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The comradeship of the "Happy Few": Henry James, Edith Wharton, and the pederastic tradition

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THE COMRADESHP OF THE "HAPPY FEW":
HENRY JAMES, EDITH WHARTON, AND THE PEDERASTIC TRADITION

BY

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B.A., Plymouth State College, 1997
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VOLUME I (CHAPTERS I-V)

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
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12/13/2007
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, for unwavering belief in me and constant encouragement, my father, whose optimism and strength pulled me through moments when I thought I would fail, my brother Danny, whose courage and kind heart continue to inspire me, Gabe, whose patience is seemingly unending, and God, as without Him and faith, none of this would have ever have been possible.
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ABSTRACT

THE COMRADESHIP OF THE “HAPPY FEW”:
HENRY JAMES, EDITH WHARTON, AND THE PEDERASTIC TRADITION

By

Sharon Kehl Califano

University of New Hampshire, December, 2007

The recent scholarly reevaluation of Henry James in terms of queer theory has created a need to reexamine James’ influence on Edith Wharton and her works. In this dissertation, I explore how James introduced Wharton to a circle of friends (the “Happy Few”), a group of queer men-of-letters who provided the author with both a literal and figurative space for discovering an interiorized, masculine queer self. Specifically addressing the years between 1905 and 1910, I show in this study how Wharton’s initiation into queer culture and her introduction to the pederastic tradition, as reimagined through Walt Whitman’s paradigmatic “comradeship,” gave the author the tools for resisting late Victorian expectations both in terms of traditional gender constructs and heteronormativity. This postfeminist analysis of these two authors and their “band of brothers,” draws upon the theoretical frameworks conceived by Butler, Riviere, and Girard, all of whom address the performance of gender and sexual selves, to show how James and Wharton anticipated a postmodern, theatrical sense of identity. Through the use of erotic triangles, the splitting of identity into public and private personae, camp language, and an understanding of a specific homosexual male literary tradition, Wharton, during her friendship with James, developed a sophisticated register of human emotion; from James, Wharton learned how to channel desire in complex ways, through
sublimation and indirect expression. As a result of James’ mentorship, and his role within her complicated affair with Morton Fullerton, Wharton not only discovered her mature, authorial voice as an active, masculine speaker, but she experienced a powerful sexual awakening that acted as the catalyst for her writing her greatest works of fiction. James’ and Wharton’s shared appreciation and understanding of Whitman’s poetry, as symbolized in his construct of the “comrade,” created a powerful connection between them that powerfully influenced their lives and literary works. The discoveries Wharton made during this rather brief period of five years influenced the literature she produced until her death in 1937.
CHAPTER I

MEETING "THE MASTER"

Methodology

In this dissertation, I present a postfeminist reading of Edith Wharton and her relationship with Henry James, through the lens of queer theory. Building upon the recent scholarship that has established James as a queer writer who explored same-sex desire for younger men in his writing, I seek a reexamination of James' influence on Wharton, in terms of both her sexual awakening and authorial maturation, which occurred relatively late in life (during Wharton’s forties). James' complexity, rooted in a conscious performance of identity that anticipated postmodern concepts (e.g. Judith Butler’s ideas about the performance of gender and sexual identity), greatly affected Wharton’s awareness of two selves she learned to negotiate—a public, external, hyperfeminine self and a private, interiorized, masculine queer self. As the “Master” of both social codes and self-presentation, James taught Wharton how to develop a deeper register of human emotion, to employ more sophisticated language (through “cross-reference and allusion”) in interesting ways, to challenge traditional late-Victorian gender constructs, to draw upon a rich tradition of male intellectual and sexual connection as embodied by the pederastic tradition, and to resist heteronormative expectations by exploring various forms of taboo or forbidden desire, by sublimation or channeling such desire indirectly in erotic triangles.

Since Wharton, after her “initiation,” by James, into the “happy few” (the circle of
queer men who became her closest "comrades" and sources of support), wrote about a
deep sense of difference she felt as a child, due to her queerness (in that she exhibited
openly masculine characteristics, creating anxiety for her parents), it makes sense to look
at how Wharton arrived at her sense of self-awareness, her mature authorial voice,
revealed in her autobiographical work. For years, scholars have examined and
expounded upon the importance of James' influence on Wharton, sometimes ranking
Wharton as more a protégé or literary disciple of James than a literary great in her own
right, despite the fact that she was the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize. Much has
been made of James' friendly rivalry with Wharton and his patronage, but few scholars
have truly looked at how James himself acted as the key to Wharton's delayed
maturation, both in terms of her sexuality and, as a correlative, her literary voice. In this
study, I show how, in a sense, Wharton saw James as a father figure and, given the
considerable work written on Wharton's relationship with her actual father, the
importance of this kind of paternal role for James cannot be overestimated. Through her
friendship with the Master, Wharton came to see her real father as a queer man, a "man-
of-letters" who engaged in a well-established tradition of intellectual development (the
ancient Greek practice of pederasty and the homosexual male literary tradition that
stemmed from Hellenized, romantic pairings between an older man and a younger male
adolescent), prompting her desire to assume the role of the masculine, active speaker.

1 Many prominent biographers and literary critics have examined Wharton's relationship with her father at
length. Most specifically, Gloria Erlich, in *The Sexual Education of Edith Wharton*, shows that Wharton's
earliest memories of her father became eroticized in her mind, how Wharton experienced a kind of sexual
pleasure when reading books as a girl in her father's library, and that, later in life, Wharton's writing of the
unpublished, pornographic fragment, "Beatrice Palmato" betrayed some of Wharton's complex desire for
her father. Barbara White has suggested that Wharton was sexually abused by her father and that, as an
incest survivor, Wharton uses many images in her fiction that provide evidence to support White's claim.
Lewis, Benstock, Goodman, etc., all emphasize Wharton's relationship with her father as long-reaching and
important in terms of her intellectual development.
Connecting her father to literary agency and an active voice, Wharton learned how to sexualize language and resist the mainstream, heteronormative canon, by adopting a particular vocabulary and participating in pederastic tradition, with intent to become the father, to replace James, and to find validation for her deeply-felt literary otherness.

In terms of the specific critical framework employed in this study, I combine the ideas of three prominent theorists who explore the complexity of gender and sexuality: Judith Butler, Joan Riviere, and René Girard. Using Butler’s *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* as a springboard for examining Wharton’s persona of the “grand dame,” I explore how both James and Wharton saw identity as a theatrical acting out of roles and split their own identities into two separate personae, “masks” of gender, which were performed specifically for different audiences. For James, who moved from the effete “dandy” to the more masculine “Pensaroso,” and Wharton, who shifted between the haughty “lady of manners” to the Whimanesque “comrade,” gender constructs became fluidic, unstable, ever-changing, and profoundly complex. Riviere’s paradigm of “hyper-femininity” (as related to anxiety) and Girard’s concept of the “erotic triangle” (as connected to complicated renderings of male same-sex desire) provide an explanation for why Wharton would have been drawn to the homosexual male literary tradition and what knowledge, what greater awareness, she would have derived from the queering of her interiorized, masculine, intellectual self. By developing a unique use of language (like James’ expression through camp affirmation, euphemism, and dense labyrinths of prose), Wharton connected to James through their shared love of Walt Whitman, whose bisexuality and liberated views allowed both writers to express taboo desire through his concept of “comradeship.” Within this project, I claim that Wharton
sought to become the *erastes*, the older father figure and lover of the *eromenos*, the younger, beloved boy, in order to assume control of language and to legitimize her position within a patriarchal society that marginalized women authors. Wharton’s careful distancing of herself from public feminist causes\(^2\), her misogyny, and her rejection of the sentimental tradition of women’s literature (for example, of those female authors who wrote about New England through “rose-colored spectacles,” like Jewett and Freeman) all demonstrate Wharton’s literary disaffiliation from her biological sex and her alignment with male writers—specifically queer male writers. Countering feminist readings of Wharton that place her within a tradition of female authors who actively embraced and celebrated womanhood, I see Wharton rather as an author who was defined by and through her relationships with queer men; her position within her own “band of brothers,” her “happy few,” was responsible for her success as a mature writer and allowed her the validation that reinforced a complicated sense of “otherness,” an “otherness” best expressed and defined in her greatest works of fiction.

Within this study, I specifically address a crucial time of sexual and intellectual development for Wharton, her “initiation” into the “happy few,” between the years of 1905 and 1910. With the publication of *The House of Mirth*, in 1905, and the printing of the ghost story, “The Eyes,” which appeared in *Tales of Men and Ghosts* in 1910, as bookends, I show how this relatively brief period contained the greatest changes for Wharton and resulted in her maturation as a lover and writer. These five years dramatically affected Wharton’s writing, created a foundation for her paradigmatic investigations of self, the echoes of which rippled through her writing (both published

\(^2\) Please see Deborah Lindsay Williams’ *Not in Sisterhood* for a deeper discussion of Wharton’s conscious disassociation from feminist political agendas and refusal of being grouped with other women authors/thinkers. Shari Benstock also addresses this in her study *Women of the Left Bank*. 

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
and personal) until her death in 1937. Moments like James’ advising of Wharton to “Do New York!” in 1902 (she began drafting *The House of Mirth* in 1903, during the same year that her friendship with James really started to take off), his reading of Whitman at The Mount in 1904, his sending Fullerton to meet Wharton in 1907, his visiting Wharton and Fullerton in France in 1908, his dining with the two lovers at the Charing Cross Hotel in 1909, and his depression in 1910, all had great impact on Wharton’s sexual and literary development. With James as a mentor, Wharton grew to depend upon her friendship with him to push through various forms of anxiety that had stunted her growth, anxiety that had prevented her from becoming a fully realized adult. Due to his sexual complexity (having expressed both bisexuality and an interest in incestuous desire), James represented a figure not unlike Whitman himself, in that he explore non-heteronormative desire and a refusal of traditional gender constructs. So, too, did Morton Fullerton act as another kind of vexed individual who resembled Whitman, through his bisexuality and connections to incestuous desire, creating a mirror image of James but younger. Within their “erotic triangle,” Wharton witnessed how forbidden desire could be reformulated, sublimated, and masked as heteronormative, even though all participants in the affair identified with a queer male subject position (either externally, internally, or both). Due to the constraints of time and space, I chose to look at the period of 1905 to 1910, and only key literary works, to establish for the reader the foundation for understanding what Wharton’s “initiation” entailed and truly represented.

**Dressing the Part**

In her chapter on Henry James, in her autobiography, *A Backward Glance*, Edith Wharton opens with a description of her life before she met James, a prolonged time of
isolation and a sense of loneliness broken only during her thirties with the introduction of intellectual companions who could match and stimulate her mind. During this bloom of human companionship, rare and significant friendships emerged; clearly one of the most important relationships Wharton would ever have would be that with Henry James. Wharton would write, "I cannot think of myself apart from the influence of the two or three greatest friendships of my life, and any account of my own growth must be that of their stimulating and enlightening influence" (169). This quote rightfully introduces Wharton's reader to the figure who most radically affected her life in innumerable, profound ways—Henry James. Most biographers of Wharton, and even those of James, emphasize the lengths to which Wharton would go to seek out an audience with James, for the opportunity to meet the author whom she so greatly admired. Having learned at a very young age, from her mother, the importance of dress in attracting a man's attention, Wharton would rely upon choice pieces of costume to draw the eye of the Master.

Their first encounter, as Wharton remembered, occurred in 1887, at the Paris home of Edward Boit, a watercolorist much admired by John Singer Sargent. The painter was a cousin of Howard Sturgis, whose father, Russell Sturgis, had married a fellow Bostonian, a Miss Boit. Sturgis was a good friend of Henry James, whom he had met in 1873, and eventually became an important figure within Wharton's circle, though the two did not formally meet for at least another year and in Newport, rather than in Europe. Wharton describes vividly her excitement in being asked to dine where Henry James was certain to attend: "I could hardly believe that such a privilege would befall me, and I could only think of one way of deserving it—to put on my newest Doucet dress, and try and look my prettiest!" (172) She goes on to explain that she had been taught to regard
her feminine charms, youth and attention to appearance, as the sole means for garnering male attention, and reveals how deeply humbled she felt in the presence of the author she so greatly admired. She continues, “I was probably not more than twenty-five, those were the principles in which I had been brought up, and it would have never occurred to me that I had anything but my youth, and my pretty frock, to commend me to the man whose shoe-strings I thought myself unworthy to unloose” (172). The dress remained a fond memory, a “tea-rose pink, embroidered with iridescent beads,” though it failed to accomplish the task of earning James’ notice. Wharton, recalling her exasperation, notes how the dress failed her, “But, alas, it neither gave me the courage to speak, nor attracted the attention of the great man. The evening was a failure, and I went home humbled and discouraged” (172). Wharton’s anxiety and disappointment are both fascinating and telling. Clearly, she had thought a great deal about her first meeting with the intimidating James, choosing and counting on the right dress to gain notice. Yet, why would she feel so compelled to meet Henry James? Certainly, he was a literary great, a writer of significant distinction, but why James in particular? Perhaps details of Wharton’s and James’ second encounter will provide some clues.

Wharton approximates the period between 1889 and 1890 as when she saw James for a second time, in Venice, when she and her husband were invited by Ralph Curtis, a friend of Teddy Wharton’s, to the Palazzo Barbaro, though scholars locate 1891 as the date for their meeting. Curtis’ parents, Ariana and Daniel Curtis, had invited James to stay at the Palazzo Barbaro, their home since 1885. Again, Wharton tried to attract James’ attention through dress, this time a remarkable hat, as she believed physical attractiveness to be the means of drawing notice. Wharton writes, “Once more I thought:
How can I make myself pretty enough for him to notice me? Well—this time I had a new hat; a beautiful new hat! I was almost sure it was becoming, and I felt that if he would only tell me so I might at last pluck up the courage to blurt out my admiration for ‘Daisy Miller’ and ‘The Portrait of a Lady’” (172). This emphasis on the external self, Wharton’s physical appearance, for drawing attention, could possibly hazard an opportunity for the expression of an internal self—here, an intellectual self who admired James’ fiction. Interestingly, Wharton’s two symbolic items for drawing male attention in these two encounters, a couture dress and an example of fine millinery, become extensions of a highly feminized external self that Wharton perfected through the years. Her eventual friendship with Henry James, however, caused Wharton to redefine her inner self in terms of something different from heteronormative femininity, and the hint of this “something different” possibly drew the beginning author to the Master in the first place, as an aspect of his fiction Wharton recognized in the two works she specifically referenced.

Though scholars and critics have been quick to point to James’ female characters as attracting the notice of Wharton, I believe that Wharton recognized the unique “difference” of James’ fictional men—especially those like Winterbourne and Ralph Touchett—and that queer element also drew her to James. The figure of the aloof aesthete, the detached observer who seems content to watch the woman of his imagination, rather than being tangibly drawn into the mess of physical relationship, emerges from James’ prose. This character, who echoes earlier characters, like Rowland Mallet, and anticipates later ones, like Lambert Strether, possessed many of the qualities that belonged to its creator: the artistic sensibility, the detached interest, impeccable taste,
punctilious manners, expert grooming, cultural awareness, an educated intelligence, an intense fascination with the psychology of others, an overall sense of enjoyment of the finer things in life, and a reserved sexuality, all connect to a particular image of queer male identity, from James' period. John R. Bradley, in his *Henry James's Permanent Adolescence*, characterizes Winterbourne as a type of queer figure who appears repeatedly in James' fiction. In discussing Nick from *The Tragic Muse*, Bradley asserts, "He resembles those other of James's male protagonists—such as Winterbourne in 'Daisy Miller' (1878), Newman in *The American* (1877) and Strether in *The Ambassadors*—who are similarly presented as having no apparent sexual attraction towards women, and who are inept, cripplingly self-conscious and troubled by the prospect of forming permanent attachments to them" (98). Furthermore, Winterbourne's interest in Daisy appears to be mainly fueled by her ability to attract and flirt with other men, which causes his obsessive watching of her. Yet, this type of voyeurism—the passive man who safely watches the sexual conquests of a woman from a distance—tellingly reappeared in James' novel, *The Portrait of a Lady*.

Recent literary critics, involved in reevaluations of James' texts through the lens of queer theory, have read Ralph Touchett's prolonged bachelorhood\(^3\) as telling of

\(^3\) In her study *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick provides insight into the social construct of the "bachelor" in terms of his ambiguous sexuality, during the mid to late Victorian Period, in Europe. Sedgwick explains that due to the popularity of the "medical and social-science model of 'the homosexual man'" which "institutionalized this classification for a few men, the broader issue of endemic male homosexual panic was again up for grabs in a way that was newly detached from character taxonomy and was more apt to be described narratively, as a decisive moment of choice in the developmental labyrinth of the generic individual (male)" (188). In other words, by adopting a detached demeanor that resisted direct connection to a specific sexual orientation, homosexual men avoided "homosexual panic" by detaching from sexual desire altogether, able to avoid public disclosure of their preference, due to an assumption of heteronormativity. What Sedgwick contends is that the "bachelor" becomes a complex figure, in terms of his sexuality, in that he situates himself within an urban space, watches others from afar, and finds identification with popular artists from the period: "This persona is highly specified as a figure of the nineteenth century metropolis. He has close ties with the flâneurs of Poe, Baudelaire, Wilde, Benjamin" (193).
nonheteronormative sexuality, despite his keen interest in Isabel Archer. One critic, Robert K. Martin, in his essay, “Failed Heterosexuality: Portrait of a Lady,” claims that Ralph Touchett’s sexuality can be reasonably questioned as resisting compulsory heteronormativity: “Ralph’s homosexuality should be recognized as a possibility. He is of the character and physical type that constituted the male homosexual as he was constructed in the years surrounding this novel, a process that was part of a growing confusion around the loss of heterosexual male authority” (88). Even if the sexualities of characters like Winterbourne and Ralph Touchett resisted simple definition, striking similarities existed that captured the imagination of a reader like Wharton. Perhaps, the astute Wharton noticed the recurring image of the aesthete in, here, the most popular of James’ works and drew her own conclusions about the great author. I believe that the subtle portrait of passive queer masculinity James presented intrigued Wharton, roused her curiosity to meet the older writer, since James contributed a major archetype of masculine queerness, what Eric Haralson calls the “protogay aesthete,” to what has now become the canon of a gay male literary tradition.

In Henry James and Queer Modernity, Haralson investigates James’ development of the male homosexual, also known here as “protogay,” aesthete in his fiction of the 1870s, which would evolve during the 1880s, with a particular interest in the construction of “effeminacy.” Haralson’s book evolves from earlier work by scholars like Alan Sinfield—whose The Wilde Century (1994) dispels the myth that homosexual men were historically always seen as effeminate. Sinfield contends, rather, that the stereotype of the effeminate queer man resulted from the coverage of the Wilde trials in 1895 and their aftereffects during the mid-twentieth century. Linda Dowling examines Hellenistic
models of same-sex sexual relationships between men in an English university setting, as a means of resisting the damaging effects of sexological pathology, in her *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (1994). Joseph Bristow adds to this discussion, in his *Effeminate England: Homoerotic Writing after 1885* (1995), studying how “homoerotic writing after 1895 constantly defines itself against the predominant assumption that to be a man-loving-man necessarily meant that one was weakened, morally and physically, by the taint of effeminacy” (10), likewise contributing to Haralson’s more recent, nuanced portrait of the “detached aesthete” who appears repeatedly in James’ novels and short stories.

**The Beginning of a Beautiful Friendship**

As Edith Wharton remembered in her insightful memoir, *A Backward Glance*, her friendship with Henry James seemed to never have had a distinct beginning, for he subtly entered her life as if he had always been there. When pressed to determine the genesis of their “comradeship,” she answered in her autobiographical prose: “As for the date of the meeting which finally drew us together, without hesitations or preliminaries, we could neither of us ever recall when or where that happened. All we knew was that suddenly it was as if we had always been friends, and were to go on being (as he wrote to me in February 1910) ‘more and more never apart’” (173). Unable to pinpoint the exact moment when they became friends, Wharton suggests that their friendship spontaneously manifested itself within their respective lives, with both feeling as if they had “always” been there. Given Wharton’s earlier memories of her two previous failed attempts to meet the formidable Henry James, first in 1887 and later in 1889 or 1890 (or thereabout), respectively, we know that their friendship was not spontaneous, but rather the product of
great and consistent effort, on the part of Wharton. She would repeatedly contact Henry James over the following years—especially between 1899 and 1903.

Leon Edel, in his fine biography on James, paints a very different picture of the beginning of Wharton’s and James’ friendship, which stands in great contrast to the one that Wharton herself provides. The story Edel tells is one where Edith Wharton, over the years, persistently sent James little messages as well as copies of her latest works, in order to gain his notice. However, Wharton had very little or no control over getting James to reciprocate her correspondence. Ultimately, James’ interest in the younger writer, sparked by liking one of her stories read in a magazine, caused him to at last acknowledge the plucky woman writer who remained determined to meet him. The corresponding timeline Edel constructs is a fascinating one. In 1895, Wharton proffered, via their mutual friends, the Paul Bourgets, her congratulations and good will when James’ catastrophic play *Guy Domville* first appeared in London. Later, in 1899, she would send James a copy of her first collection of short stories, *The Greater Inclination*—a book that James would tell Paul Bourget seemed “a fruit of literary toil” (202), though he would never directly tell her so. James declined to call upon Wharton, though the accompanying note to her volume informed him that she would be at Claridge’s, a luxury hotel in London she called “the sojourn of kings,” shortly afterward. In Edel’s account, James would not return Wharton’s correspondence until a story printed in *Lippincott’s*, “The Line of Least Resistance,” caught his eye and captured his attention; the “brilliant” piece prompted him to send her his reaction, on October 26th, 1900: “I applaud you, I mean I value, I egg you on in your study of the American life that surrounds you. Let yourself go in it and at it—it’s an untouched field, really: the folk
who try, over there, don’t come within miles of any civilized, any “evolved” life. And use to the full your remarkable ironic and valeric gifts; they form a most valuable, (I hold), and beneficent engine” (202). Already assuming the role of mentor, James counsels Wharton on her literary work, advising her to focus on “American life” from a domestic viewpoint, in the way that he had so successfully examined the figure of the American abroad and out of the native element. His praise did contain some qualification, though, as her tale was “a little hard, a little purely derisive,” but he attributed these minor faults to “youth,” which time and experience could soon remedy. By the end of the letter, James had generously invited Wharton to visit him some day: she had finally left enough of an impression on the older author to warrant his notice and his valued acquaintance. Wharton had managed to stick her figurative “foot in the door” and earned his attention, during a highly productive period in her life, for she had been working diligently on *The Valley of Decision* while creating her lovely home The Mount, in Lenox, Massachusetts. When she sent James, in 1902, her two-volume historical novel set in Italy, the two still had not met officially in person, though he would respond to Wharton, offering her the oft-quoted and famed piece of advice, “Do New York!” She would finally heed his advice, when she set to work on her next full-length work of fiction, *The House of Mirth*.

The long-awaited event of Wharton’s and James’ actual meeting would at last take place in December 1903, when Wharton had come to London and The Master finally deigned to call upon her. Their first impressions of one another were reserved, with both cautious and unsure of each other. They took stock of one another, trying to see beyond each other’s cool demeanor. Wharton later wrote of the James she met that day—his
massive build, newly shaven face, and noble countenance, an appearance greatly changed from what she had seen years earlier during those previous encounters, when John Singer Sargent’s portrait of him as “Penseroso” showed him less rotund, notably bearded, and fashionably dressed. She revealed: “By the time we got to know each other well the compact upright figure had expanded to a rolling and voluminous outline, and the elegance of dress given way to the dictates of comfort, while a clean shave had revealed in all its sculptural beauty the noble Roman mask and the big dramatic mouth. The change typified something deep beneath the surface” (173-4). This passage was written in the early 1930’s (over fifteen years after James’ passing in 1916) and shows insight gained through years of having been James’ close and intimate friend. She describes James as changed for the better. She purposely draws attention to James’ strong face as a “Roman mask” with a “big dramatic mouth,” in a description that clearly denoted the performative aspect of James’s public persona through his facial façade. The theatricality of Henry James, as seen by Wharton, is unmistakable: the outward “mask” of his face signified the great “change” that occurred “deep beneath the surface.” The language Wharton uses is very telling; she wants the reader to know that the James she met that December day was a stronger, more secure man, who had matured and “come to grips with his genius” (174). Edel asserts that Wharton saw James as “massive and masterly”: “Her report of her meeting, to her editor at Scribners, spoke of his looking like a blend of Coquelin and Lord Rosebery. Thus she caught the histrionic aspect of James as well as the aristocratic” (204). Here, Edel accentuates Wharton’s perception of James’ theatrical flair and his performance of class position, descriptors that have long since been associated with the persona of the “aesthete”—a figure that remains characteristically
queer. Henry James, in response, described Wharton as a woman he thought also
performed a public version of her external self, assuming the role of the stiff, “dry” lady,
though she was admittedly “agreeable and intelligent” (204). Her inner nature would
only be revealed through their eventual, intimate friendship.

By the time that Wharton finally met James in person, she had watched him
change from the aesthete of the “Pensaroso,” to the firmly molded figure of “The
Master,” who could now commandingly act as the mentor to the younger writers who
sought his approval. Wharton clearly did not see herself as James’ protégé, though she
highly valued his opinions and insight; as a woman in her forties, she had come to the
place in her own life where she felt confident and in control, though she subscribed to the
belief that her personality naturally would be largely influenced by her closest friends—
most notably, Henry James. Susan Goodman, in her work Edith Wharton’s Inner Circle,
rightly turns to a quotation from A Backward Glance, in which Wharton poses the pivotal
question, “What is one’s personality detached from that of the friends with whom fate
happens to have linked one?” In answer to her question, Goodman asserts: “Wharton’s
question implies that ‘personality’ is collaboratively constructed, and James’s letters to
her, written between 1900 and 1915, support this contention. She functioned as his alter
ego, his secret sharer” (56). Wharton’s question seems to suggest that “fate” just
“happened to have linked” her to her friend Henry James, much in the way that she and
James mutually felt that they had “always” been a part of each other’s lives. Yet, we
know that this simply was not true. Wharton actively sought out Henry James’ friendship
and persisted in her goal of winning him over, for she sensed something in James’ fiction
and in the man himself that magnetically drew her to him. If she were to become his
"alter ego" or "his secret sharer," then she would become so through a conscious choice of self-definition that would lead to a carefully constructed interiorized self. Mentally, sexually and artistically, Wharton felt sympathy with James and would shape this internal self as not only "masculine," but "queer" as well. Goodman suggests, "Despite the differences in age, gender, and temperament, the two seemed to be parts of one person" (57). Such an observation resonates with the view of Percy Lubbock, who, in his Portrait of Edith Wharton, would write, "How we lived on Henry in those days!" (8), suggesting a quasi-parasitical relationship between James' friends and the Master. Since Jamesian studies have recently and so convincingly reexamined James in terms of queerness, then it would only make sense that Wharton would become a "secret sharer" in his sexual identity, as an intrinsic part of the symbiotic whole the two would form—to borrow Goodman’s paradigm.

Before my discussion of how Wharton became "initiated" into queer culture through Henry James, I feel it is important to address the vexed subject of Wharton being, in a sense, the Master’s protégé—a claim that Wharton herself emphatically denied and refuted. R.W.B. Lewis contends that Wharton’s mind remained very different from that of James in subtle, but important ways: "The cast of her mind and imagination, in addition, was (as her attempted parody of James demonstrated) more remote from James’s than even she realized. It had both a tough and tender femininity, a sense of the immediacies of social change, a taste for the scientific, and a distrust of the colloquial that were all missing from Henry James" (131). Yet, in the effort to define the elements of Wharton’s mind in terms of gender, as “feminine,” versus the “masculine” mind of Henry James, Lewis undercuts his own argument. When he tries to attribute certain
mental characteristics as “feminine” and solely possessed by Wharton, he, by the line of his logic, implies that James’ masculinity intellectually separated him from his “dearest Edith.” While I agree that Wharton certainly retained her own individuality within her friendship with James, the “tough and tender femininity” Lewis denotes in Wharton as being distinctively her own, I find to be something not easily defined, for both Wharton and James challenged traditional notions of gender as concerned their minds. “Playing with this concept in the letters,” Goodman asserts, “James redefines gender. Without appearing unmanly or making Wharton unwomanly, he feminizes himself and masculinizes her” (57). Part of the fascinating friendship that existed between Wharton and James centered on their shared habit of resisting strict gender definition, as shown in the figures they both chose to admire and largely discussed—George Sand, George Eliot and even Gautier’s Mademoiselle de Maupin. While these women maintained the image of sexual “normalcy”—that is, they engaged in heterosexual relationships physically—they act as queer figures in terms of gender resistance. Where Sand would openly dress like a man, Eliot kept a male pseudonym and public literary persona, while Gautier’s character brought gender-bending to a whole new level in fiction. In fact, James, in his letters, would often liken Wharton to Sand or Eliot, demonstrating that he knew Wharton was not like other fashionable women who sought his acquaintance, that he understood her deeper complexity. Though Wharton would and did learn a great deal from her relationship with James, it is very important to acknowledge her conscious effort to remain her own distinct person in terms of her authorship, and she resented being dismissed as merely an “echo” of James.
By the time that Wharton and James would fully begin to establish their friendship, Henry James had entered into the phase of his life during which he would more openly discuss his sexual preferences with those who most intimately knew him. A more mature and secure James could more expressively write of same-sex desire in his numerous letters addressed to younger men. Gunter and Jobe cite the year 1902 as the point in time when James’ relationships with Henrik Andersen, Jocelyn Persse and Howard Sturgis would “all blossom,” leading to the more overt language that overflowed his letters with proffered verbal caresses, pats and squeezes to the addressed. The two anthologists of James’ missives to younger men contend: “References to the body, to holding, to touching, to caressing, and to gazing permeate his letters to younger men. It is impossible to read them and not recognize that James yearned to touch these men through language if in no other way” (7). By 1903, James had also published *The Ambassadors*, a novel that would become one of the key texts that would investigate the image of the proto-gay aesthete—Lambert Strether—in fiction, a lasting image of the turn-of-the-century modern queer man. The repeated examination of Strether in queer readings of James’ fiction, by countless critics, becomes all the more fascinating, given the Master’s “telling Jocelyn Persse that its hero, Lambert Strether, ‘bore a vague resemblance (though not facial)’ to himself” (xxii). That James himself confessed that his character resembled who he saw himself to be—a markedly older man who desired younger men—to the young man who became his object of desire is very poignant. Eric Haralson argues that the longing on the part of Lambert Strether to touch, either figuratively or literally, the younger men he watches, became an extension of the author’s own feelings for Persse.
Though Haralson shies away from drawing too close a correlation between Henry James and his fictional character, a caveat heeded by any good literary critic, he does find that the feelings of same-sex desire, especially as felt by Strether for younger men, did reflect an integral part of who James was becoming during the earliest years of the twentieth century. Reinforcing the Gunter and Jobe’s assertion that the “most openly erotic rhetoric” that James would write was captured in the epistles penned to Jocelyn Persse—the very man to whom James would admit feeling like Strether—Haralson understandably draws attention to the affectionate nature of the character to whom James had felt akin. “Without simply trying to make Strether overlap with James,” Haralson writes, “there is nonetheless a biographical basis for correlating the character’s attentions to Chad and Bilham—from imagined contact to verbal caresses to actual pattings and fondlings—with James’s own manner of communicating deep feelings for other men” (123). Such “imagined contact” often did lead to tangibly real pats and caresses performed by James and expressed toward the younger men who often visited him. Yet, it is significant that Haralson identifies that it would be the “mature James” who could give voice to his desire and would show his deep attachment to other men more openly, for the older James of the late 1890s and early part of the twentieth century had tasted the loneliness of advanced age and had started to make certain changes.

The years between 1885 and 1903 represented a very important time, during which James would come to terms with his own sexuality, initiating relationships with men who would allow him to express same-sex male desire. His placement within a queer community in England, during this period, is unmistakable, for he had drawn together like-minded men who shared the same desire. Despite the foreboding and
prohibitive atmosphere, first in the wake of the Labouchère amendment and then in the aftermath of the Oscar Wilde trials, James managed to form safe circles of friends to whom he could express relatively more candidly his feelings towards other men, without pressing fear. As the older and well-respected author known as “The Master,” James would adopt and perform the role of a mentor to the aspiring young writers, artists and scholars who would come to him for advice or informal tutelage. In a sense, James would play the learned pedagogue to the students whose beauty he so admired—a role defined in the tradition of Platonic Greek pederasty. Gunter and Jobe explain:

With an eye fixed on the energy and spontaneity of youth and the other on his own increasingly apparent mortality, James would seem to be the Platonic or “Uranian” lover that J.A. Symonds sought to define in _A Problem in Modern Ethics_ (1891), a privately printed work that James is known to have borrowed from Edmund Gosse . . . In this distinctly intellectualized form of masculine passion, founded on a Socratic eros derived from the _Symposium_ and emphasizing spiritual over sexual procreancy, “an older man, moved to love by the visible beauty of a younger man, and desirous of winning immortality through that love, undertakes the younger man’s education in virtue and wisdom.” (6)

Here, James becomes the Platonic lover of younger men (by this, I mean he experienced an elevated, sexual desire for men that he never consummated through physical acts), a role learned from reading the _Symposium_—a key text that belonged to an established homosexual male literary tradition. During this period, many queer men discovered that ancient Greek culture could redeem same-sex male desire by showing the beneficial and productive results of such intergenerational intellectual and sexual union—a claim brought forth by Linda Dowling, in _Hellenism & Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford_. By becoming the “mentor,” James could find positive validation of his feelings of same-sex desire within male relationships that were not deviant but could be celebrated. Through his donning of the “Roman mask” of the Master, James was able to confidently express
desire more openly and positively, leading to the noticeable change that Wharton witnessed.

In 1903, when James and Wharton really began their friendship, James was a man who had finally accepted and embraced his sexuality, having spent the previous twenty years sorting out feelings of same-sex desire. During his sixties, James understood regret: he had lived his life safely and let opportunities passed him by in his youth. Although some biographers avidly believe that James engaged in a fully expressive and physically tangible sex life (e.g. Novick), I see the regret James expresses during these later, pivotal years as a strong indication that this was not the case. James’ regret indicates that societal pressure had forced him to “pass” as a heterosexual bachelor, with an assumption that his prolonged singleness was the result of never having found the “right woman,” when in reality he consciously knew he did not conform to the mandates of Victorian heteronormativity. Possibly, the obscure injury that, in rumor, had supposedly rendered him impotent served as enough of a distraction that people never really tried to surmise the truth. What regrets could Henry James have had? Clearly, he felt that he had missed out on his chance to find love with another man and experience fully what such love could mean. When gazing upon the beautiful and youthful faces of men like Andersen, Fullerton, Sturgis, Lapsley, and Walpole, the much older James could try to recapture some of the vitality and energy of his youthful days through their relationships, while always remaining cognizant of his limitations. Leon Edel reinforces this image of a pensively regretful James, when he writes, “With James there is always a touch of ‘too late, too late,’ as with Lambert Strether, in his meetings with young Bilham” (407). Edel then goes on to quote a very insightful passage from a revealing
letter James would write to Hugh Walpole, as well as a telling encounter that would
demonstrate how James felt his older age limited him:

"I think I don't regret a single 'excess' of my responsive youth," James
wrote on one occasion to Hugh; "I only regret in my chilled age, certain
occasions and possibilities I didn't embrace." According to Hugh there
was one occasion which James did not embrace. In his later years Hugh
told the young Stephen Spender that he had offered himself to the Master
and that James had said, "I can't, I can't." (407)

By admitting that the "certain occasions and possibilities" which he had not
embraced in his youth weighed heavily on his mind in terms of regret, James shows how thoughtful
reflection, in his "chilled age" on his past and forever lost opportunities, painfully loomed
in his mind. Even when faced with the tangible possibility or opportunity to physically
satiate the desire he had experienced for so long, the aged James could not bring himself
to "embrace" such a chance, preferring rather to safely recede into a state of inaction,
with the plaintive response of, "I can't, I can't." Walpole later blamed James' stern
"puritanism" for his inability to claim that which he had so desperately wanted, believing
James' inaction to be no doubt a product of his stifling American upbringing.

Tellingly, Wharton would once confide to Morton Fullerton—whom she had met
through James and with whom she had been having an affair—that she believed Henry to
be sadly lonely, that he desperately needed and lived on the love offered to him by his
closest friends. On March 18th, 1910, she revealed to Fullerton: "How little I believe in
Howard Sturgis's theory, that he [Henry James] is self-sufficient, & just lets us love him
out of god-like benevolence! I never saw anyone who needed warmth more than he
does—he's dying for want of it" (200). Here, Wharton uses very strong language to
emphasize the dire want of the "warmth" experienced through James' most intimate
friendships. Fully aware that Fullerton knew only too well how much James needed his
attention, Wharton tried to coax her lover into paying their mutual friend a little more
to kindness in the way of a written letter. Fullerton remained fully aware of James’ needs,
for he had been receiving impassioned epistles from James through the years, epistles that
repeatedly communicated James’ loneliness and feelings of isolation. The more fervent
and blatant James’ expressions of affection would become, the more he consequently
revealed how very isolated he felt, given his vision of his years of youth as having fled by
all too quickly. When James slipped into a depression, becoming suicidal in 1910,
James’ realization of his inability to let others love him touched Wharton, who wrote her
story “The Eyes” in response, providing an insightful interpretation of the Master that
reveals his inner struggle.

**Mapping the Project**

When Edith Wharton read the novels of Henry James, she recognized in the
author’s writing a sense of queerness that compelled her to meet the Master, a sense of
queerness with which she identified. More than a mentor or a kind of benevolent teacher
of the literary craft, James taught Wharton how to express and explore her interiorized,
masculine self, to resist and challenge privately the social codes and mores which related
to their shared class sensibility. While many scholars acknowledge the importance of
James in Wharton’s life—his influence on her fiction, their amicable literary competition,
the ways in which they supported and encouraged each other’s writing—few have fully
treated James’ powerful role as the initiator of Wharton’s sexual awakening. James’
complicated sexuality—his quasi-incestuous relationships with his siblings William and
Alice, his private feelings of difference, and his same-sex desire for younger men—
caused him to maintain a clear division between his public and private selves, something
Wharton sensed early on and later witnessed first-hand, as their relationship deepened. James knowingly altered his public personae to fit the demands of the dominant reading public, shifting from the dandy to the Pensaroso, with a chameleon-like versatility that matched Wharton’s own mastery of self-presentation, as her lasting image as the “grand dame” evidences. During the course of their friendship, James introduced Wharton to and strengthened her relationships with many of the men who became the members of her inner circle—the Qu’acre Group, the “happy few.” He also introduced Wharton to Morton Fullerton, a man whom he had long loved, and, as a result, stimulated Wharton’s long-delayed sexual awakening by encouraging her affair. Embroiled in a kind of ménage a trois, James acted as the key to Wharton’s overcoming of her sexual anxiety, which in her forties had become paralyzing, and patiently watched as she enjoyed the sexual communion that he lacked the courage to seek, with the man he too loved. Using his advanced age as an excuse, James shied away from physically satiating his desire for the younger men who so often befriended and to whom he wrote impassioned letters. When Wharton kindly allowed James to participate in her affair with Fullerton, by confiding the juicy “details” relating to their shared beloved, she called upon the Master to be her mentor, her support, as one who would bolster her courage and help her to remain optimistic when her romance flailed. In Fullerton, Wharton found a man whose bisexuality and quasi-incestuous desire caused him very much to resemble James, who indirectly allowed her to sexually express her desire for her mentor, and who she believed understood the complexity of the kind of ideal relationship she wanted—that of Whitmanian comradeship.
Within this study, I examine the importance of Wharton’s initiation into queer male culture and specific coterie of queer men, which resulted from her relationship with Henry James, and how that initiation led to Wharton’s discovery of her true sexual and authorial selves. James, whom Wharton later saw as a version of her own father, signaled to Wharton his own sense of difference through his literary tastes and the writing he produced. When James gave his famous reading of Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, at The Mount, in the fall of 1904, he revealed to Wharton the private, queer self he so carefully protected from his reading public. For Wharton, who had clearly sensed an unspoken pull which compelled her to meet James, James’ shared love for Whitman confirmed a suspected “otherness” she had noticed, as “signs” that had been there in his fiction, finding resonance in her own sense of difference. By 1906, James had introduced Wharton to many of the men who became the core of members of their “Inner Circle” (to use Susan Goodman’s term) and they gathered at the home of Howard Sturgis, Queen’s Acre, in Windsor, England, who fittingly hosted the group and knitted away with his lapdogs nearby. At Qu’acre, James’ and Wharton’s friends created a figurative and literal space where they could be themselves, free from outside expectations of heteronormativity and traditional gender roles, and share with each other a rich tradition of writing that dated back as far as ancient Greece. Drawing upon a homosexual male literary canon, rooted in positive representations of pederasty, James and Wharton shared discourse (e.g. camp language, “cross-references and allusions,” terminology specifically taken from Whitman’s poetry) that simultaneously protected their hidden, private, interiorized selves from the uninitiated reader or intruder, and, with their friends, revealed to each other their shared sense of difference, or “otherness,” in surprisingly light-hearted
ways. By reexamining both James and Wharton within this private space (mentally and physically), we start to understand this group's deep complexity and incredible forms of resistance, of challenge, during a time when open disclosure of one's queer sexuality often led to social ostracizing, blackmail, or imprisonment.

To lend a better understanding of both the pederastic paradigm, upon which James and Wharton strongly drew, and the effects of the Wilde trials in 1895 on those who considered themselves to be queer during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, I begin my study with a chapter that examines these two important historical contexts: the pederastic tradition and late Victorian homophobia. In regard to the first subject, I provide a discussion of specific terminology taken from texts which celebrated the practice of pederasty (beginning in ancient Greece), defining an overview of that practice's representation in a male homosexual literary tradition. With the insight that Linda Dowling provides, in her *Hellenism & Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford*, concerning the study of Greek within an Oxbridgian, academic setting in England during the Victorian period, the reader will be able to see how certain tropes existed and functioned to express same-sex male desire within the British educational system. Since this educational system affected many of the writers who influenced James and Wharton (William Johnson Cory, Swinburne, Tennyson, Symonds, Wilde, etc.) and impacted several of their friends, at least three of whom became members of the Qu’acre Group (Howard Sturgis, Percy Lubbock, and John Hugh Smith), as well as one who recorded details about their lives (A.C. Benson), the language of the pederastic paradigm provides the reader with a way of fully understanding the texts these writers produced.
Concerning the second subject, I write about the need for such literati to be discreet about their true sexual identities, during a time when evidence of homosexuality led to disastrous outcomes, like blackmail or imprisonment. With Joseph Bristow's *Effeminate England: Homoerotic Writing after 1885*, as a guide, I look at how the impact of the Labouchère Amendment of 1885 and the Wilde trials led many writers to express same-sex desire in clever, nuanced ways in their writing, using terms like “romantic friendships” to describe same-sex partnerships between men, for example. I also probe the issue of challenged gender constructs, as Wilde’s notoriously depicted effeminacy and image as a dandy produced a direct cultural correlation between perceived effemineness and suggested male homosexuality, an association which lasts even today. The Draconian laws and social rigidity that arose from the blatant homophobia of this period caused authors like James to employ language in more complicated, vexed ways, due to necessity. Thus, in “Historical Contexts,” I demonstrate to the reader the significance of the major historical contexts that called for, even mandated, many of the literary devices of obfuscation, euphemism, and indirectness which marked James’ and Wharton’s literature as unique and characteristically their own.

When I shift into the following Chapter Three, “The Qu’acre Circle,” I construct the biographical stories of the men who became Wharton’s closest friends, the queer individuals (who were later referred to by Leon Edel as the men who performed the “rites” of their “Astarte”4) who allowed her to discover her interiorized self. For example, by examining the importance of James’ relationships with A.C. Benson and Howard Overing Sturgis, I show how James’ ties to these men led to introductions to

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4 By this, Edel referred to the *keleb* priests, the homosexual men who devoted themselves to worshipping the hermaphroditic goddess Astarte, later known as Aphrodite/Venus. Please see page 402 for further discussion of this reference, in this study.
those who fleshed out the "happy few" who met at Qu’acre. Showing how their personal writing and fiction provided men like James, Benson, and Sturgis, with ways of exploring same-sex desire and questioning traditional constructs of masculinity, I assert that telling works like Benson’s diaries and Sturgis’ *Belchamber* contain powerful evidence that aligns their authors with an acknowledged queer subject position, in terms of their identities. Within this chapter, I also emphasize James’ level of discomfort with displayed effeminacy to a public audience, that James’ harsh response to Sturgis’ proofs of his fledgling novel *Belchamber* had more to do with James’ rejecting an open disclosure of effeminate queerness to readers than it did the reason he proffered his friend: poor writing. As one traces the chronology of James’ and Wharton’s first meetings and the development of their friendships, the reader notices how James acted as the linchpin, the adhesive, which bound these men and Wharton together. Therefore, when Wharton deepened her friendship with James, she found herself accepted by a society of men-of-letters, a literary entourage who supported and encouraged the expression of the complex sexual desires they all felt. With humor to disarm his listener, and pats, squeezes, and hugs to offer, James teased Wharton and the younger men who hung on his every word; when Wharton joined the group, she, in turn, brought with her Walter Berry, the only satellite member of the circle who had been her friend first.

Chapter Four, “The Reclaiming of James’ Sexuality,” presents how scholars have been reclaiming James’ sexuality in terms of queerness, revealing hidden desires that had long been overlooked by prominent biographers and literary critics, desires which clearly appear in the Master’s personal writing and fiction. In this section, I claim that, as a result of these latest publications, which recognize James’ same-sex desire and his
interest in younger men, there is now a need for reexamining Wharton in terms of queerness. Since James' impact on Wharton's writing has been long-accepted and established, leading to Wharton's lasting image as James' protégé, it makes sense that a reevaluation of that relationship is necessary, since James' reclaimed sexuality will redefine and illuminate his effect on Wharton. James greatly influenced Wharton's writing, true, but how did his complicated sexuality (considering both his latent bisexuality and suggested incestuous desire) prompt Wharton to explore ways of liberating herself from the rigid demands of late Victorian heteronormativity? What literary techniques, tropes, devices, texts, cultural references, artistic ideas, and paradigms did James share with Wharton, once she was initiated into his private circle? This segment of the project sets up the ongoing literary critical discussion about James' sexuality in order to establish a basis for the same kind of reexamination of Wharton and her sexuality.

In the chapter that follows, titled “Initiation,” I segue into Edith Wharton's recognition and writing about her sense of difference in relation to her gender, literary tastes, and creative practices, as revealed in her autobiographical work. Wharton's relationships with both her mother (who inhibited her writing and taught her to see sexual desire as distasteful in women) and her father (who, in contrast, encouraged her writing and whose library became a place of sexual excitement) come to the foreground, as the author’s interpretation of her parents later in life had been influenced by her relationship with James (and all that relationship entailed). I also show how Wharton’s friendship with Ogden Codman, Jr. (cousin to Howard Sturgis), provided her with another man whose queerness and shared love of culture (fashion, interior design, architecture, etc.)
helped her to find a literary voice, early in her writing career. It is important that Wharton’s first major publication, *The Decoration of Houses* (1898), was a book of interior design, co-written with a man whose sexuality openly resisted heteronormative expectation. This chapter also addresses the development of Wharton’s friendship with James, his dramatic reading of Whitman at The Mount in 1904, and what Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* came to represent in the male homosexual literary tradition. The chapter ends with an introduction to Walter Berry and a discussion of A.C. Benson’s observations of the first members of the Inner Circle, especially concerning “romantic friendships” and displays of affection between men.

Chapter Six, “The Flirtation,” introduces the reader to James’ relationship and desire for William Morton Fullerton, a younger, bisexual journalist who became Wharton’s lover and who helped with her initiation into queer culture, and investigates James’ role in Wharton’s affair. In this section, I look at how James orchestrated the meeting between Wharton and Fullerton, how James presided over their romance, and what the repercussions were of James’ role in the affair, in terms of the stimulation and expression of desire. With the time span of 1905 through 1910 as the primary focus for this triangulated relationship, James’ position as the “facilitator-voyeur” (to use Susan Goodman’s term) finds greater examination in that I assert that James was the key to Wharton’s sexual awakening, more than even Fullerton himself. My claim is that James not only initiated Wharton’s sexual maturation, through his encouragement of her affair with Fullerton, but James’ physical presence during pivotal moments of anxiety allowed Wharton to overcome her sexual paralysis and experience sexual pleasure. As James’ desire for Fullerton fed into Wharton’s desire for the same man, Wharton’s desire for and
to act as James (as the father figure/active speaker, the erastes) found expression and heightened the excitement of the affair. This chapter also looks at Wharton’s visit to France (with both Fullerton and James), in 1908, where Fullerton introduced Wharton to a new realm of queer culture, largely influenced by Jacques-Émile Blanche, who was commissioned to paint a portrait of Henry James during their stay. More of Fullerton’s connections to queer culture find explanation, as this portion of the study ends with the context of Nietzsche, when Wharton alludes to the author in a passage she wrote about wanting to consummate her affair with Fullerton.

Wharton’s interest in sexual science, especially the writing of Otto Weininger, specifically his Geschlecht und Charakter (Sex and Character) published in 1903, is introduced and developed in Chapter Seven, “Consummation.” Looking at Weininger’s Law of Sexual Relations, I show how Wharton’s reading of the German sexologist’s work greatly influenced the way in which she viewed both her and her friends’ sexuality. Weininger’s work provided an accepted space for bisexuality and homosexuality within a spectrum of sexual relations where both were seen as healthy, rather than “deviant” or psychologically “abnormal.” I also show how Weininger examined George Sand and George Eliot—both powerfully symbolic to James, Wharton and their closest friends—as women who resisted and challenged traditional gender constructs, due to interiorized masculinity. This idea of an inner, masculine self appealed to Wharton, who had since her childhood acknowledged a sense of difference in terms of her gender. The chapter ends with a return to Whitman, what he represented to Wharton in terms of queerness (as shown in her work The Spark), and his importance within her writing, especially when Wharton started to employ his term “comrade” in her correspondence with Fullerton.
By Chapter Eight, "Continuation," I delve further into the relationship between Wharton and Fullerton, examining the anxiety that Wharton felt with her lover and her need for James' advice, even support, throughout her affair. This section shows how, in the fall of 1908, new members (John Hugh Smith and Robert Norton) of James' and Wharton's coterie emerged, completing the Qu'acre Circle. The chapter then shifts into Fullerton's being blackmailed, James' and Wharton's shared knowledge of Fullerton's potential scandal, and their conspiracy to fix their shared beloved's problem, drawing James and Wharton closer together in terms of intimacy. I then discuss the significance of Wharton's Whitmanian poem "Terminus," which detailed her night of passion with Fullerton at the Charing Cross Hotel with great sexual passion, placing the piece within the specific context of the homosexual male literary tradition. The problematic issue of evidence, the oft-performed act of burning letters, the need for concealment, and private acknowledgement of sexuality all figure largely within this portion of my dissertation, in how they related to James' and Wharton's carefully maintained divide between their public and private selves.

"The End of the Affair," Chapter Nine, fittingly describes the dénouement of Wharton's romance with both Fullerton (her active lover) and James (her lover through shared knowledge and vicarious experience), showing how James' growing interest in other younger men and bouts of illness (both physical and mental) contributed to the affair's demise. By examining how James' growing desire for other men (like Hugh Walpole and Jocelyn Persse) upstaged the desire he felt for Fullerton, I show how James' waning interest in the journalist greatly affected Wharton's feelings for him as well. The Master's extraction from the affair started to occur just prior to the time when Wharton
began to doubt that her relationship with Fullerton would last, interestingly during the
time when her marriage to Teddy Wharton started to fall apart. With the taboo elements
of her affair with Fullerton potentially removed (e.g. James’ desire was decreasing, the
excitement of the forbidden in adultery was fading, as the need for divorce became
imminent, etc.), Wharton found that the romance lost much of its appeal, especially when
Fullerton failed to be there for her emotionally during a period when she needed him the
most. Disillusioned by the idea that Fullerton never really did understand her complexity
and the true nature of their affair (as relating to Whitmanian comradeship), Wharton
started to pull away from the relationship.

Through her writing of her ghost story “The Eyes,” written during this period,
Wharton faced her fear of never recognizing her inner core (her interiorized, masculine,
queer self). When she saw how lonely James became, when he realized how much of life
he had let pass him by (as evidenced by his haunting eyes), she was reminded of her
father, who she felt also had missed out on life. James’ depression, brought on by an
intense loneliness and epiphanic awareness of his inability to allow others to love him
(due to his own fear and anxiety), greatly inspired Wharton’s story. Andrew Culwin, an
amalgamation of both James and Wharton’s father, as the older pederast who fails to see
himself for who he really is, terrifies the reader with his eyes, just as Wharton had felt
“haunted” by the eyes of her father, after his death, and frightened by those of James,
during and after his illness. Potentially identifying with the haunted look in “The Eyes,”
Wharton understood that she needed to accept her interiorized, queer male self, if she
were to lead a psychologically healthy and productive life. To repress such interiorized
“otherness,” as Wharton saw it, led only to a life lived in fear, depression, isolation, and,
even worse, an emotional death that long preceded any physical end. By looking into her own eyes and recognizing the truth about herself, Wharton arrived at a powerful self-knowledge that greatly informed her writing in the years that followed.

In the final chapter, the “Conclusion” to the study, I review the culminating result of Wharton’s relationship with James, his mentorship, and his assistance with her initiation into that fraternity of queer men who taught her how to express her interiorized, masculine self. Locating James as a eroticized father figure and a powerful speaker who (like Reverend Washburn, in her memory) attracted Wharton with the sound of his voice, the reader observes how James, in Wharton’s eyes, held a position of control when it came to the use of language (partly ironic, given Wharton’s awareness of James’ speech impediment). With a desire to replace James as the masculine, older speaker, within relationships with more effeminate, younger men, Wharton explored her innate sense of difference, her own queerness. Through her use of a homosexual male literary tradition, Wharton found a new voice and, as a result of her triangulated affair with Fullerton and James, she arrived at a mature authorial voice in her fiction, a voice that investigates various forms of taboo desire in complicated ways. This mature authorial voice defines Wharton’s most widely praised and lasting literary works, like *The House of Mirth*, *The Reef*, and *The Age of Innocence*. Drawing upon the pederastic paradigm, Wharton discovered a model for positive same-sex desire between men, an educational practice that led to great military and intellectual achievement, one which Whitman lauded in his concept of “comradeship.” Wharton also approached and imagined the complex and taboo desire of the father for the son, which she explored repeatedly in her writing, after 1910, revealing an interest in incest as another way of challenging heteronormative
sexual expectation. Although the period of Wharton’s initiation began with her meeting James and continued throughout her life, my study shows how the specific time between 1905 and 1910 acted as an intense period of experience and self-discovery for the author, which had lasting effects on her writing and self-awareness, until her death in 1937.

From historical contexts and critical development, to biographical detail and interpretation of Wharton’s fiction, I look to find the long hidden Wharton who resided within that “innermost of chamber” of her being. Given how protective Wharton was about her own life and the lives of her most intimate friends, I piece together the story of a Wharton who hid behind a public façade of hyper-femininity, while she exposed perceived masculine characteristics within a private setting; sometimes, her observers found slippages, when Wharton, wearing “the mask,” revealed something unusual (e.g. when Wharton’s gaze became a bit too intense when she stared at other women, or when she froze in reaction to someone who assumed too familiar a tone with her). In fact, my favorite photograph of Wharton is a candid image (perhaps the only truly candid picture of Wharton that exists) that reveals a woman very different from the poised “grand dame” so often captured in staged visual representations. With one arm akimbo (a pose read as “queer” in a literary tradition, with one arm “bent”)5, Wharton’s face appears puckered as she takes a long drag from a cigarette, with a serious expression of intent. Oddly enough,

5 I must credit Susan Schibanoff with bringing to my attention Michael Camille’s article, “The Pose of the Queer: Dante’s Gaze, Brunetto Latini’s Body,” in Queering the Middle Ages, which contends that the pose of the “arm akimbo” was one recognized as signaling male queerness, as early as the middle ages. Camille suggests that Dante read this pose as “queer,” when he depicted Brunetto Latini in his verse, in that his “arm akimbo” related to ancient statues which showed the male body in a contrapposto position, statues from Greek and Roman antiquity which carried associations of pederasty. “One of the resonances of Brunetto’s pose to his contemporaries was with the ancient statue as an index of perverse pride and, perhaps, pederastic desire,” claims Camille. Pointing to “major associations” of queerness with the “stereotyped ‘akimbo’ pose in eighteenth-century England,” Camille exposes how this body language nonverbally communicated sexual difference for men. Given contemporary caricatures of Oscar Wilde, with one arm akimbo, and photographic images of queer men (Graham Robb’s Strangers provides many) from late nineteenth century, one can see how Wharton’s posturing carries with it possible connotations of a privately acknowledged queerness.
despite her fashionable, frilly blouse, her magnificently plumed hat, and her painfully cinched waist, Wharton's look is one that has always struck me as not very feminine at all, but rather mannish, even masculine (which exposes something of my own perceptions). I am reminded of the photographer Frances Benjamin Johnston's "Self Portrait as New Woman," an image that shows Johnston sitting, one leg crossed over the other, with one arm akimbo (with a tankard of beer in hand) and the other hand brandishing a cigarette, in a pose that resists traditional, Victorian gender constructs6. Like Johnston's image, Wharton's picture leaves the viewer with a clue to who she was in her private life, a moment when she could relax around those who were her close friends, who understood her complexity, and to whom she could display her more masculine side. The purpose of this study is to introduce the reader to that private Wharton, that exclusive and protected queer male self, and to show how Henry James acted as the catalyst for Wharton's self-discovery, both in terms of her sexual and authorial selves. Included in the Appendices, one will find a timeline of important dates for this study, a graphic that visually depicts the connections between all the circle's members (including dates), and an explanation of the graphic, to help the reader better understand the scope of the project and navigate its different stages of development.

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6 In her study *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism*, Laura Wexler explains how Johnston's photograph, taken in 1896, communicated resistance towards traditional representations of women and femininity. "In the self-portrait, she sits cross-legged, wearing a man's cap, surrounded by bric-a-brac in her own artist's studio, drinking beer and smoking a cigarette," writes Wexler. "She wishes to signify a plentitude of rebellion against Victorian social convention. The photograph states that as an artist, Johnston is not, and does not wish to be, ladylike" (161). I find it interesting that with one arm akimbo and the other with a cigarette, Johnston's pose sends a message of being "unladylike." If in Wharton's candid photograph the viewer catches a glimpse of Wharton's private self, then I find great import in the fact that Wharton's pose would be read, at least by Wexler, as one of resistance in terms of Victorian gender constructs. This image, then, shows that Wharton was did not keep up the façade of the "lady," when she captured unknowingly in a private space.
CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

The Pederastic Tradition

Both Henry James' and Edith Wharton's understanding of the pederastic paradigm, that which inspired Whitman's concept of "comradeship," presented these authors with an avenue of expression that responded to a specific mode of writing that largely pathologized same-sex desire for a reading public—sexological writing from the late Victorian period. In order to better understand how James taught Wharton to resist heteronormative expectations during the early twentieth century, one must have full comprehension of the history relating to both the practice of pederasty and the criminalization of male homosexuality during the late nineteenth century. This chapter establishes that tradition and explores the motivation behind James’ and Wharton’s need to protect their interiorized identities from a probing public. By examining the paradigm and the need for its reclamation, I show how James and Wharton developed split selves, performing a compliant identity, in terms of gender and sexuality, to a public audience while exposing a resistant one within a private sphere.

According to Linda Dowling, in her insightful study, Hellenism & Homosexuality, William Johnson Cory’s Ionica, a book of lyrical verse that glorifies boyhood days at Eton, was a text that carried with it a very significant meaning in terms of a male homosexual literary tradition. Dowling mentions Ionica within the context of discussing John Conington, Corpus Professor of Latin at Oxford, who gave his much younger

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student J. A. Symonds the text—a book that would affect Symonds and his attitude
towards same-sex male desire deeply: "Conington, with the gesture that was to become a
central literary trope for imaginative initiation among late-Victorian Decadent writers,
gave the younger man a book—William Johnson’s Ionica (1858)—a volume of verse
which, as Symonds was to remember, ‘went straight to my heart and inflamed my
imagination’” (86). Here, Symonds “imaginative initiation” into male homosexuality
occurs with the “literary trope,” this gesture of being given a book by a knowing older
man, a book that belonged to a private male homosexual literary tradition. Dowling’s
work explores how all things Greek provided a discursive space for the open expression
and celebration of same-sex male desire between men, as being connected to the ancient
practice of pederasty, or what Dowling refers to as “paiderastia." She contends that:

Greek studies operated as a ‘homosexual code’ during the great age of
university reform, working invisibly to establish the grounds on which,
after its shorter-term construction as a nineteenth-century sexual pathology
(Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis), ‘homosexuality’ would subsequently
emerge as the locus of sexual identity for which, today, such late-
Victorian figures as Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde are so often claimed as
symbolic precursors. (xiii)

Figures like Pater and Wilde, along with the Uranian poets, sought in Hellenism—
primarily Greek texts, myths and history—what Dowling calls a “counterdiscourse,”
which worked against the damaging language that sexological pathology had made
commonplace in regard to male homosexuality. Instead of interpreting same-sex male
desire as deviant, abnormal, a disease or a product of gender inversion, the desire shared
between two men, within the setting of ancient Greece, could be seen as beneficial,

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7 For a full discussion of the word “pederasty,” its etymology, and variants (such as “paiderastia”), please
see page 70, towards the end of this chapter, where I examine the importance of the term, how it evolved,
and took on different meanings linguistically.
educational, nurturing and productive—for philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle stood as very strong advocates of pederasty.

In terms of history, the pederast, within a specific homosexual literary male tradition, descended from the ancient Greek warrior who participated in the practice of institutionalized pederasty, which has and had been seen as the productive, masculine, stimulating force that brought Hellenic Greece into a “Golden Age” of civilization, considered responsible for the “Greek Miracle,” by some historians. “Pederasty”—from the Greek “paido” for “boy” and “erastes” for “lover”—as William Armstrong Percy, III, uses the term, in *Pederasty and Pedagogy in Archaic Greece*, specifically refers to a particular kind of sexual relationship between two men. An older man, usually between the ages of 22 and 30, assumed the role of a teacher to a pubescent younger man, between the ages of 12 and 18, who in turn became the student. Both the older and younger men belonged to the upper class, with the older, more experienced warrior passing on his military knowledge and combat techniques to his younger protégé. Within the historical context of ancient Greece, such a relationship provided strong bonds of “comradeship” and served to enhance men’s loyalty to one another. Yet, the clear motivation for the practice related to the preservation of the aristocratic class. Percy claims:

According to that system, most upper-class Greek males, forbidden or strongly discouraged after 600 B.C. from marrying before their thirtieth year, took adolescent males as their beloveds. In his early twenties, the young aristocratic lover (*erastes*) took a teen-aged youth, the *eronomos* or beloved, to bond with and train before going on at about age thirty to matrimony and fatherhood. Then, the youth, now grown and having completed compulsory military training, himself in turn took another adolescent to bond with and train, before he, too, married. In this form, pederasty embodied a class ethos and the aristocratic desire for self-perpetuation. (1-2)
This educational tradition often included a strong sexual component that helped men to bond together and trust one another deeply. As the relationship remained most importantly an educative one, with the purpose of military training, the age of the boy would become important—since in the Greek tradition the eronemos would have been a pubescent boy, usually between the ages of twelve and eighteen—with the older man assuming the role of the mentor or teacher.

The Greek association of the pederastic tradition helped to reinforce masculine characteristics that conformed to Victorian ideals for strongly-defined gender polarization, reclaiming same-sex male desire as something positive and ideal, in response to popular sexological texts. Many theories made popular by late-Victorian sexologists, like Krafft-Ebing or Ellis, labeled male homosexuals “inverts”—individuals whose biologically male bodies possessed an interiorized female self—a belief that the Greek tradition of pederasty worked specifically against, countering notions of effeminized male homosexuality. Within the Greek historical context and given the military setting of the training practice, pederasty not only became a tool for the bonding of two warriors but served to reinforce ideals of masculinity and virility as positive, revitalizing traits, connected to combat and athleticism. Though the Greek paradigm could allow more men to express same-sex desire more freely, limitations still existed in terms of how open a man could be in terms of his feelings for other men.

When I use the word “pederasty,” I specifically refer to the tradition that Cory, Symonds and Benson celebrated—the charged, positive relationship between an older male desirer, here a teacher, patron or mentor, and the younger man who characteristically assumes the role of the student, amateur artist or puerile aesthete. The
key to this usage is that the kind of relationship described would have not have been thought illicit or deviant, but rather stood as a sanctioned and helpful educational tool. Yet, during the nineteenth century, another definition existed within a larger population—one that enforced compulsory heterosexuality—where the word “pederasty” came to mean any one of an array of same-sex male sexual practices. Particularly during the mid to late nineteenth century, in the United States and in Europe, the English word “pederast” eventually became a signifier of generalized same-sex male sexuality—ultimately removed from its classical Greek root in its wider usage. The criminal connotations associated with the word “pederasty” stemmed from a larger conflict over illegal sex acts carried out in an urban setting (e.g. Wilde’s dalliances with young male prostitutes), which worked against the privately understood practice that educated men, like Benson, advocated in the country setting of the English university—like Cambridge. To help the reader better understand why this tradition of pederasty is important and relevant to Wharton, a recent examination of Willa Cather carries great import.

When John P. Anders examines the importance of pederasty as an ideal within a specifically queer literary heritage for male authors, in his study *Willa Cather’s Sexual Aesthetics and the Male Homosexual Literary Tradition*, he shows how Willa Cather, a contemporary often linked to Wharton, also knew a great deal about the Greek tradition of older man/younger adolescent boy relationships. “Nothing in gay literature or history exerts as strong an imaginative appeal as ancient Greece’s army of lovers,” writes Anders (72), who then goes on to describe how Cather imagined and identified with such men. He explains that Cather purposely drew upon the image of the Sacred Band, an ideal military force of warriors who historically defended Thebes, to create the “homosexual
paradigm” in her works One of Ours, The Professor’s House, and Death Comes for the Archbishop:

Like her excitement over “Hellenic” poets such as Walt Whitman and Bliss Carman (Songs from Vagabondia, 1894), Cather’s evocation of the Sacred Band intensifies her enthusiasm for a specifically Greek ideal. As Vern L. Bullough writes, “If Plato represents one aspect of Greek thought, it seems at least certain segments in Greek society found the most characteristic and noble form of love in the passionate friendship between men, or more precisely between the adult male and an adolescent one” (103). In military history this ideal “was perhaps realized in the fourth century in the elite fighting corps at Thebes formed by Gorgidas known as the Sacred Band and consisting of 300 men traditionally grouped as lovers. The band, admired throughout the Greek world, was responsible for the brief period of military supremacy of Thebes” (106). (72-3)

Anders calls attention to the importance of the Sacred Band not only in terms of a male homosexual literary tradition, but in terms of “gay literature and history” as well. Cather found “truth in a classical ideal,” where she “embodies that truth in her rendition of the Sacred Band” (73); this group of men came to represent all that is positive and productive in male bonding, in same-sex desire, for Cather. Like Willa Cather, Edith Wharton greatly admired Walt Whitman (her appreciation of Whitman in fact provided the key to her relationship with Henry James) and, even more telling, Wharton owned a copy of Bliss Carman’s and Richard Hovey’s Songs from Vagabondia—a second edition, one of only 750 copies, published in 1894. That Wharton had in her possession rare copies of these important texts, and read them within the tradition Anders cites, demonstrates an important knowledge on Wharton’s part of the scholarly treatments of pederasty, much like that of Cather.

Anders opens up the importance of Cather’s awareness and usage of a male homosexual literary tradition to develop sensitivity and sympathy in her writing.

“Silenced by a prohibitive culture, the phenomenon of homosexuality—"the love that
dare not speak its name'—helped Cather develop sensitivity to human variation and a style to accommodate it,” claims Anders. The critic explains why acknowledging Cather’s awareness of this literary tradition is so important, so pivotal, for understanding her textual production or her artistic vision.

The range of male friendship and masculine desire in Cather’s fiction demonstrates this gift of sympathy and registers its sincerity. But while Cather’s wide play of feelings opened to her the imaginative possibilities of human differences, homosexuality does more than humanize her fiction; it transmutes that humanity into art. I would further argue that while the subject of homosexuality enables Cather to refine her characteristically subtle and elusive style, it becomes in effect the objective correlative of her art, dramatizing the diversity of human nature as it simultaneously deepens the mystery of her texts. (9)

Anders contends that understanding Cather’s “sympathy” for male homosexuality influenced the way in which she adopted a “characteristically subtle and elusive style” (not unlike the euphemistic prose and camp language that Wharton admired when reading or speaking with James, her closest comrade), while helping her to understand and capture in her writing “the diversity of human nature.” For the reader to ignore the importance of this tradition, as it related to Cather’s writing, would mean that that reader would never be able to fully comprehend or appreciate the full meaning of her art. I believe that this holds true for Wharton, in that this literary canon and Wharton’s initiation into the pederastic tradition led to her artistic maturation as an author. Without recognizing the monumental impact that the male homosexual literary tradition had on Wharton, one will never be able to understand how Wharton developed her characteristic voice, in her fiction, and her artistic perspective, which produced the greatest works within her body of writing—novels like The House of Mirth, The Reef, and The Age of Innocence.
In addition to Carman’s book, Wharton also read Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff’s translation of Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, in 1906. “The dean of German philologists” (Percy 33), who noted the historical import of the Sacred Band in his *Staat und Gesellschaft der Greichen und Römer*, cowritten with Benedikt Niese, from 1910, Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, in this text, emphasized the “ennobling sensual need” that found an outlet in the sexual relationship between the male lover and beloved:

> The eros that bound the Sacred Band of Thebes, the elite of the army, and not only permitted the relationships of the pairs of friend but rather sanctified them, is another thing. To be sure only the wish that blinded the eye has caused denial of the sensual element in it that should rather be acknowledged as the root of everything . . . Communal life persisted in the gymnasia and syssitia, and therefore also its consequences. That is not the distinctive feature (this would recur always), rather the ennobling of the sensual need. The boy who is received into the community and has so much to learn needs the older comrade who initiates and protects him, since in such a society a cruel form of hazing usually prevails. The knight needs a page, and in a circle of members of the same social stratum this cannot be a slave. (qtd. in Percy 33)

Wilamowitz-Moellendorff describes the sexual relationship between the “older comrade” and the “boy,” admitting the erotic component to these pairings, unlike predecessors who preferred to turn a blind eye to the subject. In fact, Wilamowitz-Moellendorff stands out from those prominent scholars of Greek who came before him in that he openly writes about the “sensual need” within the historic, pederastic relationships of the Sacred Band. He asserts that, between these warriors, sexual expression of their connection not only “permitted” comradeship to grow, but “sanctified” their relationships, which led to victory, military dominance, on the battlefield. Masculinity, virility, and military prowess valorize the practice of pederasty in such a reading. Since Wharton sought out texts that studied Greek pederasty and belonged to the male homosexual literary tradition, it is certainly possible that she read Wilamowitz-Moellendorff’s study. Certainly, as I
will show, plenty of evidence suggests that Wharton knew of the Sacred Band (e.g., her play upon the words “band,” “brotherhood, “comradeship,” and her use of Shakespeare’s St. Crispin’s Day monologue, with “the happy few” as connected to a “band of brothers,” in her personal writing) that she too saw them as emblematic of beneficial brotherhood, a powerful manifestation of all that was manly and strong in same-sex male relationships within a Greek historical context. This positive image of masculine love also resonated in readers like J.A. Symonds, whose *A Study of Greek Ethics* defended, even glorified, pederastic comradeship, and the Sacred Band acted as a positive symbol, an ideal, of the love shared between men.

Gregory Woods, in his study, *A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition*, writes that J.A. Symonds, when reading Walt Whitman’s “For You O Democracy,” noted Whitman’s evocation of the story of “the Theban Band at the battle of Chaeronea, which was Symonds’ supreme example of the intensity, purity, and masculinity of male homosexual love” (178). Like Cather and Symonds, Wharton understood the significance of the “Sacred Band” as a “band of brothers,” whose comradeship led to powerfully positive intellectual and sexual connections between men. Though R.W.B. Lewis records, Wharton cast a “knowing and tolerant eye” towards “male homosexuals,” a group she collectively referred to as “The Brotherhood” (443), it is clear that Wharton did more than “tolerate” male homosexuals, since she purposely sought their friendship and surrounded herself almost exclusively with homosexual or bisexual men: Odgen Codman, Jr., James, Fullerton, Sturgis, Lapsley, Lubbock, Geoffrey Scott, to name a few. Tellingly, Wharton often alluded to Shakespeare (another representative writer from the male homosexual literary tradition) when calling her closest friends “we happy few,” a
line that in full context reads, “We few, we happy few, we band of brothers.” The play on words is important in that if Wharton called “male homosexuals” collectively “The Brotherhood,” then she includes herself among such men, when she refers to her Inner Circle as “the happy few” (Goodman ix), “we few,” and “our happy few”—alluding to Shakespeare’s line from his St. Crispin’s Day speech, taken, of course, from Henry V—a powerful revelation of the comradeship she found within the Qu’acre (Queen’s Acre) set. Specifically, Wharton used these references in letters to Gaillard Lapsley, a core member of the circle who completely understood what she meant by such phrasing, an assertion of their otherness and the special quality of the love that they shared. By connecting her own brotherhood to a historic military band (comrades in arms who support each other in combat, not unlike the Sacred Band of Thebes), Wharton’s use of “we happy few” signals that she understood that her circle became a “band of brothers,” as members of “The Brotherhood” itself. The word “band” connects to the Sacred or Theban Band; Wharton knew that Lapsley was clever enough to know the line to which she referred and would comprehend its meaning through her allusion.

Arthurian Tales

As a don and guardian for the young men in his charge at Eton, Arthur Benson took his role very seriously and fashioned his career largely after that of William Johnson Cory—making comparisons and resolutions to live up to Cory’s example. When examining the extent of time spent invested in the school day at Eton, in a diary entry written on February 13, 1902, Benson describes the length of his day as contrasted to that of Cory, explaining that his required hours should not exceed eight: “I see that W.

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Johnson says in his diary that he averaged about nine hours a day. I don’t think it is quite so much as that now. But I don’t think it ought ever to be more than eight, and Sundays ought to be easier” (Lubbock 59). To preserve his own role as a scholar—with ample time provided for engaging in personal writing and reading—Benson would learn to trust the students for whom he was responsible. As a housemaster, Newsome describes Benson as “excellent”: “He felt for his boys; he did not allow them to dominate his life, adhering to a strict routine whereby his own privacy could be guarded and he could indulge his passion for writing. On the whole he trusted them, despising unceasing vigilance, and he rarely resorted to punishment” (74-5). Of the young men who would be Benson’s students, one House Captain would begin a lasting friendship and relationship with the older pedagogue—a young man by the name of Percy Lubbock. Within the protected walls of the English public school, the strong homosocial relationships that were encouraged could lead to what Benson later refers to as “romantic friendships.” In truth, the role of the all-male English public school held an important function in terms of educating the strong leaders and empire-builders of Britain’s future—a role that would be questioned in the wake of the Wilde trials.

Richard Dellamora, in his insightful study *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism*, explains that the function of the English public school to produce and maintain strong bonds between the men who would become the future leaders of the empire actually would contribute to the confusion surrounding what would be considered “appropriate” relationships between men. In other words, if these schools helped to forge the homosocial bonds conducive to the maintenance of a strictly male patriarchal system of imperialism, then what place would those relationships have within
a homophobic society that prohibited even private expression of love shared between two men? A crisis certainly would ensue and did. Dellamora contends:

After 1880, the all-male public school reached its full development as the open sesame to the professions—and to the Empire. Parallel with this social formation, one also finds a literature of masculine crisis in works like Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), and Henry James's "The Beast in the Jungle" (1903). The connection between the two phenomena lies in the fact that the male homosocial structure that Sedgwick describes was inherently unstable, and this instability issued in acute crisis once 'homosexual existence' became both visible and vocal during the 1890s. In the closing years of the century, some graduates refused to relinquish the homosexual bonding (and, at times, practices) that they had encountered at school. This refusal, regressive in late-Victorian terms, put in question the masculinity so carefully groomed within schools as the visible sign of and prerequisite for the exercise of power. (196)

Dellamora alludes to Sedgwick’s paradigm of the homosocial relationship between men encouraged and celebrated during the Victorian period in England. With the flourishing of these male relationships, especially within academia, homosocial relationships could, and often did, develop into fully sexual relationships between men. As Dellamora asserts, the fundamental “instability” of the “male homosocial structure” led to an “acute crisis,” with the public “outing” of Wilde during the 1890s. Dellamora also cites key texts as demonstrative, or as reflective, of the “masculine crisis” that would precipitate the wide-spread homophobia encouraged by the Labouchère Amendment and its enforcement. The key authors to whom Dellamora refers include Robert Louis Stevenson (a close friend of Henry James), Oscar Wilde (whose notoriety would culminate in the most memorable moment of “acute crisis” in the history of modern male homosexuality), and Henry James himself (who is of the greatest importance to this study). Yet, what Dellamora suggests as a primary function of all-male public schools in
England, during this time—promoting “masculinity” as “the visible sign or prerequisite for the exercise of power”—becomes vexed, as those schools would also produce the “graduates” who “refused to relinquish the homosexual bonding” and “practices” that they “had encountered at school.” Oscar Wilde was one such a student, a product of the all-male public school, who had been encouraged by his teachers like Benson to embrace the pederastic tradition that had led Greece to its finest age.

Pater’s Plato and Platonism provided in print the lectures that represented his “most influential work,” according to Gregory Woods in A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition, from the late nineteenth century. What made Pater’s work on Plato so excitingly original was that he focused on the Greek philosopher’s status as a “lover” of men. Woods contends, “In Pater’s view, Plato’s work, like Dante’s, was fundamentally shaped by the fact that he was a lover” (168); he then goes on to analyze the “extraordinary eighth lecture” in the book, “Lacedaemon,” which he calls “an intense rhapsody on virility and homo-eroticism” (168). Woods points to an important passage in this particular lecture that unmistakably reinforces an ideal of male “comradeship” found in Whitman’s poetry and Symonds’ studies of male homosexuality. The language used in Pater’s lecture sounds familiar:

Brothers, comrades, who could not live without each other, they were the most fitting patrons of a place in which friendship, comradeship, like theirs, came to so much. Lovers of youth they remained, those enstarrd types of it, arrested thus at that moment of miraculous good fortune as a consecration of the clean, youthful friendship, “passing even the love of a woman,” which, by system, and under the sanction of their founder’s name, elaborated into a kind of art, became an elementary part of education. A part of their duty and discipline, it was also their great solace and encouragement. The beloved and the lover, side by side through their long days of eager labour, and above all on the battlefield, became respectively, [aiitas], the hearer, and [eispenelas], the inspirer; the elder
inspiring the younger with his own strength and noble taste in things. (qtd in Woods 169)

Pater’s description of “comradeship,” within a classical tradition of ancient Greek pederasty, as a positive and beneficial relationship between an older and younger man, includes an integral, sexual element, for he refers to the two as “the beloved and the lover.” By referring to the biblical myth of David and Jonathan from Samuel 1:26—when David says to Jonathan (King James version), “Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of woman”—Pater demonstrates that the strong bonds between men which formed on the battlefield were not found only in Greek myth, but in the Old Testament as well. The words Pater employs in this passage focus on the rewards yielded from the “comradeship” that developed between older and younger men, a “comradeship” that mimicked the “clean, youthful friendship” shared by the mythological twin brothers, Castor and Pollux. In a practice based on Dioscuri’s example, Pater claims that charged relationships between men “elaborated into a kind of art,” eventually becoming “an elementary part of education” as well as a “duty and discipline.” Woods points specifically to this passage in Pater to explain how “male homosexuality came so strongly to feature in the intellectual life of Britain in the later decades of the nineteenth century” (169), contending that Pater’s views on the benefits of pederastic relationships, within an academic setting, represented a larger national attitude in Britain that favored male homosocial bonding in education. Like Dellamora, Woods asserts that within public schools and colleges, upper class young men in Britain, during the late nineteenth century, were encouraged to form close bonds with one another and with their instructors, calling upon the ancient practice of pederasty that had brought about the greatest achievements of Hellenistic Greece. If taught by men like Walter
Pater, William Johnson or Benjamin Jowett, male students would have gained more in-depth instruction and historical detail on the subject (169). He continues: “Education in the classics, such as boys and young men received from older men in the nation’s public schools and universities, might also be an education in the possibility of pederasty. Boys who learned Greek also learned about Greek love” (169). Such a reading of Pater’s book falls in line with Linda Dowling’s analysis of the function of Hellenistic Greek and the appeal of “paiderastia” in the educational system in Great Britain from the mid- to late nineteenth century.

Significantly, Howard Sturgis not only knew the biblical quote Pater cited in his lecture, but used the same epigram on the title page of his novel *Tim*, alluding to the love shared between David and Jonathan as analogous to the sentiment shared between his book’s protagonist Tim and his boyhood love, Carol. Below the title, at the middle of the page, the quoted line in small type appears, “Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women,” in the 1891 edition, published by the London printing house of Macmillan and Company. Fond of epigrams, Sturgis chose different quotes to head each chapter of his book, including excerpts from both William Johnson’s *Ionica* and *Ionica II*, as well as passages from varying works by Swinburne and Tennyson—notably, these three writers belonged to a distinctly homosexual male literary tradition. Yet, the biblical passage Sturgis strategically placed on the title page carried a great significance within the novel, since the dying Tim, during his last visit with his “romantic friend,” recites this line to Carol: “Tim’s face lit up exultingly. ‘Passing the love of women,’ he said; ‘that was it, Carol, wasn’t it? ‘Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.’ Do you remember the day when they read it in the lesson in the chapel at Eton’” (314-5).
Tim, in this scene, draws upon the particular biblical passage that had been explained and taught, during a lesson “in the chapel at Eton,” which had provided them with an example of a loving relationship between two men. The words hold such powerful meaning for the speaker that Tim pleads with Carol to make sure that the quote will appear as an epitaph on his gravestone. Since the quote appears on the title page, it is almost as if Sturgis pays tribute to his fictional character’s last wishes by reprinting David’s words to Jonathan. Following a tradition of the sentimental novel, the lover-like devotion shared between the two boys becomes contained by the fact that Tim will die, which allows the two to more fully express their feelings for one another with a freedom purchased at the cost of death. In a touching last gesture, “Carol bowed his head without a word and kissed him. And thus their friendship was sealed on either end” (317). Despite being a popular trope within the genre of the sentimental novel, death here reassures a potentially homophobic audience that Tim and Carol will not grow up to be queer men engaged in a sexual relationship, but nips the romance in the bud, in order to preserve a seemingly innocuous attachment between two schoolmates at Eton. As a result, the novel functioned on two levels. On the one hand, a resistant reading public could choose simply to see Tim and Carol’s relationship as a sentimental schoolboy friendship, which would explain the exaggerated bursts of emotion and affection that occurred between the two. Yet, on the other hand, a knowing audience could read the book as a schoolboy romance within a homosexual male literary tradition, picking up on the homoerotic themes and references to queer culture.

Though Wharton’s extant library holdings do not include a copy of Sturgis’ *Tim*, she had either read the book or knew enough about it to mention it to William Crary.
Brownell, in her letter written in support of *Belchamber*, in 1904. In that January 7th missive, Wharton cited one of Sturgis’ previous works, “a boys’ book called ‘Tim’ which had great success in England” (87). According to George Ramsden, not only did Wharton’s copy of *Plato and Platonism* survive into the present, but the edition is signed and “marked throughout,” demonstrating that Pater’s lectures engaged her interest enough to warrant active written response, possibly in the form of underscoring, circling, marginalia and punctuation. The timing of Wharton’s reading of Pater, at the end of 1905, during the same period when her friendships with various queer men—such as James, Sturgis, and Lapsley—were growing, is not mere happenstance. That December, according to R.W.B. Lewis, Wharton had been intrigued on one particular afternoon with Plato’s *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, not only pouring over the two dialogues about “erotic and transcendent love,” but transcribing “a long passage from each in her commonplace book” (159). From the *Symposium*, Wharton learned that “love will make men desire to die for their beloved . . . a woman as well as men” (159) and experienced what Lewis calls an “overpowering” reaction to both of Plato’s texts. Certainly, by the time she had written Sara Norton on the 26th, Wharton had felt inspired enough to be in a “mood for the Hellenic” and appreciated her friend’s gift which would fuel her recent reading binge.

A few months later, Wharton would write to Sara Norton that she had been reading the book by Butcher that Norton had given her, “with great joy,” and recommended to her, in response, a new read, “Wilamowitz’s translation of the Aeschylus Orestes trilogy” (105). In a footnote, R.W.B. Lewis and Nancy Lewis show that Wharton cited Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff’s “highly regarded translation into German of the *Orestia*,” a trilogy of plays which focused on the figure of Orestes.

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Like the historical figures of David and Jonathan depicted in the Bible, Orestes, within ancient Greek history, developed a charged friendship, a close comradeship, with Pylades—a comradeship described in both Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*. Henry David Thoreau, in fact, another of Wharton's favorite authors, referred to the pairing of Orestes and Pylades, in a journal entry from January 1840, in which he privately expressed that longing for a modern community that centered around male relationships: "History tells us of Orestes and Pylades, Damon and Pythias, but why should we not put to shame those old reserved worthies by a community of such" (Fone 47). Fone explains that Thoreau specifically alluded to a "community of ‘such’ homosexual lovers and conjured up a vision of this erotic Arcadia" (47). Like Thoreau, J.A. Symonds made reference to Orestes and Pylades as one of many "legends of devoted masculine friendship" that reinforced homosexual desire (133), yet did so publicly in his published work *A Problem in Greek Ethics*. Thoreau and Symonds' allusions demonstrate an awareness of Orestes’ connection to a pederastic tradition, an awareness that Wharton herself would have possessed at the time of her letter to Norton.

Since Wharton had been revisiting Plato’s dialogues as well as reading Pater’s volume of lectures, her progression to Butcher and Wilamowitz-Moellendorff’s works, in March of 1906, sprang from a common denominator of interest. Many of these works contributed to Wharton’s better understanding of the history and treatment of ancient Greek pederasty as a male tradition idealized within a Hellenistic academic movement. For example, Butcher’s *Some Aspects of the Greek Genius* advocated the Socratic method of education, calling upon a teaching practice that bonded teacher to student: "The teacher ought to be the subject vitalised and humanised in the presence of the student; the
science kindled into warmth and touching with its glow the expectant sympathies of the
listeners. The electricity of thought ought to be abroad in the air of the class-room” (233).
The language used in this passage tints the relationship between teacher and student, both
male, with a charged sense of homoeroticism. The instructor in this paradigm becomes
the subject matter made manifest, “vitalised” and “humanised” when near the student,
and his lessons take on physical attributes of “warmth” and “touching,” provided the
“electricity of thought” incumbent in the idealized classroom. Given the fact that
Butcher’s volume had been a gift, rather than a book of Wharton’s own choosing, Some
Aspects of the Greek Genius’s relevance to Wharton’s interest in Greek male culture does
not carry as much weight, since the text does not really belong to the tradition she was
examining, thought it too seems to be influenced by the Hellenistic movement Dowling
describes. Though Butcher’s volume may not seem as integral to Wharton’s reading list
from this time, many of the texts Wharton had most recently read, like Pater’s Plato and
Platonism and Plato’s Phaedrus and Symposium, had captured the imaginations of
Wharton’s closest friends—men who happened to be queer and schooled in this particular
movement within education. Tellingly, Wharton’s “mood for the Hellenic” apparently
had not waned by the time she wrote her August 7, 1906, letter to Sara Norton, informing
her friend that she had capped off a recent evening “by reading the Symposium” (106),
after a long motor-drive. What had fueled her particular fascination with Plato and his
works? Most likely, Wharton’s deepening associations with the future core members of
her inner circle certainly had considerable influence, especially considering the fact that
Sturgis, Lapsley, and Percy Lubbock—whom she had met in the spring earlier that
year—were all products of England’s formal educational system. More specifically,
Sturgis and Lubbock, who both had been schooled at Eton and Cambridge, and Lapsley, who became a fellow at Trinity College, Cambridge, all had ties to the university where Wharton’s older brother had studied—an institution that, during the late nineteenth century, had strongly encouraged and accepted the homosocial relationships that developed between male students and their classmates, as well as with their instructors. As Wharton’s friendships with these men, who were satellite figures around Henry James, increased, a level of trust deepened and Wharton underwent an educational initiation into their queer culture—which largely included particular literary, historical and artistic awareness and knowledge.

When Wharton visited Lapsley at Cambridge, they shared a lunch during which Lapsley introduced her to Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, the “adroit political philosopher” as R.W.B. Lewis calls him. This introduction, though, becomes all the more fascinating when one considers the fact that Dickinson had published, only one year after the infamous Wilde trials, a study of Greek culture that became one of the fundamental texts used for a classical education in English classrooms: The Greek View of Life, but also critical work within a homosexual male literary tradition. Dickinson, who later confessed his struggles with same-sex desire during his career at Cambridge—in his Autobiography, published forty years after his death—and acted as a mentor and good friend to E.M. Forster, had written, according to Linda Dowling, a “little handbook on Greece” that came “to serve as much as a source of information about pederastia as about hubris or helots or the agora for generations of desperately ignorant English and American homosexual young men” (153). Oliver S. Buckton, in his Secret Selves: Confession and Same-Sex Desire in Victorian Autobiography, shows that Dickinson
represented the link between Edward Carpenter and E.M. Forster, whose writing years later had obviously been influenced by Carpenter’s ideas. “Forster was introduced to Carpenter’s work in the early 1900s by Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, Forster’s mentor at Cambridge as well as a close friend of Carpenter’s,” writes Buckton. “At this period Forster was struggling with his own sexuality and eagerly embraced Carpenter’s enthusiastic approach to the subject of same-sex desire” (208). Yet, it was Dickinson’s 1896 *The Greek View of Life* that glorified the Socratic tradition of “paiderastia,” with a sexually charged description of the early philosopher and his disciples:

> Young men and boys followed and hung on his lips wherever he went . . . he drew to himself, with a fascination not more of the intellect than of the heart, all that was best and brightest in the youth of Athens. His relation to his young disciples was that of a lover and a friend; and the stimulus given by his dialectics to their keen and eager minds was supplemented and reinforced by the appeal to their admiration and love of his sweet and virile personality. (103-4)

Nikolai Endres, in his entry on Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, from *GLBTQ: An Encyclopedia of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Culture*, stresses that the language Dickinson used to describe Socrates in his book accentuated his “homoerotic attraction and allure” as an educator and, given the text’s immense popularity, presented to a wide audience a frank discussion of ancient Greek pederasty. Certainly, Dickinson’s passage depicts Socrates as a sensual and seductive figure, as a sort of Pied Piper of adolescent Greek boys who managed to attract not only the beautiful male youth of Athens, but virile adult counterparts as well. Male same-sex desire, here, in this paradigm, does not lead to disease and psychological degeneration but instead invigorates and inspires young minds as a “stimulus” for education. Dickinson’s praise of Socrates did not stop there: “That sunny and frank intelligence, bathed, as it were, in
the open air, a gracious blossom springing from the root of physical health, that unique and perfect balance of body and soul, passion and intellect, represent, against the brilliant setting of Athenian life, the highest achievement of the civilisation of Greece” (106). These words by Dickinson anticipate William Armstrong Percy III’s claim, in 1996, in his *Pederasty and Pedagogy in Ancient Greece*, that the practice of institutionalized pederasty in ancient Greece forged the strong homosocial bonds between men that brought about the greatest accomplishments of Greek civilization—the rise of Hellas and the “Greek miracle.” When Dickinson stresses the “physical health” and “perfect balance of body and soul” of Socrates, he credits the philosopher with robust health and a balanced mind, in order to argue that his accomplishment as a thinker and educator represented “the highest achievement of the civilisation of Greece.” As a result, Socrates’ role as a mentor and lover to his younger students, within Dickinson’s book, remains impervious to any taint of psychological perversity or mental abnormality that contemporary sexological writings might ascribe to the position of the male homosexual. Rather, Dickinson cleverly counters such possible homophobic readings with the evidence of Socrates’ success, which, in turn, proved not only his normalcy, but his superiority of mind.

When writing of a pederastic tradition, Dickinson provides many examples of successful male couplings that led to greatness in Greek myth, in his *The Greek View of Life*, which act as further evidence that same-sex male sexuality had healthy and beneficial results. He claims:

Achilles and Patroclus, Pylades and Orestes, Harmodius and Aristogeiton, Solon and Peisistratus, Socrates and Alcibiades, Epaminondas and Pelopidas,—these are names that recall at once all that is highest in the achievement and all that is most romantic in the passion of Greece. For it

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was the prerogative of this form of love, in its finer manifestations, that it passed beyond persons to objective ends, linking emotion to action in a life of common danger and toil. Not only, nor primarily, the physical sense was touched, but mainly and in chief the imagination and intellect. (116)

Here, Dickinson calls upon a list of men who were bonded together through the military and educative practice of pederasty in ancient Greece. Naming six famous comradeships, Dickinson cites these men, and their bonding, as “all that is highest in the achievement and all that is most romantic in the passion of Greece.” This is a very powerful statement. To suggest that these men represented the “highest” of not only “achievement,” but of the “most romantic” in “the passion of Greece,” credits same-sex male sexual relationship as being the pinnacle of not only intellectual and military accomplishment, but also the highest form of romantic love. Certainly, in this passage, Dickinson revealed some of his personal views of same-sex desire between men, within the proper contexts of education and class. He also elevates love between men, by writing that the “imagination and intellect” figured as the most important components of these relationships, beyond the inherent physical expression of desire. His writing demonstrates that he subscribed to the belief in the “Higher Sodomy,” which posited same-sex male love above that of man’s love for woman, based on male superiority of mind and body. This belief was one held and widely encouraged by members of The Apostles, an all-male secret society at Cambridge—which included figures like Thomas Ainger (mentor to Howard Sturgis), Rupert Brooke, Oscar Browning, Samuel Henry Butcher (whose book Wharton had been reading in 1906), E.M. Forster (to whom
Dickinson was mentor), Roger Fry, William Johnson (Cory), John Maynard Keynes, George E. Moore, Bertrand Russell, Lytton Strachey, and Leonard Woolf\textsuperscript{10}.

In his book *The Cambridge Apostles: A History of Cambridge University's Élite Intellectual Secret Society*, Richard Deacon asserts that Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson had found at Cambridge, in the secret society of the Apostles\textsuperscript{11}, a community that not only encouraged strong homosocial relationships between the men who made up its society, but allowed for these men to engage in "romantic friendships"—to borrow the term from A.C. Benson—or rather same-sex sexual relationships with one another.

Deacon uses a passage from Charles Merivale, a society member from 1832, to describe the goings-on in the private chambers of the Apostles, where men of "a common intellectual taste, common studies, common literary aspirations" and "the support of mutual regard and perhaps mutual flattery" would commune. "We lived in constant intercourse with one another, day by day, met over our wine or our tobacco," remembered Merivale. Deacon, in his analysis of Merivale's portrait of life as an Apostle, explains that this cohabitation and "constant intercourse" between men provided the perfect setting for same-sex relationships to develop: "It was in such intercourse in the rooms of individual members if the Society that homosexuality flourished in that period. Yet at the same time it was something much more than that: it was the formation of intense and passionate relationships which in many cases lasted for a lifetime and induced a special kind of loyalty" (58).

\textsuperscript{10} Richard Deacon, in his *The Cambridge Apostles*, offers a comprehensive list of important members of the society and the year of their initiation.

\textsuperscript{11} E.F. Benson in *The Babe, B. A.*, writes of the infamy of this secret society, as the protagonist, the Babe, becomes intrigued by a don who is a member, as he often takes pleasure in questioning this instructor about their secret meetings. Considering that Benson would in later years live with his brother, A.C. Benson, at Lamb House, in Rye—the former home of Henry James—and that Wharton would visit them on more than one occasion to see her good friend Robert Norton, Benson’s writing demonstrates a knowledge of a specific queer community at Cambridge that would have had relevance to this circle.
As a result of this positive atmosphere that the society created, men like Lowes Dickinson found a community that not only tolerated his queerness, but permitted and even encouraged him to establish strong connections to other men. It was at Cambridge that Dickinson first came to terms with his sexual orientation: “According to his own confessions he did not realise that he had homosexual tendencies until he reached university” (58). Given the tolerant setting and study of a classical education, which valued and even glorified the practice of pederasty, Cambridge provided Dickinson with a safe atmosphere for expression of his private sexual self, as it did for many of the men affiliated with the university. A.C. Benson provides a clear account of this fact.

Members of the Apostles, during the fin de siècle, looked to the Greek tradition of pederasty as a model for the beneficial, educative relationships they would develop with other men. The Apostles believed that the love shared between men far surpassed any emotion felt in heterosexual pairings; in fact, as Deacon asserts, “The theory that the love of man for man was greater than that for woman became an Apostolic tradition” (59).

Explaining “the Higher Sodomy” to mean “the view that women were inferior to men in both mind and body, and that this put a homosexual relationship on a much higher mode than a heterosexual one” (59), the Apostles believed that the love shared between men far surpassed any emotion felt in heterosexual pairings; in fact, as Deacon asserts, “The theory that the love of man for man was greater than that for woman became an Apostolic tradition” (59).

12 According to Benson, Benson attended a party on December 6th, 1909, where Dickinson was teased by inebriated young men who had been or were his students, due to his obvious desire for younger men. Benson observes in Volume 108 of his diaries:

Several young men retired drunk—one young barbarian, sitting near Dickinson (the dons sate all mixed up with undergrads) said to his friend in a hazy voice “Who’s that”—“That’s Dickinson—Dirty Dick” “Oh, that’s the Don that goes in for Free Love.” All this perfectly audible to Dickinson, who smiled freely. But I daresay such saturnalia do no harm. They sate, the undergrads, all massed together, interesting + attractive in many ways—the public fondling and caressing of each other, friends + lovers sitting with arms enlaced, cheeks even touching, struck me as curious, beautiful in a way, but rather dangerous. (69-70)

The open display of affection and Benson’s discussion of “Free Love” as connected to same-sex male desire in his diaries demonstrate a clear understanding, on the part of both Benson and the undergraduates, of Dickinson’s sexual orientation. The rest of this passage reveals that, despite the apparent tolerance of male affection on the campuses of Cambridge, dons like Benson still felt anxiety from the possible “dangerous” outcomes of such display.
plane,” Deacon contends that at Cambridge, “Dickinson found in becoming a member of the Apostles he had entered some kind of sanctuary which would protect him for life” (58-9). During his time at Cambridge and as an Apostle, Dickinson would become so vocal as to present a controversial paper that suggested that God should be made a member of the society, since God was the “true founder of the Society” (60), which was read to the Apostles “some time after the war.”

Given that Dickinson was not only an active member of the Apostles at the time that he met Edith Wharton, in 1906, but an avid proponent of the “Higher Sodomy,” as supported by more visible members of the society, like Lytton Strachey and Maynard Keynes, during this same time period, his introduction to Wharton by Lapsley carries great import. Deacon writes, “By the period between 1905 and 1910 homosexuality in the Apostles’ circles had become blatant even in public. Patrick Wilkinson, Fellow of King’s College, in A Century of King’s, has written that a visitor to the college in 1908 was surprised at ‘the openness of the display of affection between [male] couples’” (65). Perhaps, Wharton, having been intellectually fed on a steady literary diet of Pater, Plato, Butcher, and Wilamowitz-Meollendorff, had exhibited sufficient interest in Greek study that Lapsley thought that she would enjoy meeting Lowes Dickinson, whose own work was very highly regarded in the field. The conversation must have provided Wharton with a great opportunity for testing her recently honed knowledge and would have allowed her another resource for learning about the Greek pederastic tradition. I believe that this meeting represents further evidence, at least, of Lapsley’s awareness of Wharton’s growing fascination with queer culture in terms of ancient Greek history, for
why else would he have arranged for her to meet one of the most prominent scholars in the field, at that time?

Their meeting occurred during the same period when male homosexuality found such an acceptable place within the university that physical demonstration of affection between men was comfortably made public and cohabitation tacitly understood by outside observers to signify a deeper relationship. Lowes Dickinson explained these unexpected freedoms, during the years that followed the Wilde trials, as related to men who engaged in relationships of a more permanent kind, by citing the fact that “society does not condemn or suspect the common practice of men living together” (qtd in Deacon 58). Here, Dickinson shows that queer men who lived together were granted the freedom to develop lasting relationships with each other, since the contemporary heteronormative public assumed that such cohabitation lacked any sexual element; this assumption of heteronormativity, in turn, allowed queer men to “pass” and provided numerous freedoms, especially if such men fit the mould of the “confirmed bachelor.” As a result, men like Lapsley and Dickinson—not to mention Sturgis and Benson—could engage in same-sex relationships with other men with a certain degree of freedom afforded to them by their setting and their public identities as Cambridge scholars who never married. Provided the concentrated subject of Wharton’s reading list during the late months of 1905 and the spring of 1906, it would be very difficult to believe that Wharton did not seize this opportunity of meeting Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson to discuss what had captivated her imagination for such a span of time, complicating her understanding of same-sex male sexuality in ancient Greece.
After her lunch with Lapsley and Dickinson, Wharton stayed the night in London and then made her way to Windsor to visit Howard Sturgis at Queen’s Acre, to share his table for a dinner and good conversation. According to Lewis, she returned three days later, with Henry James, to stay overnight. At this point in Lewis’ biography, he describes Queen’s Acre as “not a particularly handsome house, outside or in,” but goes on to write of “wooden balconies and deep eaves” that appeared on the exterior, and the rooms which inside were “crowded with chintz and cushions,” with “tables covered with books, and walls smothered by watercolors” (167). Yet, when Wharton arrived at her friend’s home, she encountered a new face—that of the pensive Percy Lubbock. During 1906, Lubbock appeared as a man in late twenties, thin and long-limbed, with a sensitive countenance and shy demeanor. Susan Goodman describes Lubbock at this time as “a companion of Lapsley’s whom Sturgis had met on one of his frequent trips to Cambridge” and though she mentions his, Lapsley’s and Sturgis’ common “ties to Eton and the novelist Arthur Christopher Benson,” she does not seem interested in untangling how they first met one another. Since we know that Lubbock had been Benson’s student and House Captain during his years at Cambridge, and that only a year earlier, in 1905, Benson had recorded in his diary that Lubbock began to form a “romantic friendship with H.O.S.,” it seems odd that the attachment between Sturgis and Lubbock would be glossed over as a mere acquaintance brought about by mutual friend Gaillard Lapsley. Furthermore, I am intrigued by Goodman’s use of the term “companion” when describing the relationship between Lapsley and Lubbock. Is theirs the same sort of “companionship” that Benstock mentions in conjunction with Ogden Codman, Jr., and Berkeley Updike? How does the word “companion” function, for biographers or
historians, as a blanket term for relationships between men that become difficult to determine in terms of the sort of connection they shared? The word does remain ambiguous enough to mean friend or sexual partner, or both, without disclosing which of these the subject might be; in fact, the word has long operated as a label for those individuals whose identity has lacked the proper language to name what their role is within a same-sex relationship\(^1\), homosocial or homosexual. Whatever term might be used, the fact remains that at the time that Wharton was introduced to Percy Lubbock he had not only developed a charged friendship with the older Benson, but had partaken of a “romantic friendship” with Sturgis\(^1\) (while also remaining the “companion” of Gaillard Lapsley). Throw into the mix that Henry James, according to Frank Kaplan, had acknowledged that Lubbock had fallen in love with him around the time of their first meeting, circa 1900, and it seems that Percy Lubbock attached himself romantically to more than one of the Qu’acre circle’s core members.

Susan Goodman’s use of quotes by Gerard Manley Hopkins reveals how Sturgis’ Windsor estate provided almost a different world for those who visited it. Given

\(^1\) This problem of language related to queer identity still exists in terms of Standard English. The term “partner” has more recently been adopted as relating to a “significant other,” whether heterosexual or homosexual. Since the word “partner” stands as non-gendered, its usage is meant to avoid overt disclosure of one’s sexual identity by simple reference to the object of one’s affection. Like the usage of the title “Ms.,” meant to be the equivalent of “Mr.,” as a title that does not immediately denote one’s marital status, the word “partner” has become a replacement for terms like “boyfriend,” “girlfriend,” “husband,” or “wife”—words that pertain to specific genders, making one’s sexual orientation unavoidably revealed. Sensitive to this issue, I do not mean to oversimplify Percy Lubbock’s “romantic friendship” with Howard Sturgis, or rigidly define in anachronistic terms Ogden Codman’s relationship with Berkeley Updike. I simply find the scholarly avoidance of unpacking these complex connections by prominent biographers of Wharton, like Goodman and Benstock, remarkably misleading.

\(^1\) Lubbock’s “romantic friendship” with Sturgis allowed for flirtatious affection, since three years later they would engage in a “loverlike kiss” before Benson. They obviously developed a tactile level of comfort with one another that included the privilege of physical demonstrations of their connection to one another.
Hopkins' own place within a homosexual male literary tradition\textsuperscript{15}, his observations carry all the greater import in that they suggest that a certain freedom existed there—a freedom from the demands of heteronormative society. Goodman provides Hopkins' impression: "Gerard Hopkins found the tone of Howard Sturgis's Qu'Acre on the edge of Windsor Park—characterized by picture-strewn walls, dogs snoring in baskets, and piles of books everywhere—'symbolic of the civilized standards which made a visit there so new, so delightful an experience . . . The point about Qu'Acre was that it was a place existing by individual right'" (5). Here, Hopkins stresses that Queen's Acre represented a separate "place"—Hopkins' emphasis marked by the use of italics—which remained outside larger society, though "civilized standards" were always maintained. According to Hopkins, visiting the estate of Howard Sturgis was like stepping through a portal into another world, a world that existed "by individual right." He continues: "It had a way, that house, of effecting the oddest transformations, making the fantastic real, the real fantastic" (qtd in Goodman 5). By emphasizing the illusion of fantasy, Hopkins' description demonstrates that a sense of escape was experienced during a visit to his friend's home, an escape from reality into the world of the "fantastic." Claiming that the "oddest transformations" took place there, Hopkins could see that the place that allowed its owner and his friends to be themselves—to reveal their private selves normally hidden from a public audience or greater society as a whole—really did provide the perfect setting for the metamorphoses he witnessed. Much like the Arcadian secret pond in Hopkins' 1888 poem "Epithalamion"—which represented a "safe haven" (Fone 107) where the speaker, in an idyllic scene, bathes and communes with young men—the estate

\textsuperscript{15} Remember that Byrne R.S. Fone cited Hopkins' name along with Symonds, as examples of educated men who used the simple name of Whitman, during the 1880s, as a signifier of same-sex male desire in their personal papers.
of Queen’s Acre provided a secure pastoral location where Sturgis’ friends could magically “transform” into their most complex selves, within a protected environment. These complex selves resisted the mandates of compulsory heteronormitivity and challenged the constraints of rigidly-defined gender roles, creating a common sense of queerness. Unable to express his desire for men openly, Hopkins, by his own account, found that, inside the house of Howard Sturgis, he could connect with like-minded men who shared his appreciation of male society and beauty.

Though Gerard Manley Hopkins never identified or recognized himself as homosexual, he did immortalize male beauty in his poetry and experienced desire for men in his life. Hopkins, who had attended a Benjamin Jowett lecture on Thucydides and was tutored by Walter Pater during his years at Balliol College, Oxford, experienced same-sex desire, according to Gregory Woods, when he met Digby Mackworth Dolben, to whom he was first introduced in 1866 (171). Dolben, a teenage poet, exchanged poems with the besotted Hopkins, but tragically drowned in 1867, in the prime of his youth. Devastated by his young friend’s death, Hopkins drew upon the romantic figure of Dolben for many of the written works he produced—homoerotic texts that glorified masculine beauty. Woods explains that Hopkins “belonged to that culture of sentimental and erotic male friendships shaped by both Greece and (Catholic) Rome” (171) and that his personal feelings of same-sex desire, as experienced during his friendship with Dolben, greatly influenced some of his best literary works written, as both a poet and a Jesuit priest. Graham Robb seems to agree with Woods’ interpretation of Hopkins’ works, for he reprints a section of one Hopkins’ best-known sermons, which provides a famously homoerotic description of Christ. The sermon was one Hopkins delivered at
Leigh in Lancashire, in 1879, and is cited, in Robb’s *Strangers*, as an example of the “ecstatic blend of sexual and metaphysical yearning” Hopkins felt and expressed through his imagining the physical body of Jesus, a body markedly virile and revealingly alluring. This sermon, along with his poems, “Epithalamion” and “The Bugler’s First Communion,” became popular works by Hopkins widely included and referenced with a homosexual male literary tradition—a tradition of which friends of Hopkins, like Sturgis, would have been well aware, given their close association. Like other men who so often frequented the grounds of Queen’s Acre, Hopkins may have relished the freedom to “let the mask slip” a bit within the judgment-free zone found there, with the “perfect Victorian lady” Sturgis as his host. Wharton, of course, tacitly understood Howard Sturgis’ close friendships with men like Hopkins. She quietly comprehended Lapsley’s connections to men like Dickinson, who were English and whom he had met through his studies at Eton and Cambridge, as well as through mutual friends with similar interests.

Joseph Bristow, in his full-length study *Effeminate England: Homoerotic Writing After 1885*, argues with Dowling’s suggestion that “Oxonian Hellenism” provided an open discourse within male homosexuality which could resist the very real dangers of homophobia—as best exampled by the Labouchère Amendment, the eleventh clause of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, which was passed in England in 1885. With the looming fear of blackmail—for the Labouchère Amendment was nicknamed the “Blackmailer’s Charter”—men still had to be careful that their letters or expressions were not too explicit in regard to same-sex desire, for such admissions could have been used as

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16 George Santayana provided a telling description of Sturgis as “a perfect young lady of the Victorian type,” which has been referenced by both Leon Edel and reprinted in *GLBTQ: An Encyclopedia of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Culture*. For further discussion of this quote and its importance in relation to Sturgis' gender construction, please see Chapter Three, page 104.
potential blackmail—a fact Morton Fullerton sadly experienced. While Bristow does acknowledge that Hellenism certainly functioned in the way that Dowling proposes—that the Greek model allowed very positive associations and encouraged more men to use the language of the classics or Greek history to express same-sex desire to each other—he finds it doubtful that the same-sex desire often shared between men all of a sudden could have allowed open expression through the simple use of a “coded language.” What sort of freedom of expression could such “coded language” provide? Clearly, the fear of criminal charges of sodomy or possible blackmailed still lingered. Bristow contends:

Much as I would like to believe, as Dowling does, that mid-Victorian liberalism provided the generous terms, if not the latitude, to accommodate transformations and subsequent eroticizations of the Oxonian homosocial context in which Wilde developed his aesthetics, his canon of writing—like the memoirs of John Addington Symonds—demands that we confront hostile forces that are indeed impending, and which were anticipated in plays, novels, and poems that regarded sexual desire as frustratingly inexpressible. The tide of Victorian masculinity had in any case long been turning against the Oxonian aestheticism in which Wilde was immersed in the 1870s. (20)

Here, Bristow makes an interesting point. Though the language and cultural commerce of Hellenism could provide the additional means of expression of same-sex male desire, many men still experienced painfully inhibiting limitations and dangerous boundaries that, were they tested, could lead to extortion or imprisonment. Significantly, Bristow chooses to focus his study largely on how the trials of Oscar Wilde, in 1895, forever linked what would become characteristic traits of effeminacy to the image of the male homosexual in the century to come. Yet, Bristow does not alone focus on the trials of Oscar Wilde as the most important event in the history of the modern homosexual male in England; Alan Sinfield in his The Wilde Century, also, explores the repercussions of Wilde’s legacy in terms of modern male sexuality and gender construction. Prior to the
trials, as both scholars assert, effeminacy did not necessarily correlate with queerness or
evidence of a man’s homosexual identity. However, the trials’ sensationalist media
coverage, in 1895, combined with the growing popularity of sexological theories, which
circulated during the fin de siècle, established feminine characteristics as tell-tale signs of
male homosexuality for a homophobic public at large, both in England and in America.

Despite Bristow and Sinfield’s insights into the “effeminate” as it was constructed
before the Wilde trials, clearly there was a “masculine” purity and innocence found in the
tradition of Greek pederasty that, in a sense, lifted same-sex male sexuality out of the
gutter of flagrant promiscuity found in seedy parts of London in the “molly-houses.” An
upper-class sensibility, paired with a classical education that endorsed Plato’s views of
same-sex male desire as something beneficial when expressed for the benefit of both
partners, led academic men to reclaim male desire as something sanctioned, beneficial,
and lofty, rather than criminal, ruinous, and seedy. When Benson looked to the journals
and verse of William Johnson Cory, as Symonds did, he was able to find a depiction of
an older man’s appreciation of the glory of boyhood, free from the judgment and
prejudice the connotations of the word “pederasty” itself implied, for the word
“pederasty” in the English language included usages and connotations that were largely
pejorative. Men like Benson would have been very careful not to use the specific word
“pederasty,” since its meaning contained overt reference to illegal sex acts that could
have led to dangerous results.

**Hellenizing Masculine Desire**

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word “paederasty,” also written
as the orthographic variant “pederasty,” first appeared in 1613, in the English language,
and was defined to mean the sexual practice of sodomy with a boy—"unnatural connexion with a boy; sodomy." Notably, the word "paederast" would later be defined as synonymous "sodomite," the former first appearing in 1730 and the latter as early as 1380, though the OED does cite both the Greek origin and the early French "pédérastie" as root forms of "paederasty." The earliest definition the OED provides of "paederasty" reveals in the use of the word "unnatural" that pederasty in 1600s England meant something very different from the "paiderastia" that Dowling more recently describes—both in terms of the ancient Greek historical concept and the renewed model found during the mid to late 1800s. The OED's proffered synonym of "sodomy" obscures the meaning of "pederasty" that scholars like William Percy intend in historical treatments of ancient Greece. The synonym "sodomy," as well, simply reduces pederasty to meaning anal sex—a sex act that is not reserved solely for man-man sexual relations but often carried out by heterosexual couples as well. As a result of such a limited and misleading description, the complicated problem arises that pederasty has come to imply either one or simultaneously two prohibited sex acts—1) sex with a boy ("unnatural connexion" could imply any of a number of sex acts, e.g. mutual masturbation, fellatio, etc.) or 2) explicit anal sex. In the first mentioned, the object of sexual desire is problematically described simply as an underage "boy," where the age of that boy has not been defined—a product of which has been the confusion of mistaking "pederasty" with "pedophilia." This lack of establishing the appropriate age of the younger male sexual object (read: the desired), by opting instead to use the simple word "boy" (a term, interestingly, the OED defines as being applicable to males prepubescent, postpubescent, and even adult), causes some slippage into what has been defined as same-sex male pedophilia, where the male
subject (read: the desirer) is an adult of legal age. If the word “boy,” here in the OED usage, means a prepubescent male, then the term “pederasty” becomes solely synonymous with modern notions of pedophilia and describes an illegal sexual relationship between a man over the age of 18 and a boy under the age of thirteen. Such a usage would be not only very misleading, but would have practically nothing to do with the Greek institutionalized practice that Percy describes and which persisted in a male homosexual literary tradition as positive and a beneficial educational practice.

According to Matt Cook, in his study London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885-1914, the clashing views of same-sex male sexuality related largely to a conflict between the seemingly corrupting influence of an urban landscape and the invigorating, athletic and healthy site of the pastoral—where the city and the country would stand at opposite ends of a binary opposition that pitted degeneration against regeneration. Cook explains that Hellenism, with empire-building at its root, carried with it the positive ideals of nationhood and social reform. He asserts:

Both Hellenism and pastoralism promised stability, a counter to degeneracy and a clearer idea of national identity. They heralded other spaces, including Athens, Arcadia and the English greenwood, and used the muscular body as a symbol of health, vitality, personal endeavor and self-restraint. At a time when fears about the city were focussed on the degenerate, criminal, prostituted and effeminate body, these versions of corporeal perfection provided an important counter. An athletic physique could signify not only personal vitality, but also national strength and prowess. (124)

In the paradigm that Cook presents, Hellenism and pastoralism appealed to middle- and upper-class men who needed to justify same-sex desire as something positive rather than debased or corrupting. The particular association such men sought in Hellenism, specifically the Greek tradition of pederasty, involved very strong concepts of nation-
building and class consciousness; in fact, “Whilst pastoralism allowed for claims about
the naturalness of desire, Hellenism conjured a social system in which homosexuality had
supposedly been an accepted and integrated part” (125). Provided the example of Greek
culture, which classical education held in the highest regard—Hellenic Greece, here,
producing the finest philosophy, art and literature the world had ever seen, not to mention
innovations in democratic government—the tradition of male homosexuality that had
been credited with these achievements provided a helpful tool for dispelling prejudiced
stereotypes of abnormality or sickness sexologists linked to same-sex male sexuality.
Even the actual site of the physical body became symbolic of the two views of the effects
of same-sex male sexuality. On the one hand, sexologists who viewed the male
homosexual body as diseased—possessing sickness either literally, such as with syphilis,
or other sexually transmitted diseases, or psychological affliction, like inversion or
hyperfemininity, or resulting in actual physical deformity, as marked by “crooked
fingers,” excess hair growth or disfigurement—emphasized powerfully negative physical
characteristics. At the other end of the spectrum, those who looked to the Hellenistic
ideal of pederastic relationships, poets and scholars alike, celebrated the male body as
virile, strong, athletic, muscular, and beautiful as exampled in Greek statuary. Where
psychologists and doctors fixated on images of the diseased body, writers like Pater and
Symonds visited the British Museum—a popular spot for many men who longed to
admire the masculine figure in all of its perfection.

The act of gazing upon the athletic male body fulfilled a need for men like Pater,
Symonds and Benson, who sought positive expression of same-sex male desire within the
private outlet of personal writing, turning to museum exhibits and river shores to watch
bathing younger men, to appreciate male beauty in its physical form. Cook explains, “The importance of Hellenism in contemporary discourse on homosexuality made the British Museum, and especially the statues galleries, an important site in the city for many men. It was a place where it was legitimate to look at sculpture of naked men: they were associated with an Hellenic ethos of self-realisation and control rather than ‘modern’ urban debauchery” (33). Within the “safe” confines of the British Museum’s statuary rooms or when privately lounging on the banks of the Cam, unassuming men could observe male beauty as healthy and athletic—a body of perfection in proportion and musculature, in contraposto.

In his letters to A. C. Benson from the mid to late 1890s, Henry James discussed the subject lingering on his mind: (the subject of same-sex male desire) his involvement with Symonds and the notoriety of the Wilde trials in 1895. Benson, who also believed in the beneficial effects of the Greek practice of “paiderastia,” would tell James about his ongoing project of writing numerous volumes of his diary, in the tradition of William Johnson Cory, whom he so greatly admired17. The simple subject of Cory, in and of itself, would be enough to signify same-sex male desire, as Cory belonged to a nineteenth century tradition of male homosexual writing that included Tennyson, Whitman, Swinburne, Symonds, Pater, and Wilde (several of these writers Wharton directly examined and lauded within her circle of friends): “The decade-by-decade ‘bursts’ in homosexual literature in the second half of the century seem stimulated mainly by the

17 Despite his subscribing to the belief of same-sex male desire between an older and younger man as extremely positive, Benson struggled, like James, with physically acting upon such desire. When properly contained and expressed, this desire was strongly beneficial, but, when men engaged in sex acts that were more hedonistic than educationally productive, this desire became debased and negative, in Benson’s view. This most likely explains why both Benson and James, judged Oscar Wilde as almost deserving his fate, despite their pity for him, since that he blatantly embraced a “decadent” lifestyle that sought pleasure about everything else.
breakthroughs in accessible homosexual writing in the years immediately preceding them—for example, by the models of Tennyson and Johnson/Cory in the 1850s, of Whitman and Swinburne in the 1860s, of Symonds and Pater in the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s, and of Wilde in the 1890s” (Cady 12). Due to his strong attachments to students and practice of selecting student “favourites,” Cory was eventually “sent down” from Eton, after a request for his resignation. David Newsome explains: “In the end, Cory allowed himself to become too obviously (as Julian Sturgis once put it to Arthur) ‘simply an old Greek—like a philosopher in a dialogue of Plato—born out of due time’” (195).

In a letter to Arthur Benson, written on September 25th, 1897, James divulges his interest in both Benson’s dairy and Cory’s journals:

Send me by all means the Diary to which you so kindly allude—nothing could give me greater pleasure than to feel I might freely—and yet so responsibly—handle it... I shall be very glad indeed of a talk with you about W. Cory—my impression of whom, on the book, you deepen: whenever anything so utterly unlikely as articulate speech between us miraculously comes to pass. (57)

It is also in this letter that James first tells Benson of his recent lease of a “smallish, charming” house in Rye, known as “Lamb House.” By this time, James and Benson had been friends for thirteen years and James certainly knew enough of Benson to feel safe in expressing his curiosity about Cory. The following week, James would write again to Benson, signaling to him that he began to understand him all the better. Using the metaphor of his newly-rented house, James writes, on October 1st: “It is really good enough to be a kind of little becoming, high-door’d, brass-knockered façade to one’s life. This gives me an advantage, for I feel—after the Journal—as if I had got a little behind your knocker” (59). This use of innuendo—the getting “behind” of Benson’s “knocker”—clearly represents James’ intimation that he understood how Benson felt,
even expressing sympathy in regard to his feelings toward younger men. The affectionate pats, shoulder squeezes and hand-grasping that Benson records that James offered to him demonstrates the physicality of their friendship stemming from a shared understanding of their most private and hidden selves. The recent publication of William Johnson Cory's journal that summer of 1897 provided both Benson and James a cultural cue or hint to one another that would reveal similar views toward impassioned relationships between older and younger men.

When examining the relationships between men in the late-Victorian period in England, one should always remember the incredibly complex spectrum of emotional involvement, during a time when homoerotic sentiment had been made illegal. Richard Dellamora emphasizes the effect that the Labouchère Amendment, in 1885, had in terms of inhibiting the expression of these feelings even within a private sphere, since the piece of legislation moved beyond the simple banning of sodomy. He claims:

Passage of the Labouchère amendment, a piece of legislation so broad in scope as to make illegal all male homosexual activity or speech whether in public or private, marked a decisive turn for the worse in the legal situation of men in Britain who engaged in sexual activities with other men. I say 'homosexual' even though as a category of modern sexology that term is instated only in the following decade because the amendment contributed to the social formation of homosexuality by shifting focus from sexual acts between men, especially sodomy, the traditional focus of legislation, to sexual sentiment or thought, and in this way to an abstract entity soon to be widely referred to as ‘homosexuality.’ The Labouchère amendment or something like it was essential to the increasing deployment of homophobia as a mechanism of social control that occurred after 1885. (200)

Here, Dellamora stresses that the amendment prohibited “all male homosexual activity or speech whether in public or private,” which led to the notorious and widespread blackmail—as was seen with the male prostitutes that extorted money from Oscar Wilde,
who had letters written to Alfred Douglas in their possession, or as seen with Madame Mirecourt, who would force sums of money from Morton Fullerton for years, with incriminating letters that revealed the nature of his involvement with Lord Ronald Gower in her care. Not only did men fear being caught in a compromising connection with another man in terms of a sexual relationship, but the amendment had made even consensual “sexual sentiment or thought” towards other men illegal, thus attacking “an abstract entity soon to be widely referred to as ‘homosexuality.’” As a result, men would have to become cleverer in terms of expressing same-sex desire, by developing a use of language that would allow them to freely express such feelings while never revealing enough specific information as to become incriminating. In letters and in publicly printed writing, these men would employ a mode of language that specifically drew upon popular cultural references, a male homosexual literary tradition, and artistic cues in order to both express their desire and sexual identities, while resisting the legislation that made such expression illegal. Rather than a “code,” which, to me, seems motivated by a need to hide or conceal something from others, this language of “camp” gloriously celebrated and playfully exposed queer identity to those “in the know.” Men, like James—whose sense of humor has been noted by many of the people who knew him best—experimented with language in ways that become fascinating, resulting in writing full of rich allusion and cultural context that captures the remarkable resilience of men who refused to be told

18 In her study Another Mother Tongue: Gay Words, Gay Worlds, Judy Grahn distinguishes “camp” as a word taken “from a theatrical sixteenth-century term camping, meaning ‘young men wearing the costume of women in a play’” and that, within a queer lexicon, it has come to mean something related to humor and queer identity: “Camp is burlesque, fun, an ability to poke a jocular finger at one’s own frustrations and guffaw at the struggles of other pathetics, homosexuals or famous, influential people” (227). The OED defines “code” as “a system of words arbitrarily used for other words or for phrases, to secure brevity and secrecy,” which suggests concealment and furtiveness due to anxiety. These two words, “camp” and “code,” despite sharing some similarity, for me, differ greatly due to the expression of humor. James, Wharton, and their circle certainly liked to laugh and perform their identities to each other, rather than hide them, using long-standing jokes and references to playfully tease.
who they could or, more fittingly, could not love. The figures of Howard Overing Sturgis and Henry James himself become excellent examples of such men—men who were not afraid to be themselves with the friends they trusted.

According to Byrne R.S. Fone, when William Johnson was sacked from his position as an instructor at Eton, in 1872, he changed his name to William Cory to avoid any hint of the scandal that accompanied his being “sent down.” Due to the “suspicion of too intimate relations” with his younger male students, Johnson notoriously lost his prestigious job, in a demonstration that, though the Hellenistic model of pederasty had found glorification in poetry from the period—Johnson’s own Ionica had first appeared in print in 1858—practical examples of age-defined same-sex relationships still led to certain threat within even the “safe” confines of the public school. When Johnson, who had maintained a remarkable record of pedagogical development and had become a well-loved don at Eton, lost his post at Eton, his sacking symbolized an intolerance of his known sexuality. Interestingly, Johnson’s dismissal occurred only a few years after the word “homosexuality” had been coined in a German text in 1868 and the subject had been made extremely popular in sexological texts. Once male “homosexuality” had entered English discourse as a psychological disorder and mental abnormality, the classical model of pederasty so admired in lyrical poetry underwent a monstrous transfiguration within a larger social context. As a construct, the “homosexual” became inextricably bound up in negative connotations of sickness and disease, something Johnson’s poetry contradicted with images of boyhood athleticism and the virile health of the male body so admired in Ionica—which “in several expanded editions, continued to

19 Graham Robb dates the likely emergence of the term “Homosexualität” to “a peripatetic Hungarian man of letters called Kertbeny (Karl Maria Benkert, 1824-82)” who used the word in a letter to Ulrichs, in 1868, as well as in two pamphlets that followed.
be published well until the end of the century” (Fone 103). Despite the public “outing” of Johnson’s sexuality, which led to his professional demise, many of Johnson’s former students continued to honor his legacy with their own positive literary portraits of same-sex male desire. One of those students was Howard Sturgis. Fone writes, “Of Johnson’s pupils there are several whose own works suggest similar devotion to homoerotic themes, among them, for example, Howard Sturgis, whose novel *Tim* details a homoerotic relationship between two Eton boys” (103). Yet, it must be acknowledged that Sturgis’ “homoerotic” text was first published anonymously in 1891, showing that though he seemed more daring in his show of same-sex desire, even Sturgis remained wary of bringing his non-heteronormativity too far into the light of public scrutiny. For someone like Benson, who so largely fashioned his own teaching career after Johnson, the public revelation of his own private sexuality could have had professionally disastrous repercussions. Unlike Ogden Codman, Jr., who could be so cavalier in his correspondence to Arthur Little about same-sex male sexuality, Benson feared the ostracizing that Johnson had faced and could only confide his own sense of queerness to close and trusted friends and, of course, his diary.

One of the close and trusted friends who shared A.C. Benson’s sense of privacy and decorum proved to be the same Gaillard Lapsley Codman once had called an “Aunt Mary” in a letter to Arthur Little. Though they had very different demeanors, Benson felt an immediate sense of kinship with the younger Lapsley, when he wrote in December 1905, “I could not have thought I could have got to know Lapsley at my time of life” (189). Writing almost like an “old maid” who had finally found love, despite advanced age, Benson, in his entry, adopts a tone of infatuation in his description of his friend: “We
are very different too. He is polished, brilliant, capable, dry. I am lymphatic, slovenly, muddled, sentimental. Yet we mix well” (189). With self-deprecation, Benson admired Lapsley’s difference, as his observations on his friend reveal his eagerness in their relation—“Yet we mix well.” While Sturgis and Lubbock’s “romantic friendship” continued to grow, it seems that Benson had been tending the budding sense of Whitmanian comradeship developing between himself and Lapsley. The private alliances between these men provided an intimacy that allowed them to express to each other what they could not reveal to a larger society that remained frightfully homophobic and stringently heteronormative. The background history of these “romantic friendships” and associations shows that several of the members of Wharton’s inner circle not only identified with a tradition of homosexual male literature—in some cases, adding to it as well—but could openly encourage the attachments they had developed with each other (e.g. Sturgis and Lubbock, Benson and Lapsley). With each other, they created a sense of acceptance and trust that allowed them to be themselves, removing the “veil” that shrouded their queerness from a public audience. Henry James, however, remained the dominant figure within this group, keeping up devoted friendships with Benson, Sturgis, Lapsley and Lubbock, and penning letters of camp affection to all of them with his characteristically dramatic flair.

For example, in one choice passage from a letter James wrote to Sturgis on February 20, 1912, James playfully teased that their mutual friend Arthur Benson had been giving lectures on Symonds that purposely ignored direct treatment of the pederastic tradition as related to active homosexuality. Confirming intriguing information James had received from Lapsley (which Sturgis must have referenced in a previous letter), who
had apparently attended the lecture Benson gave, the Master claimed that Benson
ironically skirted the very subject which fascinated Symonds the most:

Yes, I had heard (from Gaillard Lapsley) that dear Arthur is lecturing on
Symonds “with the disagreeable side left out!” But it supremely
characterizes Symonds that that was just the side that he found most
supremely agreeable—& that to ignore it is therefore to offer your yearning
curiosity a Symonds exactly uncharacterized. However, Arthur is clearly
doing him in the Key of Pink. But if a course of lectures, generally, might
be made of all things, disagreeable and agreeable, he “leaves out,” it might
stretch almost to the length of his whole oeuvre—so far as at present
perpetrated. But, dearest Howard, here is perpetration enough. (162-3)

Clearly amused that Benson carefully ignored what was an essential component in
Symonds’ writing, James asserted that the “key” was missing for decoding Symonds’
writing, much in the way that Wharton later suggested that only one of James’ closest
friend’s could decipher the language of “cross-reference and allusion” of his own letters.
To Lapsley, James offered a “fictional dialogue” in a letter that Fred Kaplan cites as an
example of James’ open disclosure to his friend of his inability to act upon same-sex
desire in his older years. Kaplan writes:

When Laspley told him that Arthur Benson was giving a course of lectures
on John Addington Symonds, “with the disagreeable side left out,” he
responded with a joking fictional dialogue, “Symonds Without the Key”:
“How charming that sounds,” but “don’t you think we ought to have
the key?” “No—and it’s forbidden to bring it with you.” “Mayn’t we leave
it at the door with one’s umbrella?” “Well—if you leave it in the lavatory.”
“But don’t you think it might so be lost?” “It’s for you to judge. But such a
key should be lost. Yes—I remain outside.” “Outside the lavatory?”
“Outside the subject.”” After his illness of 1910, what had been unlikely
before had become an impossibility. (539)

Using the “key” as a camp reference to the phallus, James knowingly makes fun of his
own inability to participate in the actively sexual pederastic practice that Symonds’s
praised and explored in his writing, to two close friends who knew the inside joke.

Writing of the “Key of Pink” (a rather racy euphemism) to Sturgis and of the “key” one

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brought to the “lavatory” to Lapsley, James clearly felt comfortable enough to signal to these close friends and even laugh about his own inability to pursue sexual relationships with the younger men he desired. Locating outside judgment as a inhibiting factor (“such a key should be lost”), although age and illness certainly played their role in James’ later celibacy, the Master understood why Benson needed to omit the “key” from his lectures, just as he understood why he had never used his own key within his relationships with men. Certainly, James developed a strong sense of security with these friends to be able to joke with such camp language and affectation. Since three of the men mentioned were directly involved in this set of exchanges, one can see how James fostered a kind of safe zone within his circle of friends, one of acceptance and mutual support that allowed for such humor and became the very core of the “happy few” who could laugh about such things.

**The Aesthetic of the Aesthete**

As mentioned earlier in Chapter I, prior to Wharton’s meeting James, she had already “met him,” in a sense, through reading his novels and from observing him on two different occasions. The man she had come to know as Mr. Henry James, the genteel writer who appeared during the 1880s and 1890s as the image of the “Pensaroso,” or deep thinker—took the form of the bearded, well-dressed and “elegant” man whose impeccable taste would set him apart from others. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines an “aesthete” as “one who professes a special appreciation for what is beautiful, and endeavours to carry his ideas of beauty into practical manifestation,” dating the word’s emergence in mainstream English vocabulary to circa 1881. During the 1880s, James had perfected the image of the aesthete as embodied in his characters, Gilbert
Osmond and Ralph Touchett, in *The Portrait of a Lady*. He had already given his reading public such figures as Rowland Mallet, in *Roderick Hudson*, and Winterbourne in *Daisy Miller*. In the year 1885, James even played the role of tour guide to Count Robert de Montesquiou—an infamously profligate lover of men forever immortalized in the pages of both Huysmans and Proust—during Montesquiou’s visit to London, as he had been “yearning to see London aestheticism” (Haralson 60). That James would have been recognized privately as an authority on “London aestheticism” reveals much about who the writer had been perceived to have been during this period. Polished, carefully groomed and fashionably garbed, James would learned how to appreciate beauty, though he would not solely dedicate his life to its pursuit, like his character Mark Ambient—directly based on J.A. Symonds—in his short story, “The Author of Beltraffio.” Still, James had longed to “fit in” as concerned the fashionable social scene in London and mastering social codes and mores allowed him such an entrée. Wharton had considered him “essentially a novelist of manners,” a cultural authority of cosmopolitan life—something about which she herself knew a great deal. The figure of the aesthete, within literary history, has now come to be seen as one of the distinctly queer figures from the nineteenth century. Though Haralson applies the appellative “proto-gay”—meaning that though the modern concept of the gay man had not yet become fully developed, certain figures still existed that were associated with same-sex male sexuality—the figure of the aesthete becomes a recognizably representation, a distinct characterization, of a particular male homosexual figure.

In his fascinating study, George Chauncey has dramatically revealed how a multitude of terms circulated during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that
represented a wide array of sexualities and gender construction that appeared within what would be considered New York’s homosexual male community. By locating these terms and describing their meanings, Chauncey convincingly demonstrates that male homosexuality did not consist of one neat category of men who were easily recognizable, but rather that the classification of men who engaged in sex acts with other men remained amazingly complex. Chauncey contends:

Many of the terms used in the early twentieth century were not synonymous with homosexual or heterosexual, but represent a different conceptual mapping of male sexual practices, predicated on assumptions that are no longer widely shared or credible. Queer, fairy, trade, gay, and other terms each had a specific connotation and signified specific subjectivities, and the ascendancy of gay as the preeminent term (for gay men among gay men) in the 1940s reflected a major reconceptualization of homosexual behavior and of “homosexuals” and “heterosexuals.” (14)

Though Chauncey investigates images of same-sex male sexuality largely in New York, the historical framework he provides gives insight into the variety of and complicated language that existed within the specific social groups he examines. Two of the primary terms that I employ, and which Chauncey clearly defines, possessed specific meanings that remained separate from one another—“queer” and “fairy” or “queen.” I draw upon Chauncey’s definition of “queer,” which would signify men who engaged in same-sex male sexuality, without seeing themselves as “effeminate” or displaying traditionally feminine characteristics. “By the 1910s and 1920s,” Chauncey explains, “the men who identified themselves as part of a distinct category of men primarily on the basis of their homosexual interest rather than their womanlike gender status called themselves queer” (15-6). Queer men stood apart from effete or feminine men, known as “fairies,” “nancies,” “sissies,” “pansies,” or even “queens,” who displayed cross-gender mannerisms and maintained interests that were considered “womanly.” Chauncey goes
on to show how queer men disassociated themselves from their effeminate counterparts by using such terms to show that clear differences existed within the often-generalized larger grouping of men labeled “homosexual.” “They might use queer to refer to any man who was not ‘normal,’ continues Chauncey, “but they usually applied terms such as fairy, faggot, and queen only to those men who dressed or behaved in what they considered to be a flamboyantly effeminate manner. They were so careful to draw such distinctions in part because the dominate culture failed to do so” (16). Certainly, a tendency to generalize or stereotype the homosexual male experience into one homogeneous identity remains a treacherous pitfall within any coverage of queer history; the task of accurately representing the diversity and complexity of same-sex male sexuality from this period can seem intimidating and fraught with problematic misinterpretation. For my study, I focus mainly on two distinct figures—the queer and the fairy—within the homosexual male community in England, primarily between 1895 and 1916, in order to show their influence on Edith Wharton. In order to assist my examination of Wharton and her “comrades,” I simultaneously must face the challenge of locating the meaning of specific references used within her specific community of men—the cultural allusions, literary texts, and the charged vocabulary—that was used as signals to one another. As a resource, I have relied on the more recent publications in queer studies that have examined sexual history within England, Europe and the United States, during this period, and which also show how complicated and diverse the subject positions of homosexual men were within their own given communities. These works paint a distinct portrait of life within these communities and, as a result, demonstrate how
contemporary culture from this period teemed with new language to accommodate finely-drawn distinctions in identity.

Many scholars have shown how, as a representative of male queerness, the aesthete would embody outwardly definitive and effeminate characteristics, as observed in the public persona of the iconic Oscar Wilde. Joseph Bristow, in his *Effeminate England: Homoerotic Writing After 1885*, shows how the figure of the effeminate “dandy” resulted largely from the caricature-like portrayals of Wilde, in the media, during his trials in 1895. Though his study traces multiple forms of effeminacy, beginning with the late nineteenth century and progressing through the twentieth, Bristow reinforces the idea that effeminacy became inevitably bound up in portrayals of male homosexuality due to the negative propaganda that bombarded the reading public aware of the Wilde trials. According to his study, Wilde’s repeated portrayals of the aesthete within his dramatic fiction presented a consistent voice of resistance that challenged dominate heterosexual culture. “In Wilde’s hands,” Bristow writes, “the aesthete—for all the controversy he aroused—became what I shall call an insider dissident: a figure who provoked the commonsensical mentality of bourgeois England by entertaining it from within its ranks” (21). Despite the teasingly witty way Wilde would critique high society, his popularity would wane, when tolerance of his overt sexual antics in his private life wore thin due to public scandal. Graham Robb, in his fine historical work *Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century*, reveals that the “Aesthetic Movement of the 1870s and 1880s” started to grate on the dominant heterosexual culture in England even prior to Wilde’s infamous trials. Robb purports that: “The aesthetes’ flowery excesses were mocked so affectionately that it is easy to assume that their audience was quite
innocent of their subtexts until the unmasking of Oscar Wilde. But swooning aesthetes were seen to be suspiciously pederastic long before the Wilde trials” (105). If the aesthete had been recognized for some time as a queer figure and had been tentatively accepted, even if teased or parodied, then the powerfully dramatic trials of Oscar Wilde soon brought that tolerance to an abrupt end. I find it fitting that James would undergo a substantial change in his appearance and demeanor, as recorded by Wharton, conveniently during the same time that Wilde’s scandal and trials would come to an almost explosive head. Certainly, Edith Wharton felt drawn to James because she had been able to penetrate his fiction and public persona and connected to the “disaffiliated aesthete”\(^\text{20}\) she had observed.

\(\text{20}\) This is a term used by Eric Haralson in his study *Henry James and Queer Modernity*, which is discussed in further detail in Chapter Four. The “disaffiliated aesthete,” for Haralson, is a character who James investigates repeatedly in his writing, as a precursor to modern representations or characterizations of gay men in fiction. This sort of figure anticipates later, more modern depictions of male queerness within an urban setting. See page 176 for more of this discussion.
CHAPTER III

THE QU’ACRE CIRCLE

Howard’s Endearment

Wharton’s relationships with a specific circle of queer men, known as the “Qu’acre Circle” or the “Happy Few” (many other epithets exist), largely introduced to her by Henry James, provided the author with both an emotional and physical space to explore her sense of difference, both in terms of her gender and complex sexual desire. By unpacking the importance of the relationships these men and Wharton created with one another, I tell a story of a “band” of friends who forged deep bonds that lasted a lifetime and reveal how their sense of humor and shared “otherness” allowed them to express their true selves. My goal is to paint the portraits of several remarkable individuals, each playing their own role within a literary coterie of accomplished artists, thinkers, and writers, who allowed Wharton to develop her mature voice as an author.

When Wharton recalled her visits to Queen’s Acre in A Backward Glance, she placed her friend Howard Sturgis within a distinct academic setting and noted particular personal associations that readers familiar with a homosexual male literary tradition would have recognized and understood as queer. “Howard’s closest associations,” Wharton contends, “were English, for he had been sent to Eton and thence to Cambridge. At Eton he had been a pupil of Mr. Ainger’s, a privilege never forgotten by an Etonian fortunate to have enjoyed it; and Mr. Ainger, whom I most often met at Queen’s Acre, had remained one of his most devoted friends” (226). Given the frequency of Ainger’s
presence at Queen’s Acre, duly noted by Wharton, the author must have been aware of their past together\textsuperscript{21}—especially considering her playful remark that studying under Ainger remained “a privilege never forgotten by an Etonian fortunate to have enjoyed it.” She continues by then connecting Sturgis to a man he greatly admired, William Johnson Cory. Wharton explains: “Another friend of his youth was the eccentric and tragic William Johnson Cory, an Eton master of a different stamp, and an exquisite poet in a minor strain; and it is to Howard that I owe my precious first edition of ‘Ionica,’ royally clothed in crimson morocco” (226). Using such adjectives as “eccentric,” “tragic,” and “different,” Wharton signals to her reading public—at least to those who would have picked up on such descriptors—that Cory was queer. Yet, Wharton distinguishes Cory from Ainger and Sturgis, by writing that he was “tragic,” which most likely revealed how Wharton viewed the sexual indiscretion that led to his being “sent down” from Eton. Much like A.C. Benson, we learn from Wharton that Howard Sturgis admired William Johnson Cory and his poetry. Wharton also places herself within a specific literary tradition by praising Sturgis for having given her a rare and extremely valuable first edition of Cory’s verse, \textit{Ionica}—the very same book that John Conington gave to J.A. Symonds, a text which the latter revealed “went straight to my heart and inflamed my imagination” (qtd in Dowling 86). According to the inscription Sturgis wrote within the first edition he gave Wharton, he presented Wharton with his gift in 1909, but the

\textsuperscript{21} Fred Kaplan claims that Sturgis’ relationship with his former Eton tutor, Edward Ainger, with whom he lived as a companion, was the most powerful relationship in his life: “His closest relationship, other than with his parents, had been with his Eton tutor, with whom he maintained a lifelong mutual devotion and with whom he spent long periods of time” (454). Sturgis and Ainger lived together, supported each other, and shared a relationship where both believed in and celebrated same-sex desire between men of an age difference, specifically within an academic setting. Given that Sturgis had developed this kind of relationship with his former teacher, Wharton must have been aware of their connection and time as companions, given her reference to Ainger as one of Sturgis’ “most devoted friends.”

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contexts for this gift and the interpretation of what it meant will be discussed in a later chapter.

In her memoir, Wharton interestingly credits Howard Sturgis for introducing her to so many of the people she met during her visits to Queen’s Acre, people who became her close and intimate friends. When Wharton transitions into the third section of her chapter “London, Qu’acre, and Lamb,” she explains, “Most of my intimate friendships in England were made later (to me, at any rate) than the rush and confusion of a London season. Some of the dearest of them I owe to Howard Sturgis, and to him, and to Queen’s Acre, his house at Windsor, I turn for the setting of my next scene” (224). Repeatedly, Wharton emphasizes her relationship with Sturgis as the key to many of the most important friendships that she developed in her life, friendships that helped shape her understanding of her intellectual and sexual selves. Likening herself to Sturgis, she elaborated by writing, “Continuity in friendship he valued also as much as I did, and from that day until his death, many years later, he and I shared the same small group of intimates” (226). Wharton’s memories of Queen’s Acre flooded through her mind with a warmth and nostalgia that resulted from the laughter and great society she enjoyed there. Her love for her closest friends seeps through in her portrait of life there:

At Queen’s Acre some of my happiest hours of my life were passed, some of my dearest friendships formed or consolidated, and my own old friends welcomed because they were mine. For Howard Sturgis was not only one of the most amusing and lovable of companions, but untiring in hospitality to the friends of his friends. Indolent and unambitious though he was, his social gifts were irresistible, and his drawing room—where he spent most of his hours, not from ill-health but through inertia—was always full of visitors. There one found all that was most intelligent and agreeable in the world of Eton. (230)
Here, Wharton strongly asserts that some of her “happiest hours” of her life were experienced in the company of Sturgis and their friends, at Queen’s Acre. The “world of Eton” finds embodiment in the figure of Howard Sturgis, the host whose hospitality generously afforded “the inner group” a place to comfortably congregate and socialize.

In recent years, two anthologies of Henry James’ letters to younger men have appeared in print: Gunter and Jobe’s edited collection, *Dearly Beloved Friends: Henry James’s Letters to Younger Men*, first published in 2001, and Rosella Mamoli Zorzi’s assemblage of James’ letters to Hendrik C. Andersen, *Beloved Boy*, first published in 2004. What these two newer collections of James’ letters directly reveal—for the most significant of these letters have already appeared in Edel’s comprehensive volumes of James’ letters—is that Henry James liked to write letters to younger male correspondents. More than this, James assumed an affectionate tone in his letters, sending verbal caresses and expressions of desire to younger men who had caught his eye. Significantly, Gunter and Jobe’s collection includes a section of letters—one fourth of the collection, in fact—penned to Howard Overing Sturgis, a very close friend and an important member of James’ and Wharton’s Inner Circle. Before we explore the role that Sturgis played by hosting the various friends at his English home, Queen’s Acre, however—the place, with its name shortened to Qu’acre, that provided the allusion for what would become known as the “Qu’acre Group”—the relationship between James and Sturgis must be fully examined.

One of the best accounts of Howard Overing Sturgis (1855-1920) remarkably comes from the pages of Arthur Christopher Benson’s diaries—which were edited by Percy Lubbock and published in 1926, a year after the death of their author. A. C.
Benson (1862-1925), a scholar and educator, who taught at both Eton and Cambridge, first met Sturgis when Howard visited a mutual friend’s home in 1887. Benson’s first impression of Sturgis revealed concern: “He was perplexed by his effeminate ways and a little nervous of his wit” (Newsome 59). Though his father was a prominent American banker, Howard Sturgis’ mother was the younger Miss Boit of Boston and became Russell Sturgis’ third wife. David Newsome, in his biography of A. C. Benson, On the Edge of Paradise: A. C. Benson: The Diarist, explains: “Howard Sturgis’s life and lifestyle exude a real period flavour—a touch of fin-de-siècle and very much more than a touch of Edwardian opulence. His background was unusual: an American father who married three times and who became massively rich as a partner in Baring’s Bank, living his last years as a delicate invalid. By his third wife he had three sons and a daughter” (58). Howard, the youngest of the three boys, would live in the shadow of his “athletic and popular” older brother Julian, the second-born son—echoes of whom one finds in Sturgis’ portrait of Arthur, Sainty’s younger brother, in Sturgis’ novel Belchamber—who became what Newsome terms an “ineffectual author.” Sturgis became very close to his mother and, from an early age, exhibited the “effeminate ways” or characteristics Benson surely noticed. He preferred embroidery to riding, and chose reading over playing cricket. Much of Sturgis’ childhood experiences appear in the story of Sainty’s youth.

Though Newsome shows that James’ first encounter with Sturgis, in 1873—when Sturgis was in his last year at Eton—predate meeting with Benson, the latter relationship provided more intimate details about Sturgis’ life and sexuality (Seymour 229). Yet, the relationship between James and Sturgis developed into a powerfully strong one, particularly years later, when Sturgis had come into his own. Miranda Seymour, in her
study *A Ring of Conspirators: Henry James and His Literary Circle 1895-1915*, sheds light on the context of the first meeting between James and Sturgis:

Howard, the youngest, was in his last year at Eton when he first met Henry James who, in 1873, was among the steady stream of American visitors who flowed through the hospitable doors of Mr. Sturgis's country houses, Mount Felix at Walton-on-Thames and, subsequently, Givons Grove at Leatherhead. James, not yet established in English society, was a grateful recipient of the Sturgis family's hospitality. His description of Mr. Touchett and his son Ralph in *The Portrait of a Lady* later paid tribute to both Russell and Howard in those days. (229)

Howard would have been only 18 years old when he met Henry James, who was his elder by twelve years. Years prior, Howard's father, Russell, had been given an enticing offer by the London bank of Baring Brothers, in 1845, of "a partnership, a splendid house overlooking the Mall, and £10,000 a year for the entertainment of clients" (229), which clearly must have accounted for the Sturgis family's reputation for being incredibly hospitable hosts and great entertainers. As with his connection to A. C. Benson, Sturgis' youth and warmth touched the heart of the older man, as a younger boy or student in need of a mentor, or wiser, older teacher—a role that James could certainly fulfill. Many letters provide clues as to the nature of the relationship shared by James and Sturgis.

In Gunter and Jobe's volume of letters, *Dearly Beloved Friends*, the editors present a compilation of letters that strongly demonstrate the affectionate attachment that James maintained with the younger Sturgis. Though James and Sturgis met many years earlier, Gunter and Jobe insist that it was not until the earliest years of the twentieth century that James would develop romantic feelings toward Howard: "During the first few years of the twentieth century it seems that Henry James fell briefly but passionately in love with Howard Sturgis, a love that Sturgis may have reciprocated. This was a love of an older powerful man for a younger socialite and writer who lacked James's own..."
professional confidence and security, who sought from James support and reassurance regarding his writing” (115). In this account of the relationship, much import becomes attached to lines in James’s letters to Sturgis, which revealingly claim, “I repeat, almost to indiscretion, that I could live with you. Meanwhile I can only try to live without you” (115). The use of the word “indiscretion” carries a powerful meaning, as James would have had to be careful about not making his expression of desire for Sturgis too lucid, for fear of possible blackmail, were such a letter to fall into the wrong hands. Keeping up one’s guard in letters for James required labyrinths of language and euphemism that would set the outside reader’s head spinning, preventing potentially homophobic readers from puzzling out the meaning of such vague phrasing. To help provide the full context of James and Sturgis’ friendship, one must look to the presence of A. C. Benson in their lives, who, as an established pedagogue, advocated Hellenistic ideals of same-sex male relationships marked by age disparity and an educational association—the study of which provided a language of its own.

Benson, who wrote about his experiences as tutor and don at Eton and Cambridge in books like From a College Window, looked to the figure of William Johnson Cory, whose diary he avidly read and whose professional career he longed to mimic. In fact, Benson so admired Cory that, after reading his Letters and Journals, in 1897, he began to faithfully keep a diary that numbered more than sixty volumes by the time of his death. These diaries allow a unique view of several members who belonged to the Qu’acre Group or Wharton’s Inner Circle—with Benson’s intimate accounts of Sturgis, James, Gaillard T. Lapsley, Percy Lubbock, and brief mention of Robert Norton. As an educator and a life-long bachelor, Benson preferred the company of male friends and established
many sexually charged relationships with younger compatriots, though he seemed wary of initiating a physical element within these attachments. His admiration of boys and younger men, while moving beyond mere aesthetic to emotional involvement, never progressed to full sexual expression, due to what he called his “Anglo-Saxon prudishness”—a characteristic he felt both he and Lapsley shared; for James, this moral constraint was described as “Puritanism.” Yet, Benson did distinguish his male friendships from those shared by men such as Sturgis and Lubbock, who in contrast found romantic sentiment and expression acceptable and completely natural between men, sanctioned by the idealized pederastic paradigm.

In his portraits of Howard Sturgis and Henry James, whom Benson had met first in 1884, the diarist continuously draws attention to the physical nature of these two men and their ability to openly demonstrate affection through pats, hugs, and kisses. For a stiff and “prudish” man such as Benson, such touching seemed confusing; at times, Benson seems grateful that these men would touch him, but during other moments he expresses discomfort at the thought of the fine line of “appropriate” physical conduct being crossed. When Benson would meet James at the train station for a visit, he would remember: “Henry James, looking somewhat cold, tired and old, met me at the station: most affectionate, patting me on the shoulder and really welcoming, with an abundance of *petits soins*” (46). As Benson would become a close friend of James, he and the Master would share intimate conversations about their inability to partake in fully realized romantic relationships with other men. He recalls a particularly poignant confession by James about his own personal regrets, when looking back on his life experiences: “‘I often think,’ he went on, ‘if I look back on my own starved past, that I
wish I had done more, reached out further, claimed more—and I should be the last to block the way. The only thing is to be there, to wait, to sympathise, to help if necessary. He joined all this with many pats and caressing gestures; then he led me down by the arm and sent me off with a blessing” (226). Henry James’ telling admission demonstrates the painful barrier that prevented his taking that step further by entering a full relationship, which would include full sexual expression. Though, in this circumstance, James evaluated his situation with Hugh Walpole, a young man to whom he had harbored a deep attachment, I find the sentiment pertinent to a friend such as Sturgis—the “only” man with whom James could have seen himself sharing a home—who could and did engage in “romantic friendships” with men. After sharing this deep and intimate lament about his past relationships, James would turn to Benson and offer him the “many pats and caressing gestures” that marked the tactile quality of their relationship. Given Benson’s care to mention each symbolic gesture of touch James would make toward him, I believe that these “petit soins” (“little comforts”) by James acted as an important component in the older author’s relationships to other men, as has been observed before by scholars like Eric Haralson.

The mature James, as studied by Haralson in *Henry James and Queer Modernity*, was wont to offer many affectionate gestures and physical signals of his deeper attachment to male friends. So commonplace was the act of James’ placing a caressing hand on his male visitor’s shoulder that one friend would refer to the gesture as familiar to those who knew him best. Haralson expresses his initial surprise at learning of James’ tactile nature, an aspect of him that seems so foreign from the stiffly asexual man so often depicted in literary history:
After hearing so much about James’s fabled fastidiousness, and after so many readings of his fiction that see James himself inscribed in his “repressed” male characters, one is surprised to learn of his comfortable physicality with male friends. As Forster would notice during his visit to Lamb House in 1908, James’s tendency to lay an appreciative hand on one’s arm or shoulder was a distinguishing trait, or, as another recipient called it, “that gesture so familiar to those who knew him.” By extension, any reader of James’s mature correspondence will know the epistolary equivalent of his familiar gesture, “those extravagantly tactile expressions of affection.” (123)

Here, James’ affectionate “physicality” demonstrated during his encounters with younger male friends lends considerable weight to his verbal expressions of his desire to hold hands, pat, squeeze and hug men, in his letters to them. Why should such expressions of desire and affection be discounted as merely figurative, when copious evidence proves that James acted upon his urges to reach out and touch someone? Should such expressions be simply dismissed as characteristic phrasing, when James clearly would physically reenact the gestures he so often offered in his letters to such men? Of course, they should not. These gestures and signals show that James confidently approached younger men with elaborate demonstrations of his desire for them, as part of his flirtatious nature, a nature Miranda Seymour explores in her study A Ring of Conspirators.

According to Seymour, physical demonstrations of affection and flirtation were a common and expected element within the close circle of men with whom James most intimately associated. At one point, Seymour refers to a passage in Arthur Benson’s diary that describes a definitive 1913 scene between James and Gaillard Lapsley—to whom James would write many an impassioned letter and for whom he harbored a great infatuation—in which Lapsley felt surprised by James’ willingness to express affection: “Lapsley said, ‘If I had caught him in my arms, kissed his cheeks, as I have often done, it
would be all right’—this power of receiving caresses is a new light to me on H.J.—he
lives in an atmosphere of hugging—that is probably the secret of Hugh Walpole’s
success, the kisses of youth—he is jaded by the slobbering osculations of elderly men
with false teeth” (188). In analyzing the physical expressions of the group of men that
surrounded James—a group that included men like Benson, Sturgis, Lapsley, Lubbock,
Walpole, etc.—Seymour suggests that such “physical intimacy” was of a “fairly
promiscuous kind” (188). Certainly, when Benson as an observer witnessed such open
display of affection, his inner prude would react strongly to such scenes. On the topic of
what Benson would call “romantic schoolboy friendships,” he provided his own reserved
view which echoed that of his fellow aloof friend, Gaillard Lapsley:

We [A.C.B. and G.T.L.] discussed the ethics of romantic schoolboy
friendships, and how far romance should enter into them. My own feeling
is that they are very sacred things; that the best kind are simply passions of
the purest kind. But that they are better not spoken about, either by people
writing about them, or by friends to each other. One does not want any
sentimentality about it, any glancing or hand-patting. I have myself
experienced several of these devotions, early and late—but my best and
closest friendships have not been made that way, but have grown up
silently and even coldly, with no admixture of sentiment at all. (196)

This passage, which was written in 1905, shows how Benson’s views were clearly vexed,
for he appreciated the “sentimentality” and “hand-patting” that James would offer to him,
much like his friend Lapsley would feel the same way about James, years later in 1913.
Though Benson tries to distance himself from any enjoyment of such physical connection
with other men, he details such moments consistently in his private writings with positive
reactions. So, while Benson might have claimed to prefer keeping such affectionate
display at bay, he, in his own accounts, appears to look forward to the comforting pats
and hugs that Henry James would give him. Still, open demonstration of physical

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intimacy shared by other men made him feel uncomfortable. In a vivid scene depicted by Benson, the pedagogue became dismayed by an overt gesture of affection shared by Howard Sturgis and Percy Lubbock, in 1910. Yet, before that scene can be analyzed, the history shared by these men—a history which at that point had become rather extensive—must be further explored.

If James and Benson had met in 1884, approximately eleven years after the date of James’ meeting of Sturgis, and Benson and Sturgis met three years later, in 1887, certainly James’ history with Sturgis would predate that of either of Benson’s friendships with either the older Master or the younger Howard, or “Howdie” as he was called by close friends. Yet, from Benson’s perspective, these two men would become extremely important in his life, along with Edmund Gosse, who maintained a very close friendship with Henry James as well and who would also exhibit same-sex male desire within his associations within their acquaintance. In a telling anecdote, when presented with the “dreadful game” by Mary Cholmondeley, Benson reveals how close he believed these friends were. David Newsome retells the story:

Mary Cholmondeley once tried out her “dreadful game” on Arthur—putting him in the imaginary predicament of having to take three real friends to the top of St. Paul’s Cathedral, duly to find when he got to the top that he could only take one down again with him. One of the others had to be pushed over to fall to his death; the third had to stay on the top forever. How would he make his choice? Actually Arthur did not hesitate: “I pushed Henry James over, as fittest to die, left Gosse on top, and brought Howard Sturgis down.” (95)

When faced with the task of choosing three “real friends,” Benson without hesitation decided upon three men—Henry James, Edmund Gosse, and Howard Sturgis; of these three, he would select the one to whom he felt closest, the one he would “take down with him again” from the top of St. Paul’s Cathedral, who interestingly would be Howard.
There were distinct qualities about Howard that greatly appealed to his friends—his penchant for brilliant conversation, his thoughtfulness, his ability as an entertaining host and most of all his way of making everyone around him feel important.

Howard Sturgis had the power to make his friends see themselves as he saw them—as great in some way. Arthur Benson seemed clearly struck by how Sturgis would validate other people's ideas and how he could draw people out, bringing out their most brilliant selves in conversation. He wrote the following observation in his diary:

Howard, on the other hand, is observing, subtle, sensitive, smoothing over and adorning all social occasions with a perpetual flow of witty, unexpected, graceful talk that never palls or wearies. He will fall in with any mood, interpret any suggestion, make the most of a shy point, and give everyone the feeling of their own brilliance. All this has increased; he used to be capable of and indulge in very malicious little strokes of satire, which were always true enough to make them bite. I was always conscious with a kind of fearful joy that he was in the house, and used to be inclined, when either he or I entered a room, to look at him curiously to see whether he was in the melting or the freezing mood. (44)

While Benson compliments Sturgis' magnanimity in that he would “give everyone the feeling of their own brilliance,” the diarist also warned of his friend's ability to sharply criticize with “very malicious little strokes of satire.” Certainly Benson must have felt the pain caused by some of those pricking arrows of truth volleyed by their witty verbal archer, for he admits that he used to try to intuit whether Sturgis “was in the melting or the freezing mood.” Other men, like James, of whom Sturgis had the highest regard, would only revel in the glow of Sturgis' praise and attention. Lubbock would famously recount James' description of Sturgis, as Leon Edel details: “Howdie was like a richly-sugared cake, said James, always available on the table. 'We sit round him in a circle and help ourselves. Now and then we fling a slice over our shoulders to somebody outside.' Sometimes they even allowed a newcomer to join the closed circle” (195). Here, Sturgis
is not so much the dangerously changeable satirist, but a decadent dessert upon which all
his close friends would feast—a guilty pleasure to be had.

In a biography of A. C. Benson, David Newsome provides fine details of Sturgis’
life that reveal the strong sense of duty that he possessed. When Howard began his
academic life at Cambridge, he dedicated himself mainly to the pursuit of fine arts. He
was largely involved in the Amateur Dramatic Club (ADC) and studied at the Slade
School of Art (Newsome 59). Clearly, his artistic nature and love of literature, theatre
and the performing arts aided his flair for the dramatic. Yet, when his parents needed
him, Howard was there:

His studies were interrupted by his father’s illness. Thereafter Howard
effectively retired from active work. He nursed his parents; he set up
house in a beautiful residence near Windsor Park—Queen’s Acre (or
Qu’acre as it came to be called)—and became a sort of patron both of
writers and artists (Henry James was a frequent visitor) and of strange
American cousins whose common feature was a propensity to over-stay
their welcome. One such—William Haynes-Smith (always affectionately
known as ‘The Babe’)—became a permanent guest: a sturdy young man
of rough manners and inexhaustible solecisms, whose status in the
household was that of companion and resident male housekeeper. (59)

Howard’s sacrifice in ending his formal education at Cambridge demonstrated his
commitment to nurturing those whom he loved most dearly. He cared for and nursed
both his father and mother until their deaths, and likewise offered similar emotional
support and validation to his friends—which, in turn, caused such friends to become
extremely loyal. Newsome and Edel have proffered explanations for William Haynes-
Smith, or “The Babe.” The primary theory is that Haynes-Smith became the “child” that
Howard had always longed for, and Haynes-Smith willingly allowed the older, distant
cousin to take care of him. Susan Goodman, however, suggests that Haynes-Smith
served a dual role, and was “treated as child and wife” by Sturgis (78). Haynes-Smith
became not only a companion but the equivalent of a spouse or life partner. In James J.
Gifford’s entry on Sturgis in the *GLBTQ: An Encyclopedia of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual,
Transgender and Queer Culture*, his relationship with Haynes-Smith is referred to as a
“lifelong relationship” and, in Mark Mitchell and David Leavitt’s edited anthology *Pages
Passed from Hand to Hand: The Hidden Tradition of Homosexual Literature in English
from 1748-1914*, Haynes-Smith is only described as a younger co-resident of Queen’s Acre. Certainly, Howard’s relationship with “The Babe” signified something more than
simple cohabitation or a distant cousin’s propensity for mooching, for when Sturgis
developed cancer and became an invalid himself, it would be Haynes-Smith who lovingly
cared for him until his death—a selfless act that impressed even Edith Wharton.

Perhaps, yet again, Arthur Benson and his four-million-plus-word diary provides
the best portrait of Sturgis, or rather, the most human and rounded-out depiction. Benson
would have been in a position to know Sturgis very well, as he did consider him the one
“real” friend with whom he was unwilling to part or desert atop St. Paul’s Cathedral.
Benson knew that Sturgis would have a fine influence on younger men, as a supporting
mentor and guide, much in the way that James had been and continued to be a mentor and
guide to him. Thus, when Percy Lubbock, whom Benson had first met in 1904,
demonstrated an interest in beginning a “romantic friendship” with Sturgis a year later in
1905, Benson believed that the relationship would be mutually beneficial and so
encouraged the match. Benson writes:

> P.L. is making a romantic friendship with H.O.S. I think it will do him
good—he wants sympathising with. H.O.S. struck me very much last
night by saying he didn’t want to be one of those men who go on always
having romantic friendships with young men—so undignified—but that if
he carefully eliminated the mawkish, it would be better—did not give way
to sentiment—and pleased me more still by saying that he used not to care
whether he did a friend harm or not by spoiling—but now cared very much and would rather break off a rising friendship than do so. (196)

Here, Arthur Benson discusses Howard Sturgis’ views on his own “romantic friendships with young men” that could lead to “undignified” behavior—clearly exposed by overly demonstrative sentimentality in such friendships. Benson interjects the “so undignified” to express his own disapproval of public displays of affection between men, like the hand-patting and glancing that he condemns. By eliminating what he calls the “mawkish”—a word the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as meaning “imbued with sickly, false, or feeble sentiment; overly sentimental,” most likely the usage in this context—Sturgis, as recounted by Benson, signals his own caution in establishing relationships with younger men who were falsely and excessively prone to surfeit in emotion. Yet, one cannot be certain if Sturgis, who must have been well aware of Benson’s strict code of conduct between men, was wisely choosing his words before a specific audience, since in other accounts of him, Sturgis appears to be rather confident and open in regard to his associations with other male friends.

In terms of his open demeanor, Mitchell and Leavitt describe Sturgis as “quite queeny,” an interesting term given the name of Sturgis’ famed estate in England. According to Leon Edel, Sturgis had a very successful career at both Eton and Cambridge and struck people with his wit, poeticism, sociability, gentle nature and refusal to become overly intellectual. Edel records: “We can see him through the eyes of one of the younger Etonians admitted to his circle, Percy Lubbock. ‘He sat at home,’ wrote Lubbock, ‘wound his wool and stitched at his work; he took a turn on the road with his infirmary of dogs; with head inclined in sympathy and suavity he poured out tea for the local dowager who called on him’” (194). As concerned his “feminine” behavior, Edel
cites George Santayana as one man who meanly judged Sturgis and disliked his mannerisms. In the encyclopedia entry on Sturgis in *GLBTQ*, Gifford reprints the George Santayana quote that provided a derisively humorous and satirical account of Sturgis and his quirks, with Santayana claiming that:

> [Sturgis] became, save for the accident of sex, which was not yet a serious encumbrance, a perfect young lady of the Victorian type. He ... instinctively embraced the proper liberal humanitarian principles in politics and history.... He learned to sew, to embroider, to knit, and to do crochet.... He would emit little frightened cries, if the cab he was in turned too fast round a corner; and in crossing a muddy road he would pick up the edge of his short covert-coat, as the ladies in those days picked up their trailing skirts.... Howard attracted affection, and however astonished one might be at first, or even scornful, one was always won over in the end.

Edel alludes to Santayana’s description of Sturgis as a “perfect young lady of the Victorian type” as well, reinforcing this image of Sturgis as womanly. Susan Goodman, in her study *Edith Wharton’s Inner Circle*, indirectly suggests that Sturgis’ connection to his “much-loved mother,” his “excessive reverence for his mother’s memory,” as Santayana put it, and his identification with his mother led to Sturgis’ performed persona of the “perfect” Victorian lady, which seemed not to bother any of the Qu’Acre members. Yet, even buried within Santayana’s infamous depiction of Sturgis, he admits that Sturgis would “win over” those who were initially unaccustomed to and unnerved by his appearance and behavior, noting strongly, “However astonished one might be at first, or even scornful, one was always won over in the end.” Using a description that seems to echo sexologists, Santayana’s linking of Sturgis’ effeminate ways to an “accident of sex” suggests sexual inversion—that Sturgis suffered from being a woman trapped within a man’s body, not an unpopular theoretical view of the effete male homosexual at the time. Benson himself appears to have subscribed to a similar view of Sturgis.
As a teacher and mentor to Howard Sturgis, Benson often provided constructive criticism for his younger friend, though he often found Howard’s caustic wit and biting humor fascinating. Though the most complete published collection of selections from Benson’s diaries has been filtered through Percy Lubbock’s critical editorship, certain passages still appear that “flesh out” the men with whom Benson had established such close relationships, as observed in before-cited passages. Lubbock, though twenty-four years younger in age and despite being a very close friend of Sturgis himself, permitted many of Benson’s insightful comments about Howard to be read by a general public, though “compromising” information would certainly still be removed or omitted.

Certainly, in terms of his personality, Sturgis was clearly seen as “effeminate” by Benson, as well as many other friends, where he exhibited many characteristics that were interpreted as feminine. In discussing his friendships with men, Benson tellingly reveals why he gravitated toward men for friends, claiming: “Yet I do not squabble with my men-friends . . . I have had rows with Howard, but he is more feminine than most of my friends” (157). Benson, following his line of logic, connects Howard’s “feminine” nature to the “rows” which remained strikingly and characteristically absent from his relationships with “men-friends.” The diarist also provides an illuminating perspective when he likens Hugh Walpole to Howard Sturgis, alluding to sexological ideas of gender inversion: “I am not sure that his is not a girl’s spirit got into a male body just as H.O.S. is a virile spirit in a rather feminine body” (qtd. in Newsome 261). What I find fascinating in regard to Benson’s account of both Walpole and Sturgis is that he creates a split between the intangible “spirit” and the corporeality of the human body. Where Hugh Walpole possesses a “girl’s spirit,” Howard Sturgis has “virile spirit” harbored
within a "feminine body, which, for Benson seems less troublesome a case. Walpole's
sentimentality and frank expression of emotion mark him as being womanly in spirit
(read: the interiorized self—emotional, sexual, and intellectual—as feminine), unlike
Sturgis, whose weak body, dislike of athletic activity and feminine gestures, or posturing,
symbolize being womanly in body (read: the exterior self of the physical body). Sturgis
becomes less threatening because his inner self is perceived as masculine by Benson,
though Howard's "feminine body" could possibly explain why he argues more
frequently. Despite the perplexing question of Howard's gender construction, it becomes
obvious that close friends like James, Benson, and Lubbock, and even more distant
acquaintances, like George Santayana, would agree that Sturgis, through his grace and
consideration, inevitably left the best of impressions on those he knew.

Following the timeline suggested by Gunter and Jobe, James' love for Sturgis
would develop fully during the earliest years of the twentieth century, especially between
1900 and 1905; yet, for me, the time between 1895 and 1900 becomes extremely
important for laying down the groundwork of several male friendships that would come
into full focus when James and Wharton would become friends. A certain sense of
fraternity grew between James and a number of young men who would later become
central figures within Wharton's life and would largely influence her understanding of
her inner selves, eventually providing an atmosphere in which Wharton felt she belonged.
The reason that I choose to examine the years after 1895 stems from the fact that James,
during the years that followed Oscar Wilde's trials, started to become more expressive of
his feelings about men and same-sex male sexuality more directly in his letters and
writing from this time onward. Also, only particular figures like Morton Fullerton,
Arthur Benson, Edmund Gosse, etcetera, would directly affect Wharton’s life and her friendship with Henry James; thus, for a sense of efficiency and pertinence, I have honed my focus within this chapter to primarily the years 1895-1900 for the first part and 1900-1905 for the second. While James developed a more mature sense of his own sexuality during this period, his growing self-awareness taught Wharton how to refine her own interiorized identity in terms of queer masculinity.

**Men of Letters**

Fred Kaplan, in *Henry James: The Imagination of Genius*, demonstrates how James became attached to both Johnathan Sturges and William Morton Fullerton, who openly associated with groups of queer men during the 1890s. Jonathan Sturges, whom James most likely met in 1889, when the twenty-five-year old journalist and fiction writer would have the Master write a prefatory piece for a collection of short stories by Guy de Maupassant he had translated. A Princeton graduate, Sturges had struggled with polio since birth and would relocate to London in 1889, where he would gain access to the circles that would lead him to Henry James. Kaplan suggests that Sturges allowed James to feel like Walt Whitman nursing the wounded Civil War soldiers—where the older man could assume a protective role and nurse the younger, invalid writer: “By 1893, the relationship had become a warm, loving one. Perhaps James saw in Sturges something of the crippled young man he had thought himself to be. Sturges moved with and beyond James into the world of Wilde, with whom he soon became friendly, and Wilde’s London homosexual circle” (404). Apparently, James and Sturges disagreed in expressing their support of Oscar Wilde, when Sturges asked James to sign a petition in late 1896 that called for the pardoning the flamboyant dramatist. In a telling passage to those in support
of Wilde, Sturges wrote that, "James says that the petition would not have the slightest
effect on the authorities here, in whose nostrils the very name of Zola and Bourget is a
stench, and that the document would only exist as a manifesto of personal loyalty to
Oscar by his friends, of whom he never was one" (qtd in Kaplan 404). This quote is
interesting in that James infers that the names of the French writers Zola and Paul
Bourget (a good friend of Wharton's) would be questionable in terms of the "authorities"
ensuring sexual decency. Furthermore, James reveals how shrewd he could be in
ascertaining what would be an appropriate expression of support for Wilde and what
might simply taint him in the eyes of the public by aligning himself with someone he
barely knew—despite his empathy for the situation. Privately, James could offer support
and care for other men, but he was not ready to reveal that side of him to a hostile public.
Yet, James' relationship with Sturges lasted for roughly six years, when his connections
with other young men became more pressing and important.

Kaplan dates the meeting of Henry James and Morton Fullerton (1865-1952) to
1890, through an introduction provided by Charles Eliot Norton, who had known
Fullerton from his studies at Harvard. A New Englander who attended Phillips
Academy, then Harvard, and became a journalist, Fullerton moved from Boston to
London to begin a position working for the London Times. Within two years, Fullerton
was "transferred to the powerful Times bureau in Paris," residing largely in France for the
next fifteen years. Well-groomed and extremely well-dressed, Fullerton, from numerous
accounts, exuded great charm and had powerfully seductive ways—with a slim build,
bushy yet groomed mustache, slicked hair and intense eyes. Apparently, the attraction
James felt toward Fullerton was immediate. Yet the younger man became somewhat of a
“player,” to use a more modern term, seducing both men and women alike. He carried on affairs with two men at the same time, while also involved with Margaret Brooke; one of these men would be very-well known for his homosexual exploits—a gifted sculptor by the name of Ronald Sutherland, later known as Lord Gower. Kaplan reveals that James would meet Gower through Fullerton at a lunch in April 1893, “hosted at a Parisian restaurant” (407). By 1897, James penned unmistakably impassioned letters to Fullerton, using language of flirtation and of a sexual nature. On February 25, James wrote to him:

May you long retain, for yourself, the complete command that I judge you, that I almost see you, to possess, in perfection, of every one of your members . . . If I could wish you to be anything in any particular but what you are, I should wish you to have been young when I was. Then, don’t you see, you would have known not only the mistress of ces messieurs,—you would almost, perhaps, have known me. And now you will never catch up! (42)

The “perfection” of “every one” of Fullerton’s “members” leads James to confess his regret that he and Fullerton were not young together—by stressing the “I” and the “me” in his epistle, James clues Fullerton in to the fact that they might have had a different sort of relationship. Unfortunately, as James would often claim in his older age, the perils of the aging process itself would prevent him from trying anything new—even sexual experimentation. Kaplan contends that Fullerton understood James’ inability to take their flirtation further, which might have provided the reason for their never developing a fully sexual relationship. He claims in regard to Fullerton: “Apparently, he never made the effort to translate James’ homoerotic intensity into a homosexual affair of the sort that he had with Gower, perhaps because he believed that James would not have responded favorably” (409). Kaplan then turns to a fascinating declaration by James of his desire
for Fullerton, suggesting that it was not James who did not express or respond to such desire, but Fullerton who remained aloof and distant. James’ words become haunting:

“I want in fact more of you,” James confessed and complained. “You are dazzling . . . you are beautiful; you are more than tactful, you are tenderly, magically tactile. But you’re not kind. There it is. You are not kind.”

“I’m alone,” he wrote to Fullerton at the beginning of the new century, “I’m alone & I think of you. I can’t say fairer . . . I’d meet you at Dover—I’d do anything for you.” (409)

Here, James’ letter reveals painfully powerful emotions of desire, pleading words that one would expect of an abandoned lover. James emphasizes Fullerton’s physical charms, calling him “dazzling,” “beautiful” and “magically tactile.” The latter term intrigues me, as James chooses to stress and italicize the word “tactile,” noting the “magical” quality of Fullerton’s physical, touchable body. The passage works to a crescendo when James almost begs, “I’d do anything for you,” the cry of a lover in desperate need. Their relationship would continue to become increasingly complex and charged through the next decade, especially with the introduction of Edith Wharton into the equation.

However, during the 1890s, James’ friendship and communication with Arthur Benson continued to grow, as evidenced from James’ letters to Benson (cited earlier) from 1897, in which James discusses reading Cory’s journals with his friend. Benson’s relationship with another friend also started to bloom during the fin de siècle, a friend who later became an important figure within the Inner Circle: Percy Lubbock.

The relationship between Arthur Benson and Percy Lubbock (1879-1966) is a puzzle; there remain clues to the sort of connection they shared, but the remnants of their story shine through certain filters. For example, the diary of A.C. Benson contains many anecdotes and accounts of people, yet the difficulty of accessibility and the sheer size of Benson’s recordings have prevented a thorough investigation of particular individuals
like Lubbock. For my research, I had to rely heavily on Percy Lubbock's edited volume of Benson's diary fragments (assembled according to what Lubbock considered permissible to publish) and David Newsome's additional work (prior to my research at the Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge, England, where the diaries are held). Benson himself remained conscious of the dangers of exposing queer men around him through his written record of the people he knew and, therefore, even had portions of his writing "sealed" for fifty years. Newsome writes that Percy Lubbock stood as "the only other person to read the whole of Arthur's diaries before they were locked away for their fifty year confinement" (3); thus, what portions were included in Lubbock's collection would have been carefully edited and selected, curiously skewing the way that certain people were perceived. When Lubbock was granted full access to Benson's diaries, in 1926, after Arthur's death, he would confide to Gaillard Lapsley, also a close friend of Benson's: "One turn of the screw is also a surprise for me—the reckless horrid way in which he apparently talked about me to people I hardly know—all noted down in the diary with a sort of glee—it's hard" (qtd in Goodman 27). Curiously, Lubbock uses the memorable idiom made popular by James, "one turn of the screw," to describe the pain he felt in discovering how freely Benson spoke of his personal relationships to strangers or distant acquaintances. As a result of Benson's "reckless" record of his relationship with Lubbock, Percy would heavily edit the portions of the diary that would have been presented to a public audience, protecting himself from the dangers of a homophobic society. In fact, most of the more illuminating accounts of Lubbock found in Benson's diary come from Newsome's biography on Benson, where many new passages are quoted at length. In these newer, uncensored selections, a truer image of Lubbock appears—an
image that Lubbock went to great pains to obscure. Newsome also offered more detailed Benson commentaries on figures like James, Sturgis and Lapsley, which help to flesh out the images of these men in Wharton’s most private and trusted circle.

From Newsome’s biographical work, we now know that gaps exist in the story of Benson that Lubbock tells, in his published volume of the diarist’s personal writing. Certain scenes occur where a “P.L.” is mentioned, but Lubbock never informs the reader that it is himself about whom Benson is writing. Instead, one must turn to the index at the back of the volume to learn that “P.L.” stands for “Percy Lubbock.” Even more curious, Lubbock engages in a mode of speaking about himself in the third person, suggesting that certain truths about Benson’s memories could never be learned as concerned “P.L.” For example, Lubbock discusses a scene about which Benson writes, wherein Sturgis and Lubbock visit him and tire him out with excessive conversation. Lubbock, however, forewarns the reader: “Howard Sturgis and P.L. are next seen spending a Sunday at Hinton; and if the guests were loquacious, let a snapshot photograph, taken in the garden, attest the fact that our host was not silent either” (144). Already on the defensive, Lubbock presents a photograph to prove that Benson’s record of their visit was not entirely reliable and that Benson contributed to their conversation, like his two visitors, without ever betraying his feelings of being overwhelmed by such talking. In another, more personal reminiscence, Benson writes about how he and Percy Lubbock had an intimate discussion about their differences in their views of friendship. Benson preferred never to invest himself too much in one or a few particular, close friendships, but rather kept most of his relationships on a more surface level. In this passage written on February 25th, 1906, Benson reveals: “But to P.L. and his school, this
is a kind of emotional harlotry, but left me aware that friendships, etc., were for P.L. a
series of deep thrills—exultations and agonies—while for me they are only like flying
sunlight on a bright morning” (139). Clearly uncomfortable with the information Benson
has disclosed in regard to his “friendships, etc.,” Lubbock responds afterwards by
writing: “Whether P.L. indeed committed himself so deeply in the afternoon’s talk can
never now be known” (140). Rather than simply writing that he disagreed with what
Benson had written about him, Lubbock refers to himself in the third person, suggesting
that the truth about the conversation could “never now be known.” So, not only could the
reader become easily misled by not associating Percy Lubbock, the book’s editor and
narrator, with “P.L.,” the man about whom Benson reveals intimate details, but the reader
could also make the mistake of believing Lubbock when he writes that the truth could
“never now be known,” as he certainly should know what “P.L.” knows! For this reason,
Lubbock is unreliable as an objective narrator and historian. His selected passages from
Benson’s diary are filtered through his own sense of what the “publishable” truth would
be. Only from analyzing the newer passages of Benson’s diary, reprinted in Newsome’s
biography, in conjunction with the previously printed passages edited by Lubbock, can
some version of the truth be ascertained, within this study.

According to David Newsome, Percy Lubbock may have gone to greater lengths
to make certain that possibly incriminating portions of Benson’s 180 volume diary would
remain forever unread. Of the numerous volumes, many marked by Lubbock’s
marginalia, usually in places “when questioning the accuracy of statements made” (385),
one volume continues to be curiously missing—Volume Six, which covered the time
period from January to August 1901, the same year that Lubbock’s friendship with
Benson would begin to flourish. Newsome conjectures: “One can only assume that Lubbock either mislaid it or for some reason thought it better suppressed” (385). Given the more than coincidental period which the volume covered, as well as Lubbock’s cautionary tendency in his editing his collection of excerpts from Benson’s diary, the disappearance of this volume is important. Newsome refers to Lubbock’s collection as a “necessarily innocuous selection” of entries from Benson’s diaries and I find it more than likely that Lubbock, once again, wanted to ensure that a particular history would be told, filtered through his own sense of what would be “appropriate” or “safe” for a public audience. Clearly distressed when working on the intimidating project of editing and selecting the pieces he would publish from the diarist’s magnum opus, Lubbock had his own reasons for sifting through the choices he made for publication. Keeping in mind that Lubbock had already told Gaillard Lapsley that Benson had shockingly shared personal and intimate details about his own (Lubbock’s, that is) life to people he had barely known, the reader must remember that Lubbock had a vested interest in keeping accounts of his most private affairs hidden from prying eyes. For Lubbock to conveniently “misplace” the volume or destroy it, as other writers “misplaced” (i.e.destroyed) incriminating letters that could have resulted in blackmail (James and Wharton burned letters themselves), would have provided him with an easy solution to what could have been an otherwise dangerous situation. Many of the more recently published passages from Benson’s diary, reprinted in Newsome’s biography, reveal that Lubbock not only engaged in “romantic friendships” with other men, but that he maintained full-fledged same-sex relationships that would have included a sexual component. If this were the case, then Lubbock would have had a powerful motive for
censoring Benson’s all-too-candid diary. The portrait of Percy Lubbock has been thus obfuscated by his deliberate attempts to keep his personal life private—though clues remain.

Susan Goodman, in *Edith Wharton’s Inner Circle*, mentions that Percy Lubbock had become a regular in Wharton’s circle—the Qu’acre set—by 1906, when he was brought in through Gaillard Laspley, as “a companion of Lapsley’s whom Sturgis had met on one of his frequent trips to Cambridge” (21). Yet, the connection between Lapsley and Lubbock began with Arthur Benson, as Goodman suggests: “All three—Lubbock, Lapsley, and Sturgis—had ties to Eton and the novelist Arthur Christopher Benson” (21). In order to have a better understanding of how these men met and would eventually become members of Wharton’s inner circle, I have had to develop the chronology of “who met whom first,” the “where and when” of such meetings, and the introductions that would lead to an entrance into the central group. Since Lapsley has been suggested, by Goodman, as the initial link for bringing Lubbock to Qu’acre, I investigated the relationships Lapsley held with various men within the “Ring of Conspirators”—as Miranda Seymour calls James’ friends from this period, 1895-1915. Understandably, we must turn to the Master himself when figuring out how Lapsley was introduced to both Lubbock and Wharton. Though I will stress the importance of Benson’s role within the initial set of friends—which included James, Sturgis, Benson, Lapsley and Lubbock—I must begin with the first meeting between James and Lapsley.

David Newsome dates Benson’s meeting Lapsley (1871-1949) to November 1904, yet, interestingly enough, James’ relationship with Lapsley would predate Benson’s meeting Gaillard. James had known and practically begged the younger scholar.
to leave America for the more maritime climes of England, where he would eventually settle, after accepting a fellowship at Trinity College, in Cambridge. In a letter to Jonathan Sturges, written on July 10th, 1900, James wrote of impending visits from several friends, including an expected visit from Lapsley: “These days are peaceful—only my young cousin, ‘Bay’ Emmet, who has come over from Paris to paint my portrait, breaks the solitude (save G. T. Lapsley and his sister, who come down today to lunch!— and ‘Dodo’ Benson and Arthur Collins, who have proposed themselves together for the end of the week!” (153). By the date of this letter, James had known Lapsley already for two years and had become quite attached to the medieval historian. According to Fred Kaplan, Lapsley and James first met during the winter of 1897-1898, through Isabella Gardener in London, when Lapsley was only twenty-six years old. Kaplan reveals: “A Harvard graduate, with an advanced degree in medieval history, Lapsley became, for a brief time, a frequent dinner and theatre companion. When he returned to America to take up a position at the University of California in Berkeley and then to live briefly in Philadelphia, James missed his ‘beautiful & gentle’” (453-4) younger male friend. When Lapsley returned to the United States, James wrote impassioned letters, trying to convince the “beautiful” young man to return. In a letter written on September 15th, 1902, James pleaded:

I like to be your dear, but I don’t like to be your Mister. Say ‘my dear Henry J.’ and n’en parlons plus. It touches me much, at any rate, to hear from you in any form, and I can veraciously say that I missed you this summer. I miss you, in truth, at all times, and when you tell me that you too are solitary, am disposed to urge it upon you to chuck up your strange and perverted career and come here and share my isolation. I live in this little corner practically without society and yours would be charming to me. I would let you “lecture” me all day long. (240)
This passage displays some of the charged language James used in trying to persuade Lapsley to move to England to “share” his particular “isolation.” James not only confesses that he misses Lapsley but writes that he “veraciously” misses him and that he continues to miss him “at all times.” Suggesting that Lapsley leave his “strange” and “perverted career” in the United States, James employs specific language to show that returning to England and his company would be the only natural or normal thing to do. Needless to say, James would later be overjoyed by the news of Lapsley’s decision in 1904 to accept a fellowship offered to him by Trinity College and to move to England. Fred Kaplan also gives an interesting take on James’ reaction, betraying a more invested interest on the part of the older author.

Kaplan, in describing James’ acquisition of Lamb House in Rye, England, claims that as early as 1898, James was receiving Lapsley as a visitor, stressing the importance of Lapsley within James’ life at that time. Kaplan asserts: “His most deeply cherished friend beginning at the turn of the century, Howard Sturgis, the youngest son of his friend from the 1880s, the American banker Russell Sturgis, became an occasional visitor [of Lamb House]. So did three other young men, all friends of the new century and his flowering awareness of his capacity for love, two of them writers, Gaillard Lapsley and Hugh Walpole” (428). Here, Kaplan emphasizes Lapsley’s role in James’ life as a love object, a person to whom James would become strongly attached, admiring the beauty of the younger scholar and encouraging his scholarly progress. Through his attachments to Hugh Walpole and Gaillard Lapsley, James would learn of “his flowering awareness of his capacity for love.” Yet, some scholars claim that James’ growing attachment to younger men, like Lapsley, had been spurred by the Master’s relationship with Henrik
Andersen, a sculptor to whom James would express same-sex desire. In discussing James’ affectionate language in his letters to younger men—primarily the Norwegian-American Andersen—Millicent Bell, in her introduction to Rosella Mamoli Zorzi’s collection of James’ letters, Beloved Boy: Letters to Henrik Andersen, 1899-1915, suggests that James’ longing for Andersen in 1899 would strongly affect his other letters to younger men, that James would more openly confess great longing in the period following the last year of the nineteenth century. Bell explains:

His unsurrendered longing continued to the end to color his letters to this recipient with a rose-hue of sentimental tenderness. Was he ever quite so sentimental again? Almost immediately, his letters to those others—Sturgis, Fullerton, Persse, Walpole, Lubbock, and Lapsley—picked up the caressing language he had used to Andersen, though it may be doubted that, as age and infirmity overtook him, he had erotic relations with them. (xviii)

James’ admissions of sad regret, often found in his letters to these men, betray his inability to act upon the desire he so deeply felt. The open affection—hugs, pats, squeezes, kisses, and hand-holding—James would offer, along with the “caressing language” that seasons his copious correspondence to younger men, remain the extent to which James would go in terms of his attempts in satiating the desire within these relationships. Sheldon Novick argues that these gestures and expressions by James were not only signifiers of same-sex desire on the part of the Master, but that James, as a “flesh and blood” human being understandably and most certainly would have acted upon that desire—leading to definite sexual experience. I believe that Hugh Walpole’s story of James’ plaintive cry, “I can’t, I can’t,” James’ reoccurring image of the cup-bearer (the statuette in Roderick Hudson) who remained “thirsty” (James’ quote to Arthur Benson

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about this), and James’ almost obsessive interest in Wharton’s affair with Fullerton all suggest (along with other evidence that I later provide in this study) that James never did act upon that desire physically. In fact, his use of language, his writing, and his modes of self-presentation all stemmed from a deep regret in missing out on something he always wanted—or for which, to use James’ own words, he “yearned” and “gnashed teeth.”

James’ keen interest in his younger friend Gaillard Lapsley had at its root strong feelings of same-sex sexual desire, which fueled James’ pursuit of their friendship and found expression through the playful tone he assumed with him in letters. After his move to England, Lapsley would find his way into the network of friends that James had established, benefiting from a sort of cultural patronage.

When he left New England to embrace the Old, in 1904, Lapsley would meet Arthur Benson in November at Trinity, Cambridge; they would soon become walking companions. Benson, ten years Lapsley’s elder, would write: “I liked this bright, intelligent man, glittering like a diamond, polished, hard as nails . . . in spite of his detestable accent” (175). He and Lapsley would become fast friends. In fact, Percy Lubbock, in his account of their meeting, writes: “Mr. R.V. Laurence and Mr. G.T. Lapsley, though they appeared to Arthur Benson ‘not at all his sort,’ must quickly have been found to be very much his sort indeed; for they were among his closest friends in Cambridge for all the years that ensued” (109). Lubbock confirms that Benson and Lapsley must have “clicked” to a certain degree, which caused their friendship to grow at a rapid pace. If both men had “agreed” on their views of “romantic schoolboy friendships”—as witnessed during their notable discussion in May, 1905—then, obviously, as Lubbock puts it, Benson and Lapsley were of the same “sort” indeed.

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22 See page 372 for the full quote and discussion, later in the study.
Furthermore, if, by 1907, Benson and Lapsley were “cruising” the shores of the Cam, searching for and discussing attractive undergraduates (or lack thereof) on the crew teams, a sort of understanding had arisen between them that allowed them to gaze upon male objects of beauty together, openly. Yet, both men would develop a keen interest in a younger male friend who would be the cause of some jealousy between them: Percy Lubbock.

In 1901, Percy Lubbock found that he had become something more than just a student to his teacher, Arthur Benson, and the two remained in contact up until Benson’s death, in 1925. When Benson became seriously ill, with a long-lasting depression in 1922, Percy kindly nursed him, for over six months, giving him hope of recovery. Lubbock was, of course, also trusted with the important task of preparing Benson’s personal writings for publication after his death. In this diary, the older Eton don often wrote of his attachment to Lubbock, remembering their intimate conversations and rambles in nature. In 1906, Benson would recall a particular confabulation that left him with the impression that his younger friend was keeping a secret from him, a secret others shared but Lubbock would not share with him—what was it? Benson muses:

Then P.L. and I walked on, and had a long talk about relations with other people—very interesting. I have a sort of feeling, in discussing this subject with him, that he has a kind of secret, hidden from me, a secret which others share, in the matter. Then comes an outbreak like Howard’s about my coldness, and I feel it more than ever. I asked him to explain what he felt... While he talked I half understood, but with that half-comprehension which one feels slip away from the mind. (139)

In this portion of his diary, Benson reveals an important facet of Percy Lubbock’s personality—his ability to keep certain aspects of his life strangely guarded from those not admitted into his trust. During their “long talk about relations with other people,”
Benson notes that something “very interesting” arose. The “secret,” as Benson relates it, that Lubbock hides remains connected to this topic of “relations” with “other people,” but it is a secret which other people share, though Benson does not. Interestingly enough, Benson then refers to Howard Sturgis—alluding to a comment Sturgis had made about Benson’s “coldness”—as if this connection might have something to do with the “secret” Lubbock would not share with him. Perhaps, the observation made by Sturgis could have had something to do with Benson’s open distaste for public displays of male affection or sentimental touching—the hand-patting by men he so bitingingly disdained and criticized. When Benson asked what Lubbock “felt,” the answer his conversational partner provided has been mysteriously erased from the memory, with Lubbock’s grammatical tool of the ellipsis—with which he cut out snippets of information that might be compromising. We, as readers, are not allowed to hear what Lubbock said, only Benson’s response that while his younger friend talked, he only “half understood” with “half comprehension.”

What is it that Lubbock could have omitted from Benson’s record of their “interesting” conversation? Lubbock’s relationship with James might provide some hints.

Through Arthur Benson, Lubbock would meet many important men, among them the definitive Master—Henry James. In his biography of James, Fred Kaplan suggests that Lubbock most likely met James in 1900, and that their mutual friendships with Benson might have provided the link: “A pupil of Arthur Benson’s at Eton, Lubbock, a handsome young man ‘of long limb & candid countenance,’ probably met James in 1900 when, at the age of twenty-one, he seemed a prodigy of literary sensitivity and literary ambition. He immediately fell in love with James” (453). Though James admired Lubbock’s intelligence and appreciated his worship, he felt somewhat undeserving of the
devotion Lubbock showed him. Kaplan continues: “I am touched by what you tell me, James told a mutual friend, ‘of the young Percy & quite envy him.’ He wished, though, he were a ‘worthier object’ of Percy’s love” (453). Here, Fred Kaplan provides a fascinating observation. Certainly, Lubbock would have wanted to keep his feelings of same-sex desire or love for other men private, an aspect of his life he could share with those who shared his “secret” but not with those outside his circle of trust. James would not be the only man for whom Percy would feel strong feelings of love, but he would take up with both Sturgis and Lapsley, respectively, and, much later, he would become exceedingly attached to a younger painter, Adrian Graham. Benson watched Lubbock’s various relationships with a keen eye, documenting his feelings about each of his affairs with feelings of either approval or jealousy. Of course, Lubbock’s edition of Benson’s diary excerpts eliminated any of these telling accounts; it is only in Newsome’s biography that many of these important connections come to light.

**The Queen of Queen’s Acre**

We already know from George Santayana, despite his own personal bias, that Howard Sturgis was seen as quite “queeny.” Apparently, Howard never made any apologies for his cross-gender mannerisms and preferences, nor did he hide his relationships with other men from the people he knew—nor did his friends seem to mind.

Fred Kaplan gives an interesting assessment of James’ history with Sturgis:

James had seen him as an adolescent in his father’s London and country homes, the spoiled child of a possessive mother whose relationship with her favorite son was claustrophobically intimate. After schooling at Eton and Cambridge, where he revealed admirable acting skills in female roles, he lived at home. His closest relationship, other than with his parents, had been with his Eton tutor, with whom he maintained a lifelong mutual devotion and with whom he spent long periods of time. (454)
"Skilled" in playing female roles in theatre, Sturgis never concealed his feminine mannerisms, but expected those around him to accept what Kaplan terms his "cross-gender eccentricities." Here, also, Kaplan accentuates Sturgis’ "claustrophobically intimate" relationship to his "possessive mother" as a possible explanation as to why Howard would be so skilled at mastering such feminine gestures and posturing. Along with the acceptance of Sturgis’ womanly demeanor, his friends witnessed his romantic involvements with other men with equanimity. For example, Edward Ainger, the Eton tutor to whom Kaplan refers, would not only remain a teacher of Sturgis but would develop a full relationship with him, both living together as companions. Later, of course, Sturgis took up with William Haynes-Smith, whom James and Benson tolerated, though thought, at times, exceedingly tiresome. Miranda Seymour explains, "Howard Sturgis, the witty and ever-hospitable ‘Howdie’ whose strong and lively face betrays no hint of effeminacy, lived most companionably with Edward Ainger, his beloved Eton tutor and, subsequently, with his sturdy young friend, William Haynes-Smith" (188). Seymour continues by claiming that, "Nobody ever suggested that there was anything irregular about the relationship between their fastidious friend and Ainger or Haynes-Smith" (188), but acted as such cohabitation was completely natural and expected. Amazingly, during a time when same-sex relationships between men were so clearly and dangerously threatened by the law and could result in blackmail or imprisonment, Sturgis courageously lived his life without shame or guilt. His lovable nature and nurturing quality were expressed through his playing the role of the perfect host, by caring for other’s needs and making his friends feel their own “brilliance.” In fact, James, acknowledging Sturgis’ nurturing skill in a letter, wrote touchingly: "You are indeed as a
missing mother to me, & I, babi-like, (though indeed as if you hadn’t Babe enough & to spare!) gurgle back my gratitude” (qtd in Kaplan 456). This tender declaration by James, is a tribute to Sturgis’ role as the “missing mother” to his friends. In a sense, James accepted and reinforced Howard’s nurturing feminine behavior, by praising Sturgis for being such a kind and loving “mother.”

If Howard Sturgis ruled as the “queen” of Queen’s Acre, then his close friends and visitors most definitely welcomed their roles as courtiers. In fact, even the reluctant Percy Lubbock, who was not one for lavishing praise upon his literary friends about whom he so often would write, would pay certain tribute to Howard’s kindness and frank way of expressing the truth: “Howard who lived in affection more warmly, in sentiment more frankly, in indulgence more lavishly than anybody, he it was whose truth was the hardest and clearest and straightest of all” (qtd in Seymour 230). Lubbock praises Sturgis’ ability to live his life—with warm affection, frank sentiment, and lavish indulgence—in a way that did not shy away from a truth which was the “hardest,” “clearest” and “straightest,” of all the people he knew. Perhaps Lubbock admired Sturgis’ ability to live his life in an open and free way that did not conceal his attachments to the other men in his life; his ability to express who he was without embarrassment or shame was inspiring. Sturgis’ other men friends, like Arthur Benson, clearly felt uncomfortable, seeing Howard show affection to other men and expressed some reservation in regard to Sturgis’ friend’s mannerisms but, nevertheless, still loved him, much in the way that Santayana claimed that Sturgis inevitably “won” him, and other people, over. Yet, those who felt “unnerved” by Howard’s cross-gender behavior found ways to relieve their anxiety.
Humor and jest provided an outlet for those who felt anxious or uncomfortable with Howard Sturgis' eccentricities. Joking about Sturgis' behavior became a common element within the writing of those who knew him most intimately. For example, Benson would playfully call his friend the "fairy prince." Seymour writes: "Kindness was the guiding principle of Howard's life. He shuddered when Benson coyly addressed him as a fairy prince, but the fairy prince's role was one that he used his considerable wealth to play, willingly and untiringly, to the Qu'Acre circle of American guests" (230).

Benson's use of the word "fairy," here, signified not only Howard's queerness in his desire for other men but, more importantly, the queerness of his effeminacy. Both James and Wharton also teased Howard about his cross-gender characteristics; both authors refer to the "bonnet" and "shawl" that Howard figuratively wore as the lady of Queen's Acre, both in private letters and even in publicly printed material. In a letter written in 1913, James knowingly joked to Wharton about a visit during which "Howard was rather capped & shawled & uncorseted; but touching in his gentle optimism (about himself & everything) & fairly heart-wringing in his modesty" (271). Here, James pokes fun at Howard's effeminacy by suggesting that he customarily wore a "cap," "shawl" and "corset," all garments typically worn by women. His reference to Howard's "shawl" undoubtedly alluded to Sturgis' ability to knit beautiful shawls, as his "work-basket" would always be found at his side or feet. Picking up on this image, Wharton later publicly referred to James' joke in her memoir A Backward Glance, when she remembered one occasion, during a visit, when she had proposed taking a walk with Sturgis, who clearly did not relish the idea of an afternoon jaunt. She wrote: "I returned to King's Road to find Howard in his usual place on the lounge. The afternoon was still
young, and as I entered the room I cried out: ‘Come along, Howard! Put on your bonnet and shawl, and let’s walk down to Eton!’’’ (236-7). Wharton’s comments found reiteration when she recounted Howard’s reaction to her suggestion, for Wharton colorfully provided Howard’s response—an emphatic decline—which he later repeated to all his evening guests. She continued:

So horrified was he at my mad proposal that it rankled in him for the rest of the evening, and every now and then, as we sat in the drawing-room after dinner, he would appeal plaintively to his other guests: “Did you ever hear of such a thing? After motoring all over the place all the afternoon with the Blanches, she actually came back and said to me: ‘Put on your bonnet and shawl, and let’s walk down to Eton!’” (237)

The repetition of Wharton’s phrase—“Put on your bonnet and shawl”—demonstrates her inclination to good-heartedly tease her close friend about his feminine ways, referring to his donning a “bonnet,” rather than the “cap” that James mentioned, though both Wharton and James stressed Howard’s wearing a “shawl.” That Wharton would include this anecdote within her book of “reminiscences” shows the level of comfort she must have felt in regard to Howard, which included his quirks and unconventional behavior. The effeminate demeanor that might have initially unnerved people like Santayana or Benson eventually provided a common touchstone for mirth and playful conversation; for those who loved Howard, these characteristics were endearing, as mention of them could often be found in the letters of Sturgis’ closest friends. Yet, tellingly and not unexpectedly, Sturgis was not the only one among his set to be considered a sort of “queen.”

In a fascinating entry in Arthur Benson’s diary, written on April 29th, 1904, some months after the publication of Howard Sturgis’ novel Belchamber in England, the Cambridge scholar recorded a meeting he had with Henry James and Thomas Hardy at
the Athenaeum. Benson began a conversation with James, who had been his friend for some years, when Hardy approached and seated himself on the other side of him. They engaged in an awkward, triangulated conversation that frustrated Benson. Benson vented in his diary: "Then we had an odd triangular talk. Hardy could not hear what H.J said, nor H.J. what Hardy said: and I had to try and keep the ball going. I felt like Alice between the two Queens" (81-2). The conversation led into a discussion of Sturgis’ novel, which James had harshly criticized. I find the timing of Benson’s comment intriguing—here, the diarist likening both James and Hardy to the two queens in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*—when, in the same entry, he would move on to record his talk with James about Sturgis’ novel, which focuses on a queer man, Sainty, and his coming to terms with the pressures of Victorian notions of compulsory heterosexuality. Perhaps, in a move of free associative thought, Benson mentally shifted from the literary "queens’ of Henry James and Thomas Hardy, to the effeminate “fairy prince” or “queen” Howard Sturgis as well as his latest fictional work, and thus recorded this progression in his diary entry. Though Henry James would not immediately strike his friends as effeminate or “queeny” as his friend Howard Sturgis, James certainly employed melodramatic language in his letters and relations with his closest friends, language so theatrical that the reader must pause to consider whether the missives were written by the same great author who wrote *The Portrait of a Lady* or *The Golden Bowl*. The contrast between the finely nuanced prose of James’ novels—where sentiment has to be intuited or implied through telling gesture—and the overt affection that overflows the pages of his epistles strikes the reader as amazingly different. The constant and exaggerated allusions to the “yearning,” “aching” and “gnashing of teeth” reveal a side of James that stands at
odds with his public image as the reserved literary genius. Understandably, only those who really knew James saw this private self—flamboyantly demonstrative and full of wit.

**Reactions to Belchamber**

During 1904, Wharton began to seriously invest herself into her budding friendships with Henry James and Howard Sturgis. As early as January, Wharton had read the proofs of Sturgis’ novel *Belchamber* and wrote to William Crary Brownell to suggest his taking on the book, on the behalf of Scribners, her own publisher. She described her reaction to the novel of “English ‘hig lif’” as “so remarkable in donne & character-drawing that, as soon as I read it, I asked if he had already found a publisher in America” (87). Wharton also provides an overview of Sturgis’ resume as a writer and his past trouble finding publishers “on the other side of the Atlantic” to carry his books. She reminded Brownell of Howard’s connection to his very wealthy banker father, Russell, and his brother, the then successful author Julian Sturgis. As if such contacts and background would not be enough to catch Brownell’s attention, Wharton powerfully backed *Belchamber* by not only giving her recommendation but threw in the approbation of Henry James to boot. She persuasively informed Brownell: “Mr. James, whom I saw in London before I read ‘Belchamber,’ thinks the situation very strong & original—but I am sure it will need neither his commendation nor mine to interest you” (87). Though she downplayed the influence that James’ or her support could have lent Sturgis’ novel, in truth, Brownell certainly would have had to consider the interests and suggestions made by two such prominent writers as James and Wharton. That Wharton would cite James’ approval of Sturgis’ novel in her letter to Brownell seems very odd, given the fact
that James' harsh criticism of his friend's writing was so devastating that Sturgis would never write another novel. (Sturgis sent 160 pages of proofs of his novel to James in the autumn of 1903, asking James for constructive criticism, but the feedback he received in response leveled his self-esteem as a writer.) By January, 1904, James had already written letters—in his customary fashion of ripping apart the literature of those who consulted him for evaluation—to Sturgis that were so painful that he reconsidered even having the novel published. Of course, James felt terribly guilty about destroying his friend’s confidence, but, at the same time, he believed his words were accurate and truthful, as his conversation with Arthur Benson in April, 1904, soon proved. Some scholars have speculated that the subject matter may have rankled James a bit too much, spurring him to disassociate himself from a book that clearly challenged heteronormative society too openly.

Sturgis’ novel provides a fascinating view into the life of an aristocratic young man, forced to comply with the high expectations of his formidable mother and stifling upper-class society—expectations that included compulsory heteronormativity. The central difficulty for Sainty, as he is called affectionately by family and friends, is that he outwardly displays feminine characteristics and takes no interest in the things that other active boys his age should like. In painful contrast to his younger brother, Arthur, who is every bit the image of strapping young English masculinity, Sainty is neither robust nor a skilled athlete, characteristics held in high regard during the late Victorian period, when empire-building depended on virile and “manly” men. In a heated childhood scene, Arthur lashes out at Sainty, contemptuously expressing how deviant he felt Sainty’s behavior and preferences to be: “Ho, ho, Miss Moddlecoddle, you can’t ride, you’ve got

23 See Seymour, page 231.
no seat and no hands; Bell said so. You’re jolly bad at games, and you like to sit and suck up to an old governess, and do needlework with her, like a beastly girl. I’m a man, and I shan’t do what she tells me” (19). By calling Sainty, “Miss Moddlecoddle,” mistakenly adapting “mollycoddle” into his own word “moddlecoddle,” Arthur demonstrates that he has clearly been listening to others, most likely adults, who have spoken of his brother in his presence. He has picked up some of the jargon that the adults around him, possibly older relatives or his mother, have used to express their anxiety over Sainty’s unconventional behavior. The OED defines the word “mollycoddle” to mean “a person, usually male, who has been mollycoddled; an effeminate man or boy; a milksop,” tracing the word’s genesis to circa 1849, though very popularly used towards the end of the nineteenth century in England. Sturgis, by having Arthur speak such a grown-up and popular word, exposed the contemporary anxiety within late Victorian upper-class society in England, an anxiety that stemmed from the instability of polarized gender constructs—in an “out of the mouth of babes” moment of revelation.

Certainly, some of Sturgis’ own memories and feelings about not possessing overtly masculine or “manly” characteristics affected his depiction of Sainty in his novel, for their similarities are striking. For instance, both Sturgis and Sainty were more interested in books than in athletics, both nursed their passion for embroidery and knitting, both were dominated by their mothers, and both preferred men sexually to women. Though Sainty is pressured into marrying a woman, simply on the basis of having given her the wrong impression of romantic interest, Sturgis, of course, only imagined what it would have been like to have succumbed to the mandates of compulsory heterosexuality. By showing how Sainty becomes easily manipulated into a marriage
with a woman whose interest in him, motivated strongly by her mother, springs from his
title and money, Sturgis exposes how queer men could be insidiously lured into the
appearance of heteronormativity. To a certain degree, the marriage for Sainty brings
about a feeling of relief in being able to conform to societal expectation, for he is seen as
“queer” by others, not only due to his feminine characteristics, but because of his lack of
romantic interest in women in general. Tellingly, Sainty’s most profound experiences
with romantic sentiment and affection do not occur with his wife but with his Cambridge
don, Gerald Newby, who awakens him to same-sex desire within an academic setting.

When Sainty arrives at Cambridge, he finally finds a place where he can fit in and
pursue his own intellectual interests without hindrance, a place that accepts his queerness.
The marked difference in “tolerance” is noticed immediately: “He looked on Cambridge
as a larger Eton, a new field for unpopularity and isolation in the midst of a crowd, but he
soon began to be aware of an atmosphere of wider tolerance than he had known at
school” (45). Fittingly, Sainty finds the social “atmosphere” at Cambridge as possessing
a “wider tolerance,” than what he had experienced at Eton. The freedom and support
Sainty experiences is quite understandable, given Dowling and Dellamora’s academic
work on how the public schools and Oxbridge not only encouraged homosocial bonding
between boys in their youth, but permitted such relationships between fully-grown men
to flourish within a college setting—with the celebrated model of Greek pederasty as an
example. In this new setting, Sainty feels drawn to one of his instructors; Sturgis
describes Sainty’s immediate attraction to the young don Gerald Newby:

Sainty was just ripe for someone to worship, and Newby supplied the
object beautifully. In all his reserved, unhappy boyhood, he had never
known the joy of that falling in friendship, so to speak, which is one of
youth’s happiest prerogatives. The only two companions for whom he had
felt much affection, his cousin and his brother, had certainly given him more pain than pleasure. The generous delights of an enthusiastic admiration had hitherto been withheld from him. This young man, sufficiently his senior to speak of his troubled soul with a certain authority, yet near enough to his own age for discussion on equal terms, excited such a feeling in the highest degree. (45-6)

The language used in this passage remains unmistakably charged with desire, for the narrator has consciously modified the phrase “falling in love” to “falling in friendship,” with a “so to speak” that signifies that the sentiment felt could be indeed very much associated with love, though Sturgis could not “name” that sentiment. The words used, here, which have become associated with Sainty’s relationships with other boys or men carry with them distinct emotions of esteem, while those inspired by Gerald have taken on a deeper and more electric meaning—with his feelings going beyond mere “affection,” to the “generous delights” of an “enthusiastic admiration,” and dramatically to the “excited” feeling “in the highest degree” of a pleasurable “worship.” Sainty, during his time at Cambridge, not only comes to depend upon his relationship with Gerald but experiences the rollercoaster of emotion associated with infatuation and desire. When presented with the trying duty of having to face his mother during a visit at Belchamber, Sainty expects that Newby’s support will help him endure the trial. Though he never mentions any sort of invitation to Newby, Sainty surprisingly depends so much upon the idea of Newby’s accompanying him home that when he hears Newby’s actual response of possibly not going, Sainty feels devastated: “Sainty felt the hot pricking sensation at the back of his eyes which was the nearest he ever got to tears. He had so intensely desired that Gerald should be at Belchamber in August, that it had not occurred to him to put his desire into words” (64). Here, the intense desire that Sainty feels needs not words, in his mind, for expression; he believed so much in their connection that he
counted on Gerald’s intuiting that he would naturally join him in going home. When pressed, Sainty finally verbally expresses his desire with language of a lover: “After all, why should I assume that just because I wanted you I was certain to get you? I haven’t so often got what I wanted in life. I should have remembered that though you are nearly everything to me, I am to you only one of a hundred men your kindness has helped” (65).

The dramatic nature of Sainty’s emotions and poignant words not only transcend that of a simple student/teacher relationship but reveals that a much deeper involvement has occurred, at least on his part. Recognizing that he is on the verge of tears, Sainty blurts out his feelings, even though he knows that it is not masculine to do so. Newby, visibly embarrassed by the breech of decorum in emotional display, acquiesces and agrees to go. Here, Sturgis demonstrates that even within the open academic setting of Cambridge, where Sturgis himself had studied and participated in theatrical productions, men were greatly affected by social and behavioral constraints based on gender. Despite the “wider tolerance” of the college community, Sainty finds the act of confessing his desire to his don nearly impossible, since the same-sex desire he experiences could never be named or directly expressed, let alone confessed with a “feminine” show of emotion. This self-conscious awareness of sentimental display betrays Howard Sturgis’ constant struggle with his naturally affectionate nature and the restrictions with which he had to abide with men anxious about overt effeminacy—men like Arthur Benson.

When Gerald arrives at Belchamber, having been swayed by Sainty’s impassioned plea, his host cannot wait to rush to meet him, feeling that he was the only person in the world who could understand him. Like an impatient lover, Sainty hurries to greet Gerald, for “He had so much to say to Gerald which he could say to no one else”
and “he wanted to pour it all out unchecked by fear of listening ears” (93). The reader clearly sees how Sainty remains fearfully aware of the “listening ears” that might prohibit or largely limit the sort of things he could say to Gerald, anxious under the surveillance of unsympathetic watchers. Feeling that “no one else” could understand him like Gerald, Sainty cannot help but feel dramatic emotions of companionship and sameness: “He felt a weight lifted off his heart; now at last he would have some one to talk to, some one who understood” (93). Though Newby always maintains a “safe” distance from Sainty—a likely result of their disparity in social position rather than sentiment—he does remain an important presence in the book. When a friend parodies Newby in a book, Sainty looks at his former teacher in a different way, the “bloom now off the rose.” Disappointed, Sainty realizes that the man he fell in love with was more of a creation of his own mind than the true individual Gerald Newby. Though Newby remains a poignant figure looming in the background, a plantive reminder of what Sainty must and had to give up by acquiescing to the mandates of his social position and custom, Sainty knows that he could never have had a future with Newby.

When Lady Eccelston sets her sights on Sainty, she knows he will be an easy target, for he suffers from a peculiar weakness that would ensure her daughter’s safety in marrying him for money and position—queerness. Sainty reflects on his mother-in-law’s schemes and realizes that he has fallen prey to the opportunistic machinations of a greedy woman, having been specifically chosen because his apparent disinterest in women and effeminate nature, both of which made him an easy mark. As a close friend of his mother, Lady Eccleston remained privy to the fears and concerns Sainty’s mother had expressed, over the years, in regard to his lack of virile manhood and her lack of
confidence in his being able to rightfully live up to role of being the new Lord Charmington. Seeing himself imaginatively through Lady Eccleston’s eyes, Sainty begins to understand his own “flaw”: “Deep in his heart he knew his real disability; it was not his lack of personal beauty, nor even his lameness that was the bar, but his miserable inherent effeminacy. A man might be never so uncouth, so that the manhood in him cried imperiously to the other sex and commanded surrender. ‘More like a woman in some ways.’ Had not Lady Eccleston said it? There lay the sting” (193). Aware of the “disability” that would render him almost “unfit” for the rigid social position that he must accept, Sainty knowingly enters into a sexless and loveless marriage in a heartbreaking act of sacrifice—a sacrifice of himself for his family and for Cissy, whom he does not want to betray. He adopts a double life, as the outward appearance of being a partner in a heterosexual marriage could mask, to a certain degree, the homosexual desire that his perceived effeminacy might betray. When Sainty does try to sexually experiment with his wife, not only are his advances repulsed, but Cissy displays unmitigated terror at the thought of touching him: “To his morbid self-depreciation her undisguised horror of him appeared only too natural. Still, no one likes to be told these things so bluntly” (241).

Easily warded off, Sainty retreats into a “morbid” solitary existence within his marriage, viewing her reaction as “too natural” and a reinforcement of his own queerness. His solitude continues until his wife produces a child from an affair. The fear of scandal prevents him from exposing his wife’s infidelity, since to be observed as the cuckolded husband would confirm suspicions about his sexual failure. Therefore, Sainty must maintain a performance of heteronormativity within a public realm, while protecting his queerness within a private sphere. An astute social critic, Sturgis, within his novel,
repeatedly criticizes the hypocrisy of contemporary English society, where people were often forced to pretend to be what they were not, all in the name of morality or duty.

Though the trope of the “closet,” as defined by Sedgwick, was not yet in use to describe hidden homosexual identity, different metaphors were used to signify the dual identity of men forced to lead a “double life.” The images of the “veil” and “mask” were often used to represent the publicly-performed persona of heteronormativity that concealed the interiorized and private homosexual self, whose exposure could lead to dangerous outcomes. Sturgis’ novel teems with satiric observations and situations which clearly expose the very real anxiety issuing from the duality of individuals living within Victorian high society, a duality explored by scholars like Steven Marcus in his groundbreaking study *The Other Victorians*. Sturgis reveals, through the time period and setting of his novel, that the pressures of late Victorian compulsory heterosexuality often sat at odds with the gender-bending that occurred with the popular, yet complicated, figure of the “dandy.” Elisa Glick, in her essay, “The Dialectics of Dandyism,” argues that the dandy has become a central figure within gay and lesbian history that acts as a site for debate about the construction of both gender and queer sexuality. Pinpointing the dandy as an icon of queer identity in the late nineteenth century, she contends that what he symbolized as a political figure remains a heated subject for discussion within queer studies. She writes:

A wide range of historians and cultural critics have placed the dandy at the center of debates about the history of the homosexual in the West, the history of modern culture, and the role of the queer in constructions of modern identity. While they have agreed on the centrality of the dandy in gay and lesbian history—presenting him as the premier model of modern gay subjectivity—scholars have disagreed over the meaning of dandyism itself. (129)
Here, Glick locates the dandy as a controversial figure that challenges notions of queer identity in not only Western culture, but he becomes “the premier model of modern gay subjectivity.” Providing an overview of two polarized views of dandyism within queer theory, which create a dialectical exchange, Glick investigates the “dialectic of dandyism” within texts such as Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The first position, in terms of the polarized views, belongs to academics like Susan Sontag, who suggest that the “dandy” signifies the mastering of the external presentation of self, through clothing, grooming and social custom. “This reading of dandyism as a preoccupation with surface,” Glick asserts, “tends to conceive of gay identity solely or primarily in terms of artifice, aesthetics, commodity fetishism and style. Associated with a ‘feminization’ of modern culture, the dandy comes to represent a retreat from politics and history into art and/or commodity culture” (130). The second view of dandyism, in contrast, links the subject position of the dandy directly to political rebellion, where the dandy argues against modern industrial capitalism in what would “become the foundation for contemporary gay/lesbian studies’ ‘take’ on the aristocratic turn-of-the-century gay male stereotype” as well as the “foundation” of current “queer theory’s promotion of a ‘politics of style’” (131). Though Glick’s article demonstrates how a discursive interchange informs readings of the dandy within certain key fin-de-siècle texts, I find her assessment of the dandy as embedded in modern definitions of queer identity fascinating, since the *Oxford English Dictionary* omits any mention of same-sex sexuality in the definition of the term, though certainly that connotation existed and continues to exist. In his novel, Howard Sturgis demonstrates certain knowledge of the dandy as linked to complicated definitions of both gender and sexuality.
In the novel, it is Arthur who mercilessly teases Sainty about his effeminate characteristics, but in adulthood, it is the masculine Arthur who adopts the look and mannerisms of the dandy; with an almost feminine excess of interest in dress and fashion, the dandy, he fusses over the appropriate accoutrements that would befit a “young man about town”:

A rather recherché dandyism was at that moment the correct style for young men about town, and Arthur was got up to kill, with a vast expanse of shirt-front illuminated by a single jewel, white kid gloves, and a cane, his fair curls cropped, flattened, and darkened as near to the accepted model as nature would allow, and his face very pink and solemn over his high collar. He went out between the acts “to smoke a cigarette,” and returned with a new buttonhole and a peculiarly fatuous smile never produced by tobacco. (142)

Finding a “single jewel, white kid gloves and a cane” the perfect accessories, Arthur not only cultivates his artificial look by “cropping,” “flattening,” and “darkening” his “fair curls,” but dons an “expansive shirt-front” that accentuates the jewel he wears. Within this description, Arthur, despite being done up as a dandy—a term the OED defines as “one who studies above everything to dress elegantly and fashionably; a beau, a fop”—retains his masculinity and sexual prowess, as intimated by the “new buttonhole” and “fatuous smile never produced by tobacco,” when he returns from his “cigarette” break. Even though it was Arthur who ridiculed Sainty for being too effeminate, Arthur eventually obsesses about fashion and engages in promiscuous sexual behavior, only to be considered all the more a man. Yet, given the historical context of the “dandy,” Arthur’s all too overt heterosexuality and excessive anxiety over Sainty’s effeminacy make him a much more complex character and call into question his apparent heteronormativity. Though Sainty must suffer the taint of being considered “womanly” and “disabled,” even though he stands as the only truly virtuous and moral character in

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the novel, Arthur can easily “pass” as being both heterosexual and masculine, despite his
dandyism. Certainly, the paradox stands as a fascinating one, as only socially sanctioned
gender-bending can be allowed in Sturgis’ presentation of the late Victorian English
upper class.

Interestingly, one of the key positive characteristics that Sainty possesses is his
“feminine” ability to care for his wife’s illegitimate son—in other words, his ability to become a mother figure. Howard Sturgis, who invested a great deal of his own experiences and views into his novel, depicts the effeminized Sainty as an excellent mother figure—a role the nurturer Sturgis played to a “Babe” of his own. Since Sainty finds meaning and love through his relationship with the illegitimate child his wife bears his cousin Claude Morland, Sainty finally finds a love that can be reciprocated. Fittingly, Gerald Newby understands Sainty’s connection to the child, as he observes to the baby’s mother: “Our dear Sainty appears in a new and most amiable light . . . I am not accustomed to see him as Kourotrophos. It is the epithet applied to Hermes in his character of the child-tender” (338). Drawing upon the Greek epithet “Kourotrophos”—which translated into English has been loosely defined to mean “youth-nourishing” or “protector of youth,” and often signified in ancient Greek sculpture as breast-feeding women—Newby attributes mother-like qualities to Sainty and alludes to an important myth to emphasize this. According to Michael Grant and John Hazel’s Who’s Who in Classical Mythology, in the myth of Hermes, one story concerns Hermes’ reconciliation with Hera. To regain favor with Hera, Hermes disguises himself in swaddling clothes as one of Zeus’ children and allows Hera to nurse him, an act that forces the goddess to accept him as a foster-child. In his reference, Gerald Newby calls Sainty a “child-tender”
and ascribes to his friend the epithet commonly applied to Greek nursing deities—more popularly Demeter, Artemis, and Leto—though “Kourotrophos” did appear on certain shrines to Hermes.

Many theories have abounded concerning the coinage of Haynes-Smith’s nickname of “the Babe,” ranging from his very youthful appearance to Sturgis’s role mother to his partner. The depth of Sturgis’ and Haynes-Smith’s relationship has been debated within past scholarship, but, more recently Sturgis’s homosexuality has been, in a sense, reclaimed. In Miranda Seymour’s 1988 study, she suggests: “William’s nickname of ‘the Babe’ has led Professor Edel to see in him the son Howard might have wanted to bear had he been a woman. The nickname had a more simple origin in William’s cherubic appearance as a schoolboy, and his role in Howard’s life was closer to that of a brother than son” (229-30). Seymour’s supposition appears a bit dated in that much of the work that would reevaluate the history of James’ sexuality through queer theoretical frameworks evolved during the seventeen years after the publication of her study. Shari Benstock, in her biography of Wharton, mentions a rumor that circulated in Sturgis’ family that Howard’s relationship with “The Babe” was less than platonic. Benstock writes: “The Babe wore on her nerves, as he did everyone except Howard, who, it was rumored in the family, provided him a home in return for sexual favors” (215).

Even without the support of recent developments in queer literary history or theory, the contemporary words of Sturgis’ close friend, Arthur Benson, clearly demonstrate that more than a fraternal affection existed between Howard and his companion. As Benson tellingly observed: “Howard Sturgis loved the Babe and H. James loved Hugh Walpole—but neither H.S. nor H.J. were ever under any illusions
whatever as to the Babe’s or H. Walpole’s intellect or character or superiority” (367).
Here, Benson likens Sturgis’ attachment to Haynes-Smith to James’ affection for Hugh Walpole—an affection that has become more recently quite important in modern readings of James’ sexual past. Frank Kaplan describes Sturgis’ relationship with Haynes-Smith in direct terms in his discussion of James’ close proximity to same-sex male relationships at Qu’Acre. He contends: “To whatever degree the bed and the cake went together for Sturgis and Haynes and for any of the other visitors to the lively household at Qu’Acre, James had no difficulty with these relationships. Sturgis’ homosexuality was unthreateningly benign” (455). Here, Kaplan claims that Sturgis’ home provided James with exposure to men who engaged in openly queer lifestyles and, in turn, allowed him to consider his own desire for younger men. Furthermore, Kaplan’s brief mention of “Sturgis’ homosexuality” can find support in Benson’s writing, which reinforces such a conclusion. Given Benson’s other lucid comments on Sturgis’ “romantic friendships” and open display of “sentiment” expressed towards other men, it is not unreasonable for the reader to imagine that the poignancy of Sturgis’ portrayal of Sainty’s love for Gerald Newby in Belchamber stemmed from feelings he had experienced in his personal life. Furthermore, Sturgis’ use of an epigram that appeared underneath the title of his 1891 book Tim: A Story of School Life—“Thy love to me was wonderful, surpassing the love of women”—reinforces the fact that Sturgis fully acknowledged, even in print, that his closest and most loving relationships were with men. Yet, I would like to propose another potential theory in regard to the cause of William Haynes-Smith’s nickname, as I see his name “The Babe” as a possible reference to the title character in E.F. Benson’s earlier novel The Babe, B.A., which first appeared in print in 1897. The close proximity of Fred
Benson, as he was known by his brothers and close friends, to Sturgis, both through his brother Arthur, and Fred’s connections to James and Oscar Browning, make this claim not entirely impossible.

Fred Benson’s novel, like Sturgis’ *Belchamber*, provides a fascinating look at same-sex male relationships within the protected sphere of the academic community of late Victorian Cambridge. The full title of Benson’s book reads *The Babe, B.A.: Being the Uneventful History of a Young Gentleman at Cambridge University*, which, from the outset, sets the tone for the title character’s comic and frivolous nature. In the “Dedication” of his book to his friend Toby, Fred reveals the close relationship they shared while studying together at Cambridge. Benson describes his protagonist by comparing him to a woman: “With a wig of fair hair, hardly any rouge, and an ingénue dress, he was the image of Vesta Collins, and that graceful young lady might have practised before him, as before a mirror” (30). Here, Benson suggests that Vesta Collins could learn something from the Babe were she to watch him in the mirror, suggesting that the Babe clearly has feminine characteristics in his appearance.

Furthermore, the effeminate nature of the Babe becomes unmistakable when Benson draws upon the image of angelic purity and innocence, even as the child plays the vigorous and manly sport of rugby: “It was a sight for sore eyes to see the seraphic, smooth-faced Babe waltzing gaily about the rough-bearded barbarians, pretending to pass

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24 The name “Vesta Collins” appears to be a amalgam of the names of two different actresses from the British stage—Vesta Tilley and Lottie Collins—who were both popular during the late Victorian period. Vesta Tilley was a cross-dressing actress who gained fame through her convincing impersonations of the “man about town,” at London music halls. Her best known character was “Burlington Bertie,” a middle class dandy who partied during the late hours of the night and slept the mornings away. During the 1890s, Lottie Collins won over London audiences with her signature rendition of the song “Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay!” and her can-can dances at music halls, which showed off gartered legs and underskirts of flashy colors. Both actresses’ careers lasted well into the early twentieth century and their names, or their combination, certainly would have been recognized by E.F. Benson’s contemporary readers.
and doing nothing of the kind, dropping neatly out of what looked like the middle of the
scrimmage, or flickering about in a crowd which seemed to be unable to touch him with a
finger” (31). The Babe is seen “waltzing gaily about” the more masculine, even
“barbaric” and “rough-bearded” men, with whom he plays rugby. Though Fred Benson
admits to Toby, in his dedication, that he should have never made the Babe so skilled a
rugby player, the sharp contrast between the cherubic young man and his beefy and
macho counterparts becomes acutely defined. In fact, in a discussion with his friends, the
Babe confesses that, no matter what he does, he cannot seem to lose the look of
innocence that make him appear so child-like. When his good friend, Leamington,
advises the Babe to affect a less puerile look, the Babe only feels exasperation: “You
must lose your look of injured innocence or rather cultivate the injury at the expense of
innocence. Grow a mustache; no one looks battered and world-weary without a
moustache” (36-7). The Babe responds by woefully confessing that nothing seems to
help him appear worldlier, not even the growth of facial hair. Like the picture of Dorian
Gray that never changes, despite its subject’s spiraling path into debauchery, the Babe is
doomed to forever appear innocent and youthfully naïve, no matter what sordid situations
befall him. Benson writes of the desperate Babe:

“But you don’t know what I was going to say,” objected Leamington.
“I know I don’t. But I’ve tried it,” said the wicked Babe. “I’ve even read
the Yellow Book through from cover to cover, and as you see, framed the
pictures by Aubrey Beardsley. The Yellow Book is said to add twenty
years per volume to any one’s life. Not at all. It has left me precisely
where it found me, whereas, according to that, as I’ve read five volumes, I
ought to be, let’s see—five times twenty, plus twenty—a hundred and
twenty. I don’t look it, you know. It’s no use your telling me I do,
because I don’t. I have no illusions whatever about the matter.” (38)
Citing the corrupting influence of the Yellow Book and Aubrey Beardsley prints, both associated with homosexual subject matter, the Babe admits that his innocent appearance fails to convey his worldliness, no matter what he does. By wearing a mask of child-like innocence, the Babe, without meaning to, can hide his true nature, for form, here, does not hold a direct relationship to content. Even though the Babe tries to conform to the pressures of a dominant heterosexual culture, he finds that he simply cannot.

When the Babe exclaims that women hold no attraction for him, he tells his close friend Leamington that he failed to kiss a girl when he tried, and that money could not impel him to try again. Fred Benson, through many cultural references and through proclamations by the Babe, overtly suggests that the Babe only experiences same-sex desire. A frustrated Babe continues: “If I thought it would do any good, I would go and snatch a kiss from that horrid, rat-faced girl as she is carrying the tray down stairs. But it wouldn’t, you know; it wouldn’t do any good at all. She wouldn’t complain to the landlady, or if she did it would only end in my giving her a half crown. Besides, I don’t in the least want to kiss her—I wouldn’t do it if she gave me half-a-crown” (43-4). This passage demonstrates the Babe’s lack of interest in kissing a girl—“rat-faced” or no—even if he were paid. Repeatedly, in his own accounts, the Babe seems to repulse any interest from women and, during the whole of the book, surrounds himself only with men friends. In addition, the Babe’s references to Oscar Wilde’s Salomé—“When I grow up I shall keep twenty-two men before me, as Salome danced before Herod” (100)—and Aubrey Beardsley—“I wish I could look as if Aubrey Beardsley drew me” (101)—demonstrates his own identification with well-known and iconic queer men in late Victorian English society. Keenly aware of the Cambridge “Apostles,” the Babe also

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curiously watches one particular don, Mr. Swotcham, and peppers him with questions to try and force him to reveal the secret of their hidden quasi-fraternity. Throughout Benson’s novel, the Babe seems determined to immerse himself in queer popular culture, alluding to books, art, prominent figures and groups that were definitively associated with same-sex male sexuality. Despite his innocent face, the Babe, himself, with his “wicked” and sexual nature, represents a common trope used within the movement of aestheticism—the innocent but sexual child that challenges traditional and compulsory heteronormativity.

Within his interpretive approach to high aestheticism, Kevin Ohi, in his *Innocence and Rapture: The Erotic Child in Pater, Wilde, James and Nabokov*, suggests that the image of the erotic child becomes a site for disrupting “the politics of sexual normativity” (6), a representative symbol of vexed and taboo sexuality. Ohi contends that the movement of aestheticism becomes necessarily and inextricably bound up in notions of queerness, of non-normative sexual desire, that eventually translates into common depictions of erotic children in key texts. He goes on to explain:

The scandal of the child as, in [Adam] Philip’s words, “an ecstatic, an aesthete” is not that children do “it,” want “it” or think about “it,” but that they unsettle assumptions about what “it” is, make sexuality in general veer away from reproduction to a generalizable perversion. Sexual pleasure for its own sake might be one way to phrase its rigors: sexual pleasure not for reproduction, not for economic productivity or stability, not for identificatory certainty, not for anything but itself. (5)

Interestingly enough, as Ohi suggests, the erotic child appears in the definitive texts that are often used for exploring James’ portrayal of same-sex male desire—most notably in works like “The Author of Beltraffio,” “The Pupil” and even *The Turn of the Screw*: In the former two short stories by James, a young man, in his twenties, develops an almost
obsessive attachment to a young boy and watches the "angelic" or exceedingly beautiful child. The troubling position of the erotic child as sex object, within this paradigm, provides aestheticism with a means of addressing non-heteronormative desire, while pushing the limits of the "fetishizations of childhood innocence." Thus, for example, the "innocence" ascribed to the Babe in Benson’s novel becomes unsettling not only because his child-like appearance does not accurately represent his moral nature, but because heteronormative society, to protect children from sexual predators, traditionally fiercely denies sexual feelings on the part of children. Therefore, the problematic image of a sexual or "wicked Babe" jolts the reader into thinking about non-heteronormative sexuality, since Benson uses that unexpected trait of sensuality to connect male homosexuality as embodied in the aesthete.

Given his intimate friendship with Arthur Benson, Howard Sturgis easily would have been in a position to know of or read Benson’s brother’s novel. Mutual friends, too, like Henry James, who in his letters makes multiple references to novels by E.F. Benson, could have perhaps provided the allusion as catchy nickname for Haynes-Smith. Whatever its root, it is clear that the name "Babe" carried with it a specific meaning within queer culture, as connected to a flamboyant younger man in a relationship with an older man, as both Sturgis’ and Benson’s works would be included in a “hidden tradition of homosexual literature.”

Mark Mitchell and David Leavitt, in Pages Passed from Hand to Hand, include works by E.F. Benson, Howard Sturgis and Henry James, as belonging to a homosexual male literary tradition which consisted of homoerotic texts that were “passed from hand to hand”—a representative act that signified one man’s initiation into queer culture
through another man. Like Conington’s passing of Ionica to the hands of J.A. Symonds, works like Benson’s The Babe, B.A, or David Blaise, Sturgis’ Tim or Belchamber, or James’ “The Pupil” or The Ambassadors, belonged to a set of texts that carried with them an unspoken association of same-sex male desire. In their anthology, Mitchell and Leavitt provide overviews of each author they include, describing that author’s placement within the tradition, their biographical investment in the subject matter and their works that queer men would share with one another. I find it very telling that Mitchell and Leavitt would choose to cover Benson, Sturgis and James, for they belonged to the same community and knew each other well. Other writers included in the collection delineate a specific line within queer literary history—Walter Pater, Herman Melville, Owen Wister, D.H. Lawrence and E.M. Forster—whose names became familiar to these men and their friends. These anthologists’ excerpt on Edward Frederick Benson cites his brother Arthur’s written plea to be more guarded about his sexuality—especially as concerned his published fictional works. According to his brother Arthur, Fred Benson, who copied out at length Oscar Wilde’s De Profundis in a notebook labeled “Private,” “including passages deleted from the 1905 edition” (323), was too blatant in his depictions of same-sex male desire. In response to his 1916 publication of David Blaise, Arthur wrote:

The particular subject is tacendum . . . Personally, I should not wish to raise it as a problem because I don’t think it is a thing which can be fought by talking. The more openly talked about the more likely to be experimented in. Why I think your book is risky is because you speak in these pages very plainly . . . there is a chance of talk and criticism of an unpleasant kind . . . Of course I think it would be most unadvisable for you to open up the whole subject—it could only be done by a fanatical medical man, with a knowledge of nervous pathology. (323-4)
Though Arthur, here, discusses male homosexuality as not “a thing which can be fought by talking,” demonstrating his own personal view of struggling against same-sex desire, he would privately admit his own deep investment in the subject within the numerous volumes of his diary. Warning his brother against the dangers of becoming publicly linked to homosexuality, Arthur suggests that only scientific texts should tackle the subject, since sexological treatments of same-sex desire in print were sanctioned by the dominant heterosexual culture. Addressing such a topic publicly could possibly “out” a queer writer and cause societal outrage at a time when homophobia ran rampant throughout England. If Arthur Benson, in 1916, still feels the pressure of societal expectations of heterormativity, then only imagine the risk Howard Sturgis took in his 1904 publication of *Belchamber*, by openly examining the theme of same-sex male desire.

When Wharton appealed to William Crary Brownell to print *Belchamber* in the United States, she lent the book her full support, while adding the weight of James’ approval to make Sturgis’ book an irresistible acquisition for Scribners—ironic, given James’ disapproving review. Susan Goodman suggests that the second of the two faults James observed in his friend’s book, with the first relating to his “representation of the English upper classes, related more to James’ aversion to Sturgis’ title character than an actual failing on the part of the writer. Goodman asserts: “He wished that the hero had more of ‘a constituted and intense imaginative life of his own.’ For a novel that so minutely explores the consciousness of its feminized protagonist, this second criticism seems curious. James may have found his reading less reconstructive—to use his own

25 The appeal was not, in the end, successful, and Sturgis’ *Belchamber* was eventually published by G. P. Putnam’s, in New York, in 1905. According to Lewis, the book only met “a grudging critical admiration” and was no financial success (142).
word—than deconstructive, the novel forcing him to confront Sturgis’s, if not his own, ambivalent sexualities” (81). Here, Goodman draws attention to the possible discomfort felt by James in having to read about a man whose sexuality echoed his own, despite the difference in gender construction. Within the volley of letters exchanged between James and Sturgis, towards the end of November and early December, 1903, James revealed his strongest point of disagreement with his friend over the plot of his book. He expressly opposed a view held by Sturgis, quoting an earlier conversation during which his friend “spoke of the part of the book after Sainty’s marriage as the part in which ‘nothing happens’” (296). Given that the vast majority of Sainty’s relationship with Gerald Newby occurs prior to Sainty’s marriage to Cissy, it is understandable why Sturgis might have thought that most of his protagonist’s development appeared mainly before his entrance into a seemingly heterosexual union. In his letter, James chides Sturgis by rebutting, “Why, my dear Howard, it is the part in which most happens! His marriage itself, his wife herself, happen to him at every hour of the twenty-four—and he is the only person to whom anything does. Claude above all, happens to him, and I regret that the relation, in which this would appear, so drops out” (296). James’ interest in Claude Morland, Sainty’s cousin, and his relationship to Sainty, as a point in the novel that should have remained in focus, for me, shows that James tried to urge Sturgis to look at more complex same-sex male relationships than just an eroticized student/teacher dynamic.

From Claude’s earliest appearance in the book, he embodies a French sensuality and decadence that subtly offends Sainty’s English virtue. The language Sturgis uses to describe the thirteen-year-old Claude becomes suggestive of an overt sexual nature: “He
seemed to Sainty like some strongly scented hothouse flower, white with a whiteness in which there was no purity, and sweet with a strong sweetness that already suggested some subtle hint of decay. As the flowers which his cousin recalled to him were among the things he did not like, his first feeling towards him had been one of vague repulsion” (32). Here, the image of the exotic hothouse flower, symbolic of French sensuality as linked to Huysmans’ character Des Esseintes, whose “deliberate choice of hothouse flowers” in À Rebours, clearly denotes Claude’s possession of certain characteristics that would have been seen to relate to male homosexuality, despite his heterosexual affairs in the book. Sturgis carefully selected this image because the image of the “hothouse flower,” given Wilde’s notorious reference to Huysmans’ novel at one of his trials in 1895 as the “yellow-covered book” that appeared in The Picture of Dorian Gray, became symbolic of male homosexuality and decadence. Despite Sainty’s initial repulsion to Claude, he soon begins to see Claude’s charm:

To Sainty, accustomed to Arthur’s scornful affection and undisguised contempt, the little attentions and deferential politeness of this older boy were bewildering, but strangely pleasant. Claude’s smile was a caress, the

Sarah Sherman revealed to me the ways in which Lily’s relationship with Gerty investigates same-sex desire between women, where Lily in desperation turns to Gerty for what seems to be almost a one-night-stand, in the way that Wharton depicts the scene. The guilt and embarrassment of the morning after, experienced by Lily, decries a sense of shame for having spent the night in Gerty’s arms and in her bed.
grasp of his hand an embrace; in later years a lady once said of him that she always felt as if he had said something she ought to resent when he asked her how she did. But at thirteen this latent sensuality only made him like some charming feline creature that liked to be stroked and well fed, to lie in the sun and purr. A boy who spoke French as easily as English, and German and Italian a little, and read mysterious books for pleasure, could not fail to be impressive to a small home-grown cousin. (33)

The “little attentions and deferential politeness” Claude shows to Sainty soon impresses him, as then Claude’s smile becomes a “caress” and his hand-shake “an embrace,” which strike the boy as “strangely pleasant.” The tactile nature of Claude’s relationship with Sainty, combined with his highly developed French sensuality, represents a “taboo” same-sex relationship, on the basis of male homosexuality, which during Sturgis’ period had become extremely dangerous; the fact that they are cousins, too, adds to the excitement. By drawing attention to Claude’s fluency in French and his odd penchant for reading “mysterious books for pleasure,” Sturgis knowingly draws upon a contemporary association between French literature and fin de siècle decadence that marks Claude as queer. Though Claude engages in sexual relationships with women in the novel, James must have picked up on the homoerotic subtext between Claude and Sainty in Sturgis’ novel, for when he writes that “Claude happens” to Sainty, in his letter to his friend, he emphasizes Claude’s name through the use of italics. Furthermore, James goes on to write that he regretted that “relation,” here again stressing the word by using italics, between the two male characters would “drop out” of the novel, when so much more could have been done with it.

27 One cannot help but think of how Sturgis’ own cousin, Ogden Codman, Jr., wrote about him with a sexual interest, wishing for Howard and Julian Sturgis to come to Boston to visit, rather than their female siblings. Please see page 199, for the discussion of Codman’s letter to his friend Arthur Little, to whom Codman describes the Sturgis boys.
Given James’ frustration with Sturgis’ novel, recent critics seem to support a reading of that frustration and disapproval of Belchamber as motivated by discomfort with homoerotic themes and Sainty’s effeminacy in the novel as related to his own prejudice and rejection of open expression of same-sex desire between men. What Goodman calls James’ “ambivalent sexuality” and what Mitchell and Leavitt term “James’s homophobia,” here, would lead to James’ harsh critique of Sturgis’ novel. Wharton would later subscribe to this view, in her A Backward Glance, when she called the book “born out of its due time” and inferred that James’ reaction stemmed largely from his “principles and prejudices,” which would later subside when he would read novels by Marcel Proust. Wharton recalls: “Howard, by the way, was to see those theories suddenly demolished when, a good many years later, I sent James a copy of Du Côté de chez Swann on its first appearance, and all of his principles and prejudices went down like straws in the free wind of Proust’s genius” (235). In truth, I am not wholly convinced that James responded to Belchamber so negatively, due to his “homophobia” or “prejudices” against same-sex male desire, for he suggests developing Sainty’s relationship with Claude as a missed opportunity for Sturgis. Why would James emphasize both Claude’s name and the word “relation” as concerned Sainty, if he found the subject of same-sex desire objectionable? Perhaps, the possible “prejudices” on the part of James to which Wharton refers related more to the effeminate nature of Sainty, rather than his sexual preference. Though James might have been able to accept and love his friend Sturgis, despite his cross-gender eccentricity, maybe that tolerance could not be extended to the celebration of a male protagonist whose effeminacy is not only suggested, but accentuated openly in a public space rather than a private one.
Notably, during that same November of 1903, James significantly confided to Sturgis that he believed him to be the only person with whom he could see himself living or cohabitating in a home like Lamb House. Having earlier written, rather playfully, a letter that included much sexual innuendo, in 1900, such a claim would have carried some weight. Gunter and Jobe cite James’ gesture of sending Sturgis a book “to commemorate their ‘congress’ (the dictionary gives ‘coitus’ as one meaning for this word\(^{28}\))” (125) as an expression of James’ desire for Howard. The book, as described in the 1900 letter, interestingly had not yet been bound by James’ usual binder, James Stoddard Bain, with James claiming that there was something enticing about such unbound “lemon-coloured” covered volumes: “I find that one reads things in the dear old French lemon-coloured covers more freely than after the trail of Bain & Hatchiard” (126). This mention of the yellow-covered books from France, in a post-Wilde trials era becomes hugely important, since Wilde had been arrested, while holding in his possession such a “yellow book.” Aubrey Beardsley, who had been the art director for the controversially decadent journal *The Yellow Book*, would lose his job as a result of his association with Wilde, while the periodical suffered terribly from the mistaken assumption that Wilde had been holding a copy of their publication during his arrest. Not so coincidentally, the journal would eventually close up shop in 1897, only two years after Wilde’s infamous scandal. Thus, when James alludes to “dear old French lemon-coloured covers,” in his missive, he knowingly links his gift to Sturgis to decadent associations of queerness. Sturgis would return James’ kindness with “a gift for his bedside” (118). As Dowling as well as Mitchell and Leavitt suggest, the act of an older

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\(^{28}\) The *OED* provides one definition of “congress” as meaning “sexual union, copulation, coition” and dates the etymology to as early as 1589, and having usage in the late nineteenth century.
man passing a book to a younger man—"pages passed from hand to hand"—remains an important trope within a homosexual male literary tradition, in the vein of Conington's gift of *Ionica* to Symonds.

In a striking epistle written on November 8th, 1903, James provides Sturgis with some of the constructive criticism in response to *Belchamber* that would severely disappoint the younger novelist. Yet, ironically, it would be in this same letter that James admitted to Sturgis, as a result of reading about his character Sainty, that he felt as if he shared a new secret with his old friend. He touchingly reached out to Sturgis:

> I also applaud, dearest Howard, your expression of attachment to him who holds this pen . . . for he is extremely accessible to such demonstrations & touched by them—more than ever in his lonely (more than) maturity. Keep it up as hard as possible; continue to pass your hand into my arm & believe I always like greatly to feel it. We are two who can communicate freely. (132)

Using affectionate language to reinforce his charged feelings for Howard, James sadly exposes his own loneliness and gratefully encourages Sturgis to "touch" him not only emotionally, but physically. As concerned the tactile quality of their friendship, James positively reinforces Howard's touching of him by responding with "I always like greatly to feel it." James also reveals that he remained "extremely accessible" to "such demonstrations" of "attachment" proffered by Sturgis, noting that they both could "communicate freely" in this way. In the closing few lines of his letter, James reassures Sturgis that their private bond and connection of same-sex desire would remain discreetly silent about such matters: "I needn’t assure you I will bury 10 fathoms deep the little sentimental secret (of another), that you gave me a glimpse of. Yours, my dear Howard, always & forever" (132). Thus, despite whatever reservations James might have had in terms of Sturgis' role as an author, he undoubtedly remained a loyal friend and
affectionate admirer of his “Howdie.” In fact, only four days later, James divulged to Sturgis that he was the only person with whom he could see himself sharing a home. In a letter written on November 12th, 1903, James again betrayed his feelings of loneliness, poignantly repeating the claim he had made to Sturgis in 1900: “I am very lonely & so proofless as to feel almost roofless. Yes—I could have lived with you. That is you might with me!” (133) I find the timing of this proposition by James to Sturgis very telling, considering that it occurred within days of his response to his friend’s proofs of his novel—a novel that focused on a queer male protagonist.

Though other critics and biographers do not treat the timing of James’ declaration—here, connected to his reaction to the same-sex male desire he observed in Sturgis’ book—many do provide their own accounts of why he would have written such words to Sturgis. Leon Edel finds this suggestion by James surprisingly forward and speculates about why he might have felt so comfortable with Sturgis. “James once told Howard he could find it possible to live with him—an unusually affectionate declaration from a novelist who cherished his privacy, and lived so proudly alone,” Edel writes, “It would have been for James a little like living with his mother” (194). While James certainly did adopt a particular tone in his letters to Howard that signaled his appreciation of his friend’s nurturing qualities, Edel’s suggestion that James would only have found in Sturgis a familial relationship like that of a mother seems implausible. Gunter and Jobe strongly rebut Edel’s treatment of James’ declaration by claiming that the Master had fallen “briefly but passionately in love with Howard Sturgis, a love that Sturgis may have reciprocated” (115). These critics motion towards James’ impartial and direct criticism

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29 The earlier letter, cited above, James wrote, on February 25th, 1900, informed Sturgis with impassioned language, “I repeat, almost to indiscretion, that I could live with you. Meanwhile I can only try to live without you” (115).
of Sturgis’ novel as the wedge that might have ended or prevented their relationship from progressing beyond that of platonic friendship. They write: “But as much as James desired companionship and love at this time in his life, he was unable to prevent himself from criticizing Sturgis’s work freely, criticism that must have been wounding. The relationship lessened in intensity after 1904” (115). Definitely, Gunter and Jobe make a valid point; James obviously hurt Sturgis deeply by ripping apart his novel. Unable to conceal his true opinion of Sturgis’ fiction writing from an artistic perspective, James could not reconcile the failure of technique and plot execution within the book with the courageous subjects his friend unabashedly addressed. Unfortunately, for Sturgis, the former would outweigh the latter in James’ mind.

In a letter written on December 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 1903, James, fearing he had forever wounded his friend and ruined their friendship, penned an epistle that would express his deepest regret at having torn Sturgis’ novel apart in his critique. James, deeply moved by his friend’s reaction, adopts a tone of humble affection when he writes:

I came back last night from a small, complicated absence—the “week’s end” the other side of London and a night of London thrown in—to find your lamentable letter, in which you speak of “withdrawing” your novel—too miserably, horribly, impossibly, for me to listen to you for a moment. If you think of anything so insane you will break my heart and bring my grey hairs, the few left me, in sorrow and shame to the grave. Why should you have an inspiration so perverse and so criminal? If it springs from anything I have said to you I must have expressed myself with strange and deplorable clumsiness. (295)

Interestingly, James calls Sturgis’ impulse to “withdraw” his novel “so insane” that he claims such an act will force him into an early grave. Reversing language typically applied to male homosexuality during this period, James writes that such an act would be “so perverse” and “so criminal”; he then adds that if his criticism had inspired such an
idea, then he must have proffered a “strange” and “deplorably clumsy” critique. The words “insane,” “perverse,” “criminal,” and “strange” represent the dramatic tone that James would take when trying to apologize to his friend for destroying his confidence in writing literature. Wharton explained that, “Howard’s native indolence and genuine humility aiding, he accepted James’s verdict and relapsed into knitting and embroidery” (ABG 235). Like Arthur Benson, Sturgis would battle depression for many years, later telling Wharton, “I would write a book if I could, I really would, in spite of all the trouble it is, & the fact that people hate it when it’s done, but I’m obstinately barren” (qtd in Goodman 81). Goodman speculates that James never connected Sturgis’ depression and the “unsuccessful response” to his work, as Goodman delicately puts it—I think it telling that the anxious Sturgis would only expect “hate” from people who read his completed fiction—even though James himself had been one of Sturgis’ greatest detractors. Even years later, in 1907, James would still unflinchingly deride Sturgis’ novel in a letter to Wharton, though he had qualified his negative remarks to Sturgis himself. Clearly, something in Howard’s writing had struck a nerve in James to such an extent that he would continue to disparage his friend’s writing, to mutual confidants like Benson and Wharton, even years after the book’s publication.

Graham Robb, in his fine study, Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century, uses both Sturgis’ novels Tim and Belchamber as examples of queer literature produced during the late nineteenth century, noting that Sturgis helped to develop modern notions of queer male identity. In his reference to Tim, Robb proposes that Sturgis had to comply with societal pressure to prematurely end the budding love between the two boys in the novel, by having one die in the bloom of boyhood. Robb places Tim within a
quasi-canon of literature that presents homosexual desire only within settings of containment, expressly “in or near the grave.” “In Howard Sturgis’s Tim: A Story of Eton (1891),” Robb contends, “Tim is only allowed to see his beloved boyfriend Carol only when he is completely incapacitated and dying” (210). Citing other scenes in novels by writers like Charles Dickens and D.H. Lawrence, Robb shows that the death of one of the partners in a same-sex relationship made the expression of desire between the two men, or boys, permissible to certain degree, since that death could be seen as punitive. By the time that Sturgis would write Belchamber, though, he would present an articulate portrait of queer male identity that resonates with modern constructs that occur today. Robb asserts: “In Howard Sturgis’s Belchamber (1904), the puny Lord Charmington, known as ‘Sainty,’ is as homosexual as it is possible to be without actually being gay” (214). Despite the fact that he never consummates his desire for other men, like that for Gerald Newby, Sainty, here, still represents a portrait of queer male identity during the earliest years of the twentieth century in England. The word “gay,” of course, signifies more current ideas and images of same-sex male sexuality in a post-Stonewall era. Here, Robb reveals that the separation between biological sex and psychological gender as concerns Sturgis’ protagonist anticipates sophisticated and nuanced treatments of modern homosexual identity that had yet to be theorized in such distinct terms. Certainly, gender construction in conjunction with same-sex male sexuality remained important issues for Sturgis, whose investigations into the subject stand as his greatest contribution to literature from this period. In the wake of Belchamber’s publication, a common sojourn at their mutual friend Edith Wharton’s Berkshires home, later that year, accomplished much in the way of reconciliation.
CHAPTER IV

THE RECLAIMING OF JAMES' SEXUALITY

The Queering of Henry James

Drawing upon recent scholarship that has been done both on the term "queer" (and its multiple meanings) and Henry James as a reclaimed, "queer" author, I show how a reexamination of Wharton is now necessary, due to the new complexity of her friendship with James and the importance of the Master's sexual identity within that connection. In this chapter, I provide the reader with an overview of the ongoing critical discussion and link this new research to Wharton. By looking at reinvestigations of James, I reveal the impetus that led to my rereading of Wharton, her use of the word "comrade" in her letters to Fullerton and personal writing, and her relationship with James, a man who reinforced her adoption of an interiorized, masculine identity.

Current work in Jamesian study reveals that the long-held claims of Henry James' asexuality or lack of sexual desire, whether due to psychological or physical reasons, have become challenged by the compelling evidence of the author's own and actively acknowledged sense of queerness. Here, I use "queer," as defined by prominent and recent theorists, to relate to a subject position that exists outside of heteronormative expectation, during a historical period that pathologized "homosexuality" as a disorder, or sickness, within the popular science of sexology—a product of the late Victorian

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30 In response to theorists like Foucault, Sedgwick, Butler, etc., who have defined the term "queer" in their own ways, I am also interested in the collection of essays, *Straight with a Twist: Queer Theory and the Subject of Heterosexuality*, edited by Calvin Thomas, where the definition of "queer" becomes challenged by new meanings that include versions of heterosexuality that have been read as non-normative, different.
period. Though the Oxford English Dictionary dates the usage of the word “queer” as connected to homosexual identity to 1932, many scholars, like Elaine Showalter and Joseph Bristow, have convincingly demonstrated how the word appears in contexts that remain unmistakably loaded with the connotation of same-sex sexuality. Since James would have used the word “queer,” himself, to describe a sexual construct that remained outside of late Victorian notions of compulsory heteronormativity, I choose to use this word, rather than loaded terms like “homosexual,” which conjures up connotations of sexological pathology, and “gay,” which suggests a modern sense of conscious sexuality that would make anachronistic assumptions inappropriate for this study. Rather, the term “queer,” while applicable to same-sex male sexuality, can be used in a variety of contexts that are linked by a sense of “otherness” in resisting heteronormative expectations—here, homosexuality, bisexuality, celibacy, prolonged singleness or never marrying, and even asexuality or the lack of a sexual drive altogether. Given this multiplicity of meanings, the word “queer” becomes a complex term, made further complicated by the variety of usages it takes on in the fiction of writers like James, Wharton and their close friends. Certainly, as a result of the innumerable times the word appears in James’ work, literary critics began to suspect that James had a vested interest in the way the word was being used.

James’ foremost biographer, Leon Edel, in the fifth volume of his opus on James, published in 1972, provided the first clues to James’ sexuality in terms of same-sex male sexuality.

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Showalter in her work Sexual Anarchy argues that Stevenson, in his The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, clearly draws upon language that plays upon double meanings connected to male homosexuality. It is not mere happenstance, here, that Mr. Hyde lives on “Queer Street” and is suspected of “blackmail,” a word that became practically synonymous with male homosexuality in the late Victorian period, with the passing of the Labouchere Amendment in England. Bristow cites Henry James and E. M. Forster as examples of writers who used the word “queer” knowingly as suggestive of same-sex male sexuality, in the 1890s and early 1900s, respectively.
desire, though Edel contended that such desire never led to actual physical sexual experimentation. Edel would point out that James carried on a number of relationships with younger men, both through correspondence, and through periodic visits, which became sexually charged and used exaggerated language of an amorous kind. The biographer focuses on the younger men, these “dearest boys”—like Jocelyn Persse, with whom James was “madly in love,” Henrik C. Andersen, a sculptor who fascinated James, and Hugh Walpole, who became a literary disciple of James—yet suggests that the homosocial relationships that developed with the Master were not only promoted during the Victorian period but were expected. Edel contends:

> We must remind ourselves that if on the one hand there was a buried life of sexual adventure among some Victorian men, as evidenced by the relations of the Wilde case and the more recent evidence in the papers of John Addington Symonds, there were also many friendships which were romantic rather than physical. The Victorian world was a man’s world: men met in clubs; there were very few women in offices and in business. The women had their world of the home and of society. Whether the homo-erotic feeling between Persse and James was “acted out” is perhaps less important than the fact that a great state of affection existed between them. (190)

In his discussion of James’ expression of desire for younger men, revealed through the numerous letters filled with descriptions of the “yearning” and “aching” felt for the objects of desire, Edel downplays such desire as commonplace and something very far removed from modern notions of gay male sexual identity. He uses the paradigm of a paternal relationship, as that of Johnson to Boswell, to explain James’ interest in younger, artistic men. Yet this treatment of James would start to change within literary studies during the late 1980s, when critical reception of James’s work started to include investigations into the homosocial and same-sex desire observed in his letters and fiction.
In 1985, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s groundbreaking study *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* established the study of same-sex male desire in English literature through a sophisticated lens of relational differentiation by using the term “homosocial” to represent vexed associations between men, associations that involved a sexual element, though not always of a physical nature. Sedgwick would soon follow with her essay, “The Beast in the Closet: James and the Writing of Homosexual Panic,” in 1986, in the edited volume, *Sex, Politics and Science in the Nineteenth Century Novel*. In “The Beast in the Closet,” Sedgwick contests traditional literary scholarship that represses Henry James’ construction of sexuality by seeing him only in terms of sexual inactivity and disinterest, due to an “obscure hurt” that hampered his ability to physically express desire. Sedgwick does this by providing several motives. She lists many causes—the desire to “protect” James from homophobic misreading, the fear of possible marginalization of James due to the “marked structure of heterosexist discourse,” the need to prevent anachronistic readings of James’ work through the use of modern gay male sensibility and identity, the feeling that James’ personal same-sex desire became transmuted into heterosexual relationships within his fiction which rendered the need for such discussion of his sexuality moot, to name a few. Sedgwick’s assessment led to her conviction that: “Any of these critical motives would be understandable, but their net effect is the usual repressive one of elision and subsumption of supposedly embarrassing material. In dealing with the multiple valences of sexuality, critics’ choices should not be limited to crudities of disruption or silences of orthodox enforcement” (197). After the publication of Sedgwick’s work, reevaluations of James’ fiction and life started to appear, validating the belief that same-sex male desire largely
informed the way Henry James conceived his own sexuality and those sexualities depicted in his literary works.

"The Beast in the Closet" would appear in print, again, in 1989, in a collection of essays edited by Elaine Showalter, under the title, *Speaking of Gender*. David Van Leer would respond with his essay, "The Beast of the Closet: Homosociality and the Pathology of Manhood," included in the spring edition of journal *Critical Inquiry*. Also, during that year, Miranda Seymour, a descendant of Howard Overing Sturgis, produced her *A Ring of Conspirators: Henry James and His Literary Circle, 1895-1915*, a biographical look at James and his fascinating relationships with close friends, like H. G. Wells, Joseph Conrad, Sturgis and Edith Wharton. Both Van Leer and Seymour contributed to the developing, complicated assessment of James in terms of his queerness. Shortly after these publications, in the 1990 book-length study *The Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick reprinted her essay, "The Beast in the Closet," as Chapter Four within her investigation into the concealment of homosexual identity within literature. In terms of reevaluating James through the problematic image of the male homosexual, an image which changed dramatically during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Sedgwick must be credited with instigating this new line of critical treatment. Yet, new evaluations of James in terms of queer theory would not only extend to his fiction but to factual accounts of his life as well.

In 1992, Fred Kaplan's biography on James, *Henry James: The Imagination of Genius*, first appeared in print and painted a more nuanced portrait of "The Master" that addressed the author's open expression of same-sex desire within his letters and his life; yet, in his study of James, Kaplan remains skeptical of the idea that James would ever
have acted on his homoerotic impulses and suggests, rather, that James’ sexual inactivity resulted from strong psychological resistance to the excess displayed within contemporary society. Kaplan asserts: “When he looked into the mirror, he also saw a man who had renounced marriage, who had never slept with a woman, and who admired beauty of men but had no sense that that admiration should ever be expressed physically. He lived in a sexually volatile world, at the intersection of the upper middle class and aristocracy. Sexual adventures and public scandals were a regular part of his London milieu” (299). Throughout his book, Kaplan draws attention to James’ relationships with other men, quoting passages from letters and his memoirs as evidence but suggests that James took a passive, feminine role in such friendships, due to his complicated relationship with his older brother, William. Kaplan’s study becomes increasingly psychological, as he implies incestuous desires expressed within the triangle of William, Henry and Alice James—claiming all three used “the rhetoric of lovers.” Yet, Kaplan returns to this image of James in his older age, a period very relevant to this study, between 1895 and 1916, as guarded in expressions of same-sex male desire, though such desire was deeply felt.

Kaplan extends Edel’s assessment of James’ sexuality, by reinforcing the fact that James appreciated the beauty of younger men and carried on several relationships with younger men, to whom he would act as a mentor or guide. In a sense, Kaplan’s biography reinforced and validated those new readings of James in terms of a closeted sense of male homosexuality. Not able to substantiate claims of James’ active homosexuality, Kaplan instead provided the image of James as having a complicated sexuality—that included desire for both women (as seen in his relationship with his
cousin Minny Temple and, even more troubling, with his sister Alice) and men (as observed in his predilection for younger men like Zhoukovsky, Andersen, Persse, Walpole, etc., or his own older brother William). Yet, Kaplan maintains that James would not have ventured beyond a sort of invisible line of conduct that would prevent any treatment of the author as a fully realized homosexual man from that period, but Sheldon M. Novick would take the argument further.

Novick, in his biography of James, *Henry James: The Young Master*, published in 1996, criticized those scholars who denied James his humanity by claiming that he never acted on sexual impulse and led a celibate existence. In fact, Novick expressed frustration that no biography of James treated him as a human being whose literature stemmed from his own perceptions and experiences. In his preface, Novick claims, “The lack of any such biography until now can be attributed partly to James’s having loved young men. Few who knew this were willing to talk openly about it, and for others it has been difficult to accept that despite the privacy in which he shrouded his intimate relations, he shared the common experiences of life” (xiii). Novick continues by stating that he had not discovered any truly new material on James but that his own biography would be different, since he would now flesh out James in terms of his human experience. He explains: “In recent works, biographers have been somewhat more open, but they still feel obliged to deny that James shared the common experiences of humanity, the experiences of realized passion, of love and family” (xiii). Novick provides a fresh look at James from an entirely new perspective that celebrates his intense connections to the people in his life; the biographer also makes the startling claim that
James, in fact, did not live as a celibate but sexually experimented with his fellow classmate, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., while studying at Harvard.

While Novick’s biography examines James’ earlier years, following his life until the publication of *The Portrait of a Lady* in 1881, and gives an intriguing account of James’ life and relationships with other men. Beginning with childhood and tracing James’ educational path to Harvard, where he and Holmes were thrown in together, Novick presents the young man as sensitive and eager to please, even painfully shy. He shows how James, who regretted being unable to fight in the Civil War, with two brothers serving, visited wounded soldiers and first experienced the “comradeship” that deeply moved Walt Whitman during his own nursing vigil. (Though James would publicly review Whitman’s poems in a harsh manner during the early part of his literary career, in his later years, according to Wharton, he considered Whitman the greatest of American poets.) The reader sees James, through Novick’s eyes, dramatically falling in love with Paul Zhukovsky and expressing his myriad feelings in his novel *Confidence*. Where biographers like Edel and Kaplan remain unconvinced that James participated in sexual acts with men, Novick claims that celibacy would keep James removed from the tangible realities of human life. To imagine that James never kissed, held, or had sexual relations, for Novick, not only seems improbable but a repressive assumption on the part of scholars unwilling to see the author as a flesh-and-blood human being.

During the 1990s, reevaluations of James through the approach of queer theory really exploded. The proliferation of literary criticism connected to James and same-sex male desire continue to stimulate new assessments and treatments of his work. In June, 1998, Hugh Stevens’ article “Queer Henry In the Cage” appeared in *The Cambridge
Companion to Henry James, with Stevens placing James within appropriate historical and sexual contexts:

Rather than asking whether James is or is not a "homosexual," criticism might examine how his writing examines the workings of sexual identity with culture, without the assumption that James’s own identity might be so simply uncovered. Caution on the issue of James’s own identity might accompany a certain boldness in reading his fiction. Such an inquiry will, I believe, eventually show James to be as important a figure as Wilde\(^{32}\) in the formation of modern queerness: whereas Wilde represents the public face of queerness, James might be seen as one of the great explorers of queer consciences. (124)

Stevens’ essay encourages critics to see James as a man whose treatment of sexuality in his literature provides a record of queer interiority through the complicated characters he depicts in his fiction and that reflect the turbulent, complicated, and multifold sexualities that emerged or evolved during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Stevens approaches a truer image of James through the use of his wordplay, punning, and ironic sense of humor—an aspect Wharton felt crucial and fundamental to his personality as a whole. Stevens asks: "Who is queer Henry? The ‘epistemological privilege’ assumed by the James’s critics would seem to be somewhat compromised by the James I have portrayed in this essay: the playful erotic punner, the teaser, taking pleasure in weaving a polyvalent erotic web which flickers between revelation and concealment” (132). Here, James’ queerness becomes celebrated in his sense of humor and ability to laugh at himself and the roles he performed. Instead of the dour James, sullen, lonely and repressed, one finds a provocateur who impishly loads his language with hidden meanings and sexual innuendo. The result is a very different image of James, no longer

\(^{32}\) Here, of course, Stevens, in referring to Wilde as an iconic figure in the development of modern queerness, clearly alludes to critical work like that of Alan Sinfield, who, in his The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment, claims that Wilde remains “the most notorious/celebrated queer/playwright” (vi) in the modern Western canon.
terrorized by his desire for other men and inspired, in playful ways, to imaginatively use language to resist and challenge suppressive forces: "The playful allusions and punning games, and of the jocular control over the movement of knowledge and secrecy, suggests that the 'heterosexual register' is ironic rather than defensive" (133). Stevens’ essay acted as a harbinger of his more complete study of James that would soon follow.

A month later, in July, 1998, Hugh Stevens published his volume of essays, *Henry James and Sexuality*, which analyzed sexuality and its constructs as pertaining to James’ characters in his fiction, using the theoretical apparatus Judith Butler sets forth in her study *Gender Trouble*. Locating sexuality as performative, Stevens reveals a Henry James who knowingly represents sexuality during the crucial historical period which sought to clinically pin down, scientifically, the various forms of human sexuality through the emergence of sexology: “For James sexuality is always *cultural*, and his fiction responds, in various ways, to the proliferation of discourses, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which attempt to ‘represent’ sexuality, are responsible for its very creation” (6). Among the sexualities explored remains that of male homosexuality, which employs the euphemistic language of “queerness” to signify same-sex male desire as outside the pathologizing discourse of sexological terminology that viewed such sexuality as “abnormal.” Stevens convincingly argues that James acted as a sophisticated negotiator of changing and conflicting constructs of sexuality, whose treatment of the performance of sexual identity through his characters became more postmodernist than modernist (as so many recent critics have claimed). Through his essays, a nuanced James masterfully detailed the historically shifting attitudes towards sexuality through his body of work and reflected how unstable such identities could be.
One year later, in 1999, numerous critical works would appear in Jamesian scholarship that would react to the innovative work of such scholars as Stevens and those who preceded him.

The January, 1999, publication of the collection of essays *Henry James and Homo-Erotic Desire*, edited by John R. Bradley, affirmed that the particular strain of scholarship dedicated to James and his sexuality in terms of same-sex male desire was not only widely accepted but now opened up a diverse array of responses to James’ writing. In his introduction to the essays, Sheldon M. Novick criticized the predominant assumption within scholarship related to James that the author suffered from a form of sexual panic or anxiety that stemmed from homosexual identity:

> Some modern critics read into the absence of desire a suppressed and thwarted homosexual identity. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s famous essay on ‘The Beast in the Jungle’ (in *The Epistemology of the Closet*) imagines the protagonist of the tale to be a character of repressed homosexual impulses. . . . Sedgwick has been so clear-headed in other contexts, resisting the creation of stereotyped identities for those who engage in homosexual acts, that it is particularly unfortunate to find her reader another sort of stereotype in this absence. (8)

Here, Novick carefully chooses his wording; referring to the “thwarted homosexual identity” (“thwarted” no doubt alludes to Wendy Graham’s study\(^{33}\)) suggested by critics like Sedgwick (or those building from her claims, here, again, Graham), he distinguishes his own views of James as belonging to a sort of separate camp in Jamesian scholarship.

For Novick, James was not a man dogged by fears of his homosexuality but one who was

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rightly cautious and discreetly pursued his desires within a private realm. Within his introduction, Novick reveals that he is preparing a second volume of his biography on James, which will focus on the latter half of the author’s life and show how James’ sexual experimentation, as seen with Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., did not stand as an isolated event in the author’s life; Novick claims that James became an active participant in sexual relations with other men repeatedly during the span of his life. Unlike those critics who “have been inclined to write as if James’s writing about sexuality was somehow unconscious, a helpless expression of neurotic fears,” Novick insists that the collection of essays he introduces “give us access not only to the sensual dimension found in James’s work, but to his mind” (14). Since Novick provides the portrait of James as a man who not only expressed his desire openly in his correspondence to other men but who physically attempted to satiate such desire through sexual acts, it is understandable why he would find the image of James as a man terrified by same-sex male desire not only inaccurate but misleading. Describing a paradigmatic structuring of identity for James, as operating through the function of three modes of performance that pertain to a respective social sphere, Novick uses the language of architecture to approach a more nuanced image of the Master.

Novick introduces the three spheres where respective “modes of being” operate and terms them the inner sphere, the social space and the outer sphere. He defines these spheres clearly: 1) the “inner sphere,” which, like a private room, protects the “self-constructed self, the inner person,” 2) the “social space,” in which “civilization accumulates, embodied in social forms and artistic decorations, the space in which one has family ties and friendships and flirtations, perhaps casual affairs. Here one wears a
mask and costume appropriate to one’s place in society” (14), and 3) the “outer sphere”
which correlates to an outside world, “the public space: the sphere of commerce and
democratic politics, of streets and hotel lobbies” (15). Each of these three modes of
being holds a crucial place within the performance of identity as a whole. Novick is
careful to explain that when James exists within the second sphere, where he donned the
“mask and costume,” he appeared as “a bachelor, a manly Victorian gentleman with
secrets” (15). He continues, “There was an aesthetic and sexual charge to the artistic
performance, of course; we are aware of the intense feelings behind the mask, but it is
important for the whole performance, and for the quality of his loves themselves, that
they remain essentially secret” (15). According to Novick, the familiar James whom the
author’s contemporaries knew and whom literary scholars now attempt to locate, is the
James with mask and costume, who inhabited the liminal space between the private and
public spheres. Appalled by flamboyant aesthetes, like Oscar Wilde, whose identity
functioned largely within the public sphere, James negotiated the social space with great
savvy, both revealing his sexuality to intimate friends, who understood his wordplay and
great love of the double entendre, while disguising same-sex male desire as innocuous
flirtation to those who possibly harbored homophobic feelings.

Lyndall Gordon, whose part-biographical study, part-critical interpretation of
James’ fiction, examines James’ important, but very complicated, relationships with two
women, Mary Temple and Constance Fenimore Woolson, in A Private Life of Henry
suggests that James fashioned an alternative form of masculinity for himself taken from
his strong associations with these women: “A reinvention of manhood began with Civil
War tales where wounded, dying men discover a higher form of manhood than may be found on the battlefield or in the drawing-room. He marked the capacity of men and women to transcend themselves in the face of mortality. The otherness of women made them a focus for an alternative to the pressure of wartime ideals of masculinity: this alternative manhood could take on qualities traditionally assigned to women” (6). Though Gordon dodges the question of James’ sexuality, particularly as it concerned other men, she curiously makes the connection between James’ construction of masculinity and the Civil War experience—a connection that echoes that of Walt Whitman. Looking to evade the whole “was he or wasn’t he” question of James homosexuality, Gordon instead writes that he “never thought of himself as deviant, for the simple reason that the Edwardians drew a sharper line between sexual activity and tender friendship.” Gordon’s opinion differs greatly from the argument Wendy Graham would fully develop in her study.

Wendy Graham, in her book-length work, *Henry James’s Thwarted Love* 34, published in November, 1999, investigates the social and cultural climate of the late nineteenth century—a climate largely dominated by sexual science and newly emergent theories in psychology—that became instrumental (in the author’s self-conception, and resulting suppression, of his sexuality). Graham locates the “standards of Victorian masculinity” (up to which James could never properly live) the science of sexology that pathologized homosexuality as a disease of the mind, and degeneration theory, which stemmed from the pseudo-science of eugenics, to show how these cultural influences deeply affected James and his understanding of his own sexuality. Suggesting that James

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34 Graham published an article with the same title in a collection of essays *Eroticism and Containment: Notes from the Flood Plain*, in 1994.
could not fulfill societal expectations related to strongly polarized constructs of gender, Graham reveals how The Master experienced anxiety related to his identity as a result: “James’s professed failure to measure up to normative standards of Victorian masculinity figures prominently in this study. My thematic concatenation of James’s effeminacy, celibacy, and nervous distress seeks to reanimate the presumptions and anxieties that made identification with interdicted gender roles so problematic for the men and women of his time” (2). Graham purports that James’ sense of effeminacy was equated with “a sign of degeneracy” and greatly impacted his life: “He therefore never escaped the constraint enforced by compulsory heterosexuality or felt free to pursue sexual intimacy with the young men he adored” (3). Here, James’ desire for younger men becomes “thwarted” and sublimated, even repressed, since to act upon such desire would cause the author to see himself as a degenerate, as non-normative or sick—from a sexological standpoint. Stressing James’ relationship with his older brother William, Graham argues that William’s lectures to his younger brother caused Henry to keep his feelings in check and, in his later years, would evolve into a view of “sublimation as a form of self-discipline rather than as an elevated mode of expressing desire” (6). Sedgwick’s analyses of James’s work greatly inform Graham’s study, along with the work of Kaja Silverman in Male Subjectivity at the Margins and Joseph Litvak’s Caught in the Act. Graham’s view of James stands at odds with that of Gordon, in terms of whether or not James saw himself as “deviant.”

demonstrate how James changed during his last years, particularly during the period from
around 1895 until his death in 1916, when he became more desirous of companionship
and connections to others—specifically younger men. Referring to a quote by Wharton
from 1910, they suggest that James’s “need for warmth” led him to use more
impassioned language, amorous language that reflected a multitude of roles he assumed,
within these relationships, in such letters:

> Just as heterosexual relationships tolerate a range of expression, so these
> letters demonstrate James’s capacity to feel a continuum of emotions amid
> a diversity of roles. James is alternately the fervent admirer, the paternal
> adviser, the fraternal comrade, the consoling spirit, the modest patron, the
> severe mentor, the faithful champion, the genial host, the ready confidant,
> the enamored soul, the ardent suitor, the plaintive lover, and the passionate
> devotee. (5)

By diversifying the roles that James assumed within his relationships with younger men,
such as the four examined within this collection, Gunter and Jobe further complicate the
image of James in terms of his sexuality. James continues to elude simple labeling or
clear sexual definition, much to the chagrin of critics who would prefer to designate to
the writer specific, stable constructs of sexuality—often a by-product of either a
conscious or subconscious political agenda on the part of the literary critic. Offering the
letters to a public audience, Gunter and Jobe allow the reader to decide how to view
James, with the understanding that, “Despite the pervasive image of the ‘secure’ Master,
the suspicion has been with us that James nonetheless enjoyed a rich sensual life, that he
was not one of those upon whom sexuality was wholly lost” (5). Resisting the temptation
to make definitive claims in regard to James’ sexuality and relationships, these editors
propose that James, while recognizing his own attraction for other men, would not have
necessarily thought of himself in terms of “deviance,” as a result of such same-sex desire.
Douglass Shand-Tucci’s study of the male homosexual subculture at Harvard University, from the nineteenth century through the twentieth, *The Crimson Letter: Harvard, Homosexuality and the Shaping of American Culture*, first appeared in May, 2003. Shand-Tucci, in a section called “Henry James’s Story,” recapitulates the image of James as a homosexual, though he seems amused rather than convinced by Novick’s claim that James “performed his first acts of love” with Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., while at Harvard. While agreeing with Wendy Graham’s suggestion that, “Thwarting passion, [James] spun out pleasure in his fiction and letters, using narrative for flirtation and intellect for a strangely embodied form of seduction,” Shand-Tucci sidesteps the controversy over James’ latent or active homosexual identity. Later in his book, he credits Richard Hall, a now “almost totally obscure” scholar and Harvard alumnus, for first acknowledging James’ desire for men in his criticism and for convincing other prominent critics, like Leon Edel, of the claim’s verity. While Shand-Tucci’s coverage of James is brief, I think that the author’s placement within the context of the male homosexual subculture that Shand-Tucci investigates at Harvard is fascinating. Such placement reinforces the image of James as a male homosexual, despite whether or not he actively performed that identity through sexual acts.

Shortly following the publication of Shand-Tucci’s book, Eric Haralson’s study of James, *Henry James and Queer Modernity*, first appeared in June, 2003. Haralson distances his study from the invasive, even “gossipy,” speculation over whether or not James had sex with men and the difficult question over whether or not James identified his own sexuality with the consciousness of modern sexual constructs—such as “gay man,” “homo social man,” “homosexual man,” “active homosexual man,” “latent...
homosexual man,” “bisexual man,” “masculine homosexual man,” effeminate homosexual man,” etc. Instead, Haralson wisely adopts the language and theoretical framework of “queerness,” as introduced by scholars like David Halperin, Judith Butler, Marilee Lindemann, and Marjorie Garber. Through the five queer readings he presents of James, Cather, Stein, Hemingway and Sherwood Anderson, respectively, Haralson demonstrates how these authors consciously examined and depicted queerness not just as a part of modern society but maintained that queerness and modernity held a direct relationship, with both mutually reifying the other.

Devoting four of six chapters exclusively to James and his work, Haralson creates a trajectory for James' development of the queer man in his fiction that begins with Roderick Hudson and ends with The Ambassadors, a trajectory that begins with the stigmatized effeminate aesthete, Roderick Hudson, and ends with the “culminating figure” of Lambert Strether, whose “bearings are homosexual, whose own sex appeal is significantly ambivalent, and yet whose affective complexities are not easily reducible to the rigidifying grids of the modern sex/gender system” (25). Haralson contends that he tries to avoid the “queer desire” of postmodern critics who view James and his writing “in excess of their objects,” given the problematic slippage caused by the fallacy of authorial intent. Yet, what impresses him most about James is the writer’s struggle to negotiate changing definitions of manhood in modern society and his solution of the figure of the aesthete who resists the preceding, prescribed definition of heteronormative manhood. Haralson asserts:

For Henry James, the struggle to articulate a modern manhood—apart from the normative script of a fixed national identity, a vulgarizing, homogenizing career in business and commerce, a middle-class philistinism and puritanical asceticism in the reception of beauty, and
crucially, a mature life of heterosexual performance as suitor, spouse, physical partner, and paterfamilias—resulted in his valorizing the character of the disaffiliated aesthete. (3)

Here, James nuances the image of the “disaffiliated aesthete” as a better alternative to the damaging “route of becoming a spouse, a father, and a conventional man of power” which would result in “a bad bargain for masculinity, as ‘business’ itself ... becomes Jamesian shorthand for the ‘congealed status of the American male, whose submission to compulsory heterosexuality results in psychic desiccation’” (111). Though Haralson warns the reader to avoid drawing too close parallels between James and the characters in his fiction, he does provide an interesting biographical context for the physicality of James’ male characters.

Stressing James’ penchant for tactile handling of his male friends, Haralson gives his “two cents” on the image of the Master as a lover of men. Dispelling the myth that James suffered a repressed, isolated life, unable to act on his desire for other men, Haralson emphasizes the very physical nature James possessed in his relations with male friends and peers: “After hearing so much about James’s fabled fastidiousness, and after so many readings of his fiction that see James himself inscribed in his ‘repressed’ male characters, one is surprised to learn of his comfortable physicality with male friends. As Forster would notice during his visit to Lamb House in 1908, James’ tendency to lay an appreciative hand on one’s arm or shoulder was a distinguishing trait” (123). Haralson also refers to the extremely affectionate tone James adopts in his correspondence to younger men, as exemplified in the collection of letters assembled by Gunter and Jobe, and discussed at length by Hugh Stevens. The image of James here, upon which Haralson draws, is that of the “unrestrained queer James,” unaffected by the prohibitive
pressure of contemporary society to conform to expectations of compulsory heterosexuality, who caresses men with ebullient language in his letters, when he finds himself unable to caress the subjects in person.

Since the appearance of Haralson’s book in 2003, Rosella Mamoli Zorzi has edited a collection of Henry James’ letters to Henrik C. Andersen, which was published in April, 2004. Asserting that the publication of the collection of letters relates more to their content in terms of James’ ideas on art and one’s role as an artist than to James’ sexual interest (a debatable subject according to Zorzi), the editor downplays the erotic language in the letters as commonplace in relationships between men: “He breaks the codes of repression of the Victorian world in these letters, although one must not forget that the codes of communication of the late nineteenth century were different from those of our time (‘beloved,’ for instance, is often used by William James in addressing his brother Henry)” (xxxix). Here, Zorzi alludes to a usage of “beloved” by William James as evidence of platonic or fraternal meaning, but Zorzi must not give credence to Fred Kaplan’s claims that James and his brother, along with their sister Alice, used the “rhetoric of lovers” in their correspondence and relationships with one another. The editor insists that the reader of this collection of missives must not attempt to assign “labels” of sexual identity to James, since the author himself sought to destroy letters that evidenced his eroticized relationships with younger men. Zorzi explains:

In spite of the development of gay theories and studies, also regards Henry James, I don’t think these letters should be read as a homosexual correspondence, full of erotic language as they are. They certainly do not allow us to place any “label” on James’s sexuality. James was always most reserved on his private life and affections in general, toward men and women, as his burning of so many letters testifies, and we should respect his choice. (xxxviii-xxxix)
Expressly resistant to interpretation of James’ letters to Andersen as a “homosexual correspondence,” Zorzi encourages readers to “respect” James’ “choice” to protect his private, personal life from public scrutiny, as demonstrated by the burning of his letters (an act one of James’ favorite writers, Charles Dickens, had performed), by ignoring the impulse to define James’ relationship with Andersen with modern constructs of sexuality that would be anachronistic. Yet, Millicent Bell, who provides an introduction to the “English-Language Edition” of the letters, addresses how James’ affectionate language in his letters to Andersen influenced the way in which he wrote his letters to other younger men.

Bell, widely known for her study of the friendship between Henry James and Edith Wharton, Edith Wharton & Henry James: A Story of Their Friendship, claims that James’ correspondence to Andersen dramatically affected the language and tone of those letters he would write to other younger men, suggesting that the amorous discourse leaked into those other missives. Though Andersen had declined an invitation by James to come and live with him, a proposition made in a letter from September, 1899, the effect of James’ infatuation with the sculptor would flow into the letters he wrote to other men: “The feelings that had produced a brief dream of romantic companionship with Andersen lingered in James’s consciousness. His unsurrendered longing continued to the end to color his letters to this recipient with a rose-hue of sentimental tenderness … Almost immediately, his letters to others—Sturgis, Fullerton, Persse, Walpole, Lubbock, and Lapsley—picked up the caressing language he had used to Andersen” (xviii). As a scholar of Wharton, Bell would have easily recognized four of those names as belonging to the “Inner Circle,” to which Edith Wharton and Henry James acted as the center.

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Given the trend within Jamesian scholarship to reevaluate the author through the insightful and intriguing theoretical frameworks offered during the past two decades by the postmodern field of queer studies, one observes how biographers and critics have gradually developed new ways of reading James. From the terrorized, repressed closet case who feared his own sexuality, as seen in readings by Sedgwick and Van Leer, to the playful, “cerebral letch” who veiled his same-sex desire through flirtatious narratives (in both his fiction and letters), as suggested by Graham, to the liberated bachelor who opted for the alternative lifestyle of the “disaffiliated aesthete,” proposed by Haralson, the image of the asexual, celibate and even impotent Henry James has become a thing of the past. Understandably motivated by a desire to protect James from a homophobic reading public that would either denigrate or marginalize his writing through limited interpretation, Leon Edel, in his exhaustive five volume biography, provided only a partial portrait of the “Master.” (His protective impulse interestingly echoes that of Edmund Gosse, James’ close friend, who also struggled with same-sex desire and protected an openly homosexual John Addington Symonds from a judgmental and unforgiving audience, in his biography of Symonds and edited collection of his letters.)

Jamesian studies seem divided into camps that have defined a specific James correlating to a specific subject position in terms of sexuality. The greatest conflict within such work occurs over whether or not James performed sexual acts with men. Though some critics find this debate intrusive, gossipy and plain “none of our business,” and others contend that to deny James his identity, due to whatever motivations on the part of the biographer/critic (homophobia, fear of marginalization, to avoid “labeling,” dodging anachronistic sexual constructs, etc.), the fact remains that James did enjoy the company
of other men and that his relationships with men affected not only his life, but his writing in very important ways.

**Regarding Henry**

The recent 2004 publication of Colm Tóibín’s historical novel *The Master*, which imaginatively represents the life of Henry James through specific, intimate moments, during the years 1895 to 1899, sensitively explores James’ same-sex desire in the devastating wake of the Wilde trials. I believe that Tóibín, whose nonfiction literary critical work *Love in a Dark Time and Other Explorations of Gay Lives in Literature*, published in 2001, reflects his interest in queer theory and history, knowingly and appropriately chose to examine these years, since the media coverage and imprisonment of Oscar Wilde would forever change the perception of the queer man in the century to come—a claim made by Alan Sinfield. As has been widely recorded by several scholars interested in James’ sexuality, The Master took an empathetic interest in Wilde and his trials, though he openly disapproved of Wilde’s flamboyance and notorious sexual promiscuity. Through his good friend Edmund Gosse, James would learn of the details of Wilde’s trials and would discuss the latest developments, often through their correspondence.

In his letters to Gosse, James expressed concern and sadness for Wilde and his troubling legal situation, though he felt that the Irish playwright had largely precipitated his own condemnation. On Monday, April 8, 1895, in a letter provided in the collection edited by Leon Edel, the Master writes to Gosse:

> Yes, too, it has been, it is, hideously, atrociously dramatic and really interesting—so far as one can say of a thing of which the interest is qualified by such a sickening horribility. It is the squalid gratuitousness of it all—of the mere exposure—that blurs the spectacle. But the *fall*—from
nearly twenty years of a really unique kind of "brilliant" conspicuity (wit, "art," conversation—"one of our two or three dramatists, etc.") to that sordid prison-cell and this gulf of obscenity over which the ghoulish public hangs and gloats—it is beyond any utterance of irony or any pang of compassion! (9-10)

James reveals his disgust with the public that sought to demonize Wilde and punish him through never-ending gossip and sensationalistic reports of his sexual exploits. The language James uses is particularly strong—note the "sickening horribility," "squalid gratuitousness," the "spectacle," "obscenity" and the "ghoulish public" that "hangs and gloats." His sense of empathy, or perhaps even sympathy to a certain degree, leads him to exclaim that such vile treatment of Oscar Wilde remains "beyond any utterance of irony or any pang of compassion." He goes on to say that though Wilde had never really interested him before, his current circumstances provided a certain "interest": "He was never in the smallest degree interesting to me—but this hideous human history has made him so—in a manner" (10). The phrase "in a manner" becomes rather important, as Edel notes that on the outside flap of the envelope which held this particular letter, James wrote an additional clue to why he would so interested in Wilde and his troubles. According to Edel, James "scrawled, after he sealed the letter, 'Quel dommage—mais quel Bonheur—que J.A.S. ne soit plus de ce monde'" (10)—a fascinating comment that linked the situation and writing of John Addington Symonds to that of Oscar Wilde, in the mind of the aging Master. Clearly, Wilde's predicament of imprisonment for proven sexual relations with other men brought into question the sexological writing by Symonds, which James had read.

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As Dowling points out, Symonds' defenses of male homosexuality and memoirs would become a part of a male homosexual literary tradition, writing that openly investigated and validated same-sex male desire within certain contexts. In his two studies, *A Study in Greek Ethics* and *A Study in Modern Ethics*, Symonds would, in the former, provide a history of male homosexuality in ancient Greece and, in the latter, treat the subject of male homosexuality within a contemporary context. In his defense of what he refers to as “paiderastia,” Symonds seems to celebrate the positive effects of male bonding within the military training that united an older man and a younger boy; he cites several ancient myths for famous examples of strong same-sex male unions—the biblical David and Jonathan, the Greek myths of Achilles and Patroclus or Orestes and Pylades. In his *A Study in Greek Ethics*, Symonds contends: “What the Greeks called paiderastia, or boy-love, was a phenomenon of one of the most brilliant periods of human culture, in one of the most highly organized and nobly active nations. It is the feature by which Greek social life is most sharply distinguished from that of any other people approaching the Hellenes in moral or mental distinction” (11). Pages from Symonds’ writing would find their way into James’ hands via Edmund Gosse, who too shared an inner struggle over his same-sex desire for men. Gosse would write to Symonds in 1890:

I know of all you speak of, the solitude, the rebellion, the despair . . . I entirely & deeply sympathize with you. Years ago I wanted to write to you about all this, and withdrew through cowardice. I have had a very fortunate life, but there has been this obstinate twist in it! I have reached a quieter time—some beginnings of that Sophoclean period, when the wild beast dies. He is not dead, but tamer; I understand him & the tricks of his claws. (qtd. in Kaplan 402)

The “wild beast” that Gosse looked to tame echoed Symonds’ use of the “chimera” to symbolize same-sex desire for other men—the image is one that resonates with the
“beast” in James’ “The Beast in the Jungle,” as Sedgwick reads the story. Certainly, the pressing danger of being caught in a compromising liaison with another man, or having openly expressed such desire through the written word, would cause very real anxiety in men, like Gosse and Symonds, who had to live through such turbulently homophobic times in England. In Gosse’s writing, the sympathy becomes clear—“I entirely & deeply sympathize with you”—the plaintive confession finally is made, though the writer had wanted to admit such feelings years earlier. Overcoming his own “cowardice,” Gosse exposes the “obstinate twist” in his seemingly traditional and “fortunate life.” Though unable to kill the “wild beast,” Gosse asserts that he has learned enough of “him & the tricks of his claws” to be able to tame such desire. Gosse knew, from James’ depiction of J. A. Symonds and his wife in the penetrating tale “The Author of Beltraffio,” that James would take a certain interest in reading Symonds’ sexological work.

In his fine biography of James, Kaplan demonstrates how James became fully aware of Symonds’ “double life”—publicly upholding the Victorian idea of heterosexual marriage and a proper family, while privately engaging in sexual relations with younger men, including handsome gondoliers found in the golden canals of Venice. Kaplan

36 In his Love in a Dark Time, Colm Tóibín claims that “The Beast in the Jungle” stands as James’ most poignant and revealing story about his struggle with his own sexuality. “The story becomes much darker when you know about James’s life—something that almost never happens with the novels,” the scholar writes. “You realize that the catastrophe the story led you to expect was in fact the very life that James chose to live, or was forced to live” (35). Tóibín asserts that the story captures the pathos of James’ closeted existence and lack of love, due to his inability to physically act upon the desire he felt for younger men:

[The story] is, ostensibly, about a man who realizes that his failure to love has been a disaster; but it is also, for readers familiar with Edel’s or Kaplan’s biographies of James, and readers willing to find clues in the text itself, about a gay man whose sexuality has left him frozen in the world. It is, in all its implication, a desolate and disturbing story, James’s “most modern tale,” according to Edel. (35)

James’ homosexuality or private identity as a “gay man,” to use Tóibín’s term, becomes one of emptiness and frigidity, “frozen in the world.” Perhaps this is why James so plaintively confessed to Benson that the figure in his novel Roderick Hudson, the statue representing “Thirst,” was indeed still thirsty, and this also may have explained why James struggled with depression in his later years.
suggests that James possibly “knew” from his first meeting with Symonds, in 1877, about Symonds’ inner struggle and hidden life. “James knew,” Kaplan argues, “almost from his first meeting with Symonds, certainly from later discussions with Gosse, Symonds’ good friend, that Symonds had lived for some time a divided life” (301). Furthermore, “Symonds had become increasingly outspoken about his inclinations, driven by his Victorian need to rescue homosexuality from sinfulness by associating it with ideal Greek values” (301). According to Kaplan, though James would refute the idea that he based his character Mark Ambient, in “The Author of Beltraffio,” on Symonds, the “denial was a purposeful evasion, an attempt to distance himself and his story from a homoerotic subtext” (300)—a subtext that clearly did exist. Thus, when Gosse sent James one of the fifty privately-printed copies of Symonds’ *A Problem in Modern Ethics*, near the beginning of 1893, he knew that his friend would take a certain “interest” in the subject of same-sex male desire. James would reveal his feelings about Symonds privately to Gosse, “J.A.S. is truly . . . a candid and consistent creature, & the exhibition is infinitely remarkable. It’s, on the whole, I think, a queer place to plant the standard of duty, but he does it with such extraordinary gallantry . . . I think we ought to wish him more *humour*—it is really the saving salt. But the great reformers never have it—& he is the Gladstone of the affair” (qtd. in Kaplan 402-3). Crediting Symonds with being the “William Gladstone” of social reform in terms of sexuality, James pays Symonds the compliment of praising his “extraordinary gallantry.”

The charged atmosphere that existed during the years that followed the Wilde trials provided James with the unique opportunity of discussing and reading about the desire that he had experienced himself for years. While, certainly, the imprisonment of
Oscar Wilde set a terrible precedent in terms of the punishment of illegal sexual relations between men, the trials did have the positive effect of allowing men to more openly discuss homosexuality since the topic was one that was circulating freely in mainstream discourse and conversation. As a result, James could more openly refer to the trials or Symonds without any suspicion being raised as to why he took such an “interest” in such matters. In a letter to William, Henry would write about Wilde: “His fall is hideously tragic & the squalid violence of it gives him an interest (of misery) that he never had for me—in any degree—before” (403). Though James explains away the “interest” Wilde holds, by parenthesizing that misery was its root, he has expressed in letters to both Gosse and his brother that he found Wilde interesting due to his tragic circumstances. This sense of tragedy would accompany James’ response to Symonds’ death from tuberculosis in 1893, when he would write to Gosse: “The so brutal & tragic extinction . . . of poor forevermore silent J.A.S. . . . I can’t help feeling the news with a pang & with personal emotion. It always seemed as if I might know him—& of few men whom I didn’t know has the image so come home to me” (403). The tragedy of both Symonds and Wilde, who both struggled to define their sexualities in positive terms, clearly struck a chord in James that resonated deeply—for these men openly confronted their feelings for other men, while he kept such feelings private. Kaplan credits Symonds with helping James to become more “open” about same-sex desire for men in the late 1890s: “Symonds indirectly helped James focus on his own feelings, which contributed to his increased openness in the late 1890s. But it was not a public openness, and it had its private ambivalences and disguises” (403).
CHAPTER V

WHARTON’S INITIATION

A Sense of Difference

Through a close examination of Wharton’s autobiographical writing, produced after her initiation and her acceptance of an interiorized queer masculinity, the reader starts to see how Wharton experienced anxiety over both her gender and sexuality since her childhood years. Her feeling of “otherness” functioned as a magnet which drew her to the queer men who she thought could understand her, could help her to find ways to productively use her uniqueness to create art. From Ogden Codman, Jr., Howard Sturgis, and Henry James, to other figures like André Gide and Geoffrey Scott, Wharton chose to invest in relationships with queer artists who allowed her to acknowledge a discursive resistance towards mainstream concepts of gender, sexuality, and even desire itself. With the Whitmanian “comrade” as a term to express her complicated interiority, Wharton learned how to connect with many men whose feelings of difference echoed her own, through language and literature. Her feelings of “otherness,” rooted in childhood experiences, never left her mind, even during her twilight years, as demonstrated by her reference to Whitman for the title of her autobiographical A Backward Glance.

From both her fragmentary Life and I and her published account of her autobiography, A Backward Glance, we know that Edith Jones Wharton never felt at ease with the traditional Victorian gender constructs assigned to both girls and women, even
as a child. Lucretia Rhinelander Jones often surprised her daughter with girl playmates, forcing her to spend time with children who might be able to show her the joys of being a girl, but Edith never had the same interests as other little girls—such as dolls and tea parties. The plan frequently failed, when Wharton begged her mother to leave her alone so that she could devote more time to her storytelling pastime of “making up.” In Life and I, she writes:

But the only toys I cared for were animals, + the only play-mates little boys. Dolls + little girls I frankly despised, though I tried to be ‘polite’ when their company was forced upon me. Never shall I forget the long-drawn weariness of the hours passed with ‘nice’ little girls, brought in to ‘spend the day,’ + unable to converse with me about Tennyson, Macaulay, or anything that ‘really mattered.’ I would struggle as long as I could against my perilous obsession, + then when the ‘pull’ became too strong, I would politely ask my unsuspecting companions to excuse me while I ‘went to speak with Mamma,’ + dashing into the drawing-room would pant out, ‘Mamma, please go + amuse those children. I must make up.’ (12-13)

Wharton uses strong language, when she claims that she “despised” both “dolls” and “little girls” and demonstrates that she did not feel akin to other female children. She clearly doubted their intelligence, since they could not discuss “Tennyson, Macaulay, or anything that ‘really mattered.’” When she tore herself away from her playmates, Wharton pleaded with her mother to let her have some time alone. Very conscious of her own position in society, Edith’s mother was insecure about her “strange” daughter and Wharton sensed that part of that fear in her parents related to her instincts about her “sex.” Her parents were uneasy with her tomboyish behavior and, as a result, anxiously encouraged her to accept traditional roles associated with feminine females. “I think my parents by this time were beginning to regard me with fear, like some pale predestined child who disappears at night to dance with ‘the little people,’” remembered Wharton.
They need not have felt any such anxiety for all the normal instincts of my sex were strong in me (15). Wharton is a little too quick to reassure the reader "of the normal instincts of my sex were strong in me," demonstrating her own anxiety.

In her autobiographical works, Wharton repeatedly emphasized how she felt comfortable only in the presence of little boys and how she shared their passion for "puppy-dogs" and vigorous outdoor exercise, foreshadowing her preference for male friendship later on in life. She would later discuss these important friendships, what she termed "comradeships," in A Backward Glance. Yet, she planted the seeds of the more mature relationships with men she developed in her adult life in her discussions of the playful romps she would take with the young boys who were her neighbors. For example, she asserts, in Life and I: "The objective world could never lose its charm for me while it contained puppy-dogs + little boys. I loved all forms of young animals, but gave my preference to these two. (Canary-birds I classed with dolls + little girls, as negligible if one could get anything better.) Games in which dogs + little boys took part were the chief joy of what I may call my external life" (15). Considering "canary-birds" as useless as "dolls + little girls"—"negligible if one could get anything better"—Wharton exposes her distaste for the cultural signals of girlhood as represented in the "doll," while expressing a preference for a popular symbol of boyhood, the "puppy-dog." One is reminded of the early nineteenth century nursery rhyme, "What Are Little Boys Made Of," with Wharton's use of the term "puppy-dog," as in "puppy-dog's tails." Instead of embracing the "sugar and spice" of girlhood, Wharton suggests that she resisted traditional gender constructs even as a child, preferring "puppy-dogs + little boys" as companions. As a result, according to her account, she was thought to be
strange or different by her parents—who began to regard her “with fear,” due to her flouting of convention. Wharton then describes having two lives, significantly reminiscent of the double life that James had mastered, the separate and distinct public and private selves: “So I lived my two lives, the one of physical exercise + healthy natural ‘fun,’ + the other, parallel with it but known to none but myself—a life of dreams + visions, set to the rhythm of the poets, + peopled with thronging images of beauty” (24). The “two lives” Wharton describes, which best demonstrated her natural interests and delights, were both associated with the traditional gender constructs assigned to boys and men who were “masculine.” By taking pleasure in physical exertion, Wharton shrugged off the notion that little girls were only to play quietly with dolls. Rather, she chose to climb trees, ride ponies, skip rope and tumble with the neighborhood boys in Newport, Rhode Island, when in a public sphere, and, when alone in her room, she privately escaped to a life of “dreams + visions, set to the rhythm of the poets” (24). Since the books of poetry Wharton read came from her father’s “gentleman’s library,” the materials, in a way, had already become gendered as male texts, as works that men would read for a classical education. With one brother having left for England to study at Cambridge, a privilege she knew she would never enjoy, Wharton learned early that her biological sex would limit her ability to pursue those things that pleased her most. As a result, she found ways, in her private life, to resist those limitations and fashioned the interiorized self that was distinctly masculine.

Since Wharton exhibited signs of gender non-conformity even as a child, according to her own account, one can see why Wharton later identified with Walt Whitman, Henry James, and queer men who challenged heteronormativity and
contemporary, traditional gender constructs. In her autobiographical work, written later in life and likely influenced by her reading of sexological and psychological texts, Wharton explores her intense sense of difference and telling makes reference to Whitman in the title of her published autobiography, for a reason. Given Wharton’s deeply personal investment in her reading of Whitman, it is very difficult to accept Kenneth Price’s conclusion, in his chapter “Wharton and the Problem of Whitmanian Comradeship,” in his To Walt Whitman, America, that Wharton simply felt defeated by an “exclusionary Whitman,” since she was not physically a man. Price suggests, “Wharton responded to Leaves on a very personal level. She points to the central importance of the ‘Whitman’ she created and used to fashion a new self: the very title of her autobiography, A Backward Glance, is drawn from Whitman’s capstone essay, ‘A Backward Glance O’er Travell’d Roads’” (47). Yet, at the same time, Price contends that Wharton “came to realize that the homosexual Whitman, an empowering and energizing conception for many people, was likely to deprive her of lasting physical communion with any individual from the one group of men that consistently took her seriously as an intellectual” (55). If Wharton felt so excluded from the sort of consciousness and sexuality Whitman describes in his poetry, then why would she, over twenty years after her affair with Fullerton ended—presumably the most dramatic event to create feelings of inadequacy to join in the comradeship she so idealized—choose a reference to Whitman’s essay as the title of her autobiography? She alludes to Whitman because he signified, not only to her but to many of the men who were her friends, a voice of otherness, of queerness, which correlated to the identity that she felt best represented her private self. Like J.A. Symonds and Oscar Wilde, Wharton used Whitman as a symbolic figure of
non-heteronormativity and complicated gender constructs in her personal and public writings, though many have overlooked the significance of Whitman as a queer figure in both. Important moments in Wharton’s history have been misread because Whitman and men like Henry James were misrepresented for so long in scholarly treatments of their lives and works. Events like the famous reading by James of Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* at the Mount no longer remain important only because of their connection to American nationalism, with Whitman as the great American poet (though he was that). These events now carry additional significance because they provide the clues for understanding both Wharton and her circle of friends. Whitman’s place within a homosexual male literary tradition secured a tacit, yet unspoken, understanding of sameness between Wharton and her friends. They were able to recognize in each other what had for so long made them feel different from a society that mandated compulsory heterosexuality and traditional, polarized gender constructs. Wharton never abandoned her use of Whitman’s paradigm of “comradeship”—a concept based on the practice of pederasty in ancient Greece—but instead used it knowingly to describe her closest relationships with men, aware that those schooled in the tradition and aware of its cultural associations with queerness would comprehend her meaning.

Wharton’s use of “comrade,” as she applied it to her most intimate friends in her autobiography and as she employs the term in her fiction, provides evidence that she understood the larger context of the word as it related to queer history; yet, what is most telling is Wharton’s use of “comrade” in her letters to Fullerton, which tells the story of a writer who longed to participate in a rich tradition she knew belonged primarily to men who desired men. Wharton first focuses on the term “camaraderie” and then later plays...
with variations of the word “comrade” in her correspondence with Fullerton. The usage evolves throughout the series of letters. For example, when Wharton first writes about the “camaraderie” that she and Fullerton were developing, in her letter from June 5th, 1908, she calls upon a curious metaphor, that of the mask, to describe the double life she was leading. She cultivated an artificial public persona to hide her authentic, yet private, self and confesses: “‘Wear the mask—’ heavens! I ought to know how! I have had time to learn. But I’m tired—tired—life is too long as well as too short” (149). Though Wharton, here, describes her frustration in having to pretend to be happily married, while harboring a love for Fullerton, she admits familiarity with pretending to be something she was not. Her exclamatory response, “I ought to know how!” when discussing having to “wear the mask” betrays her long experience with having to construct for herself an artificial persona hiding true identity. “I have had time to learn,” she writes to Fullerton and then admits understanding why he remained so “mysterious” and enigmatic, since she too could relate to the need for a division between the face one presented to the outside world and the face one wore in the privacy of one’s home.

From a very young age, Wharton learned that proper social conduct meant artificiality and occasionally a lie, even about oneself, if need be. To tell the truth might damn one to social exile or reprimand, as Wharton well learned when she, as a child, likened her dance instructor, Mademoiselle Michelet, to an “old goat.” Troubled by the necessity of telling lies in the name of “politeness” and encouraging falsity in the name of “good manners,” Wharton quickly grasped the hypocrisy of her Christian upbringing, when it conflicted with the social codes of behavior demanded by her parents—or, more
importantly, her mother. Wharton stressed the confusion she experienced when faced with opposing rules of conduct:

Nothing I have suffered since has equalled the darkness of horror that weighed on my childhood in respect to this vexed problem of truth-telling, + the impossibility of reconciling 'God's' standard of truthfulness with the conventional obligation to be 'polite' + not hurt anyone's feelings. Between these conflicting rules of conduct I suffered an untold anguish of perplexity, + suffered alone, as imaginative children usually do, without daring to tell any one of my trouble. (7)

The powerful language Wharton uses in this passage emphasizes the severity of the clash between proper manners and Christian beliefs which caused her so great an "untold anguish of perplexity" that she "suffered alone," unable to confide her feelings to anyone.

Since modern gender resistance in young girls today is considered harmless and acceptable by most (such girls are often called "tomboys"), even preferable as a stage of development, Wharton's acknowledged feelings of alienation and difference, in her childhood, due to her own cross-gender behavior often may be ignored. With such a dominant and repressive mother (who modeled womanhood for her daughter) as Lucretia Jones, Wharton grew to associate femininity with an unnatural state of being and, as a result, developed a mask of hyper-femininity that hid her inner masculinity from a public audience. Like James (who shed his image as the dandy for the more masculine persona of the Master), Wharton learned how to master her own performance of gender within society at large; to hide her own "gender trouble" (as Judith Butler calls it), Wharton became the "grand dame." Wharton herself emphasizes her mother's sexual repression (in her memoirs A Backward Glance and "Life & I") and definitively roots her anxiety over sex (which was so great, when she first married, that she experienced a nervous breakdown) in the matriarch, the mother, the female. From her mother, Wharton learned
that, as a female, she needed to remain silent rather than actively speak, had to play quietly with other girls rather than excitedly “make up” stories alone, should know nothing about sex rather than pursue pleasure, and was required to remain in the tidy drawing-room rather than pour over books in a man’s library. Clearly, Wharton’s story of her childhood difference is not unlike Sturgis’ own (which became the basis for Sainty’s treatment in Belchamber), as both authors experienced an intense feeling of otherness or abnormality in their youth, due to gender, that they carried into their adulthood. Interestingly enough, both Wharton and Sturgis paint portraits of their mothers, in their writing, as unsympathetic to their feelings of difference and both seem to attribute their personal struggles with gender to their troubled relationships with their respective mothers, during their childhoods. Wharton’s own acknowledged social anxiety, crippling shyness, icy demeanor, and perceived sexual frigidity all connect to her performance of the “grand dame,” which she presented to the world. Only when Wharton relaxed in the company of other queer friends did she reveal her true self: the masculine wit, who laughed at jokes, teased and played with friends, and exerted a dominant force over others, though in a loving way. She privately became the queer man of letters, the active voice, the man she envisioned her father to be.

**Queer Beginnings**

In his recent essay “‘A Very Proper Bostonian’: Rediscovering Ogden Codman and His Late-Nineteenth-Century Queer World,” David D. Doyle provides a fascinating look at Ogden Codman, Jr., a Boston architect who first worked with Wharton in the renovation of her Newport home Land’s End. The result of that project would be a coauthored book of design *The Decoration of Houses*, which countered prevailing
Victorian modes of eclecticism with a revival of classical style and elements within the home. Interestingly, Wharton’s first published book was written with the help of an architect who was a relative of Howard Sturgis and apparently a daringly open queer man. Given the close proximity of Wharton’s work with Codman, published in 1897, and his help in designing The Mount—though he left the project, by Wharton’s request—Wharton clearly felt comfortable with the queer male sensibility she observed in Codman. The falling out with Codman was largely precipitated by his poor treatment from Wharton’s husband, who suffered from mental illness that caused fairly erratic behavior. Though Wharton and Codman’s estrangement lasted for approximately ten years—they would patch things up after Wharton’s divorce from Teddy—Codman’s relation to not only Wharton, but her friends Howard Sturgis and Gaillard Lapsley, supplies yet another private view into the queer community they formed. Doyle, in his piece, primarily examines Codman’s correspondence with his friend Arthur Little, within which both men would frankly and candidly discuss same-sex male desire. The case study presented by Doyle provides a fascinating perspective of two men who identified with a queer sensibility within upper-class society in turn-of-the-century Boston. The letters between Codman and Little reveal that both men remained curiously interested in other men they believed to be queer and they would often remark to one another on the attractiveness of men in their acquaintance. The sort of familiar and easy discourse one finds in Doyle’s selected portions of their letters—representative of the years 1891 through 1894, notably before the Wilde trials in England—shows that these American men did not fear blackmail as expressly as their English counterparts from this same

37 For a full discussion of Wharton’s on-again off-again friendship with Codman during the construction of The Mount and the problems that led to their ten year estrangement, see Shari Benstock’s No Gifts from Chance for a detailed account.
period. Doyle suggests that “Ogden Codman, whose appearance and behavior conformed to that of the normative male, never suffered from the stigma or marginalization” that more effeminate queer men had to endure. Rather, Codman, who could “pass” as heterosexual to uninitiated individuals, reveled in the playful language of homoeroticism, and pertly teased men whose effeminacy became the subject of humor.

Of greatest interest to this study, Doyle’s account of Codman and his missives written to Little provide illuminating clues as to how Codman viewed two men who would eventually become pivotal members of Wharton’s closest circle of friends—Gaillard Lapsley and Howard Sturgis. In a letter written on April 23rd, 1894, Codman expresses to his friend, according to Doyle, how effeminate Codman thought Gaillard Lapsley to be. Doyle asserts: “Indeed the two friends assigned female names to many men, usually in quotation marks or underlined in the letters: ‘Lapsley’s name is Gilliard, maybe some relation of ‘Aunt Mary.’” By referring to men as ‘Aunt Mary,’ ‘Aunt Kitty,’ or ‘Auntie Belle’ Codman and Little emphasized these men’s effeminacy while never once attaching a feminine name or imagery to themselves” (452). While Doyle seems convinced that such playful allusion to men as “Aunt Mary,” or the like, “emphasized these men’s effeminacy,” Graham Robb shows that such names, within a larger context, belonged to widely-varying language used to celebrate men’s queerness within understanding communities. Robb contends:

Like parlare—the circus slang that was adopted and modified by English gays in the mid-20th century—secret vocabularies were more a celebration than a practical device. Homosexual argot rarely played the same role as thieves’ slang. Words borrowed from prostitution—“Mary Ann,” “pouf,” “fairie,” “tante,” “tapette,” etc.—were used in milieux from which heterosexuals were excluded in any case. (150)
Here, Robb places the term “Mary Ann,” not so unlike the “Aunt Mary” Codman employs, within a vocabulary that included “fairie” and the like, much like Chauncey’s differentiation of terms used in urban New York queer communities. By attributing to Gaillard Lapsley the feminine name of “Aunt Mary,” Codman sends Little a written wink that signals an impression of Lapsley as an effeminate queer man. This private gesturing towards Lapsley on the part of Codman becomes very significant, since such a reference supports A.C. Benson’s later observation that both he and Lapsley shared the same views on “romantic schoolboy friendships.” Thus, while prevailing biographies on Wharton and her inner circle fiercely preserve the view that Lapsley remained a “confirmed bachelor” or suggest that he was heteronormative, the evidence clearly reveals that two of Lapsley’s contemporaries and friends directly identify him in terms of queerness.

Likewise, Codman would provide a similar view of the Sturgis brothers, in his letters to Arthur Little.

The sexual forwardness of Codman and Little in their correspondence may seem somewhat surprising to a modern reader, given the candor of their observations and overt descriptions of the attractive men who caught their attention. Apparently the sons of Russell Sturgis gained their notice, as the two men waited and watched the boys develop into approachable young men. In epistolary exchange during April 1892, Codman and Little discussed the impending visit of the Sturgis family, who were Codman’s cousins 38, and were about to arrive from England. Doyle presents their interchange to a modern audience:

An exchange on the Sturgis family’s approaching visit (they were relations of the Codmans) conveys quite explicitly where both friends’ sexual interests lay. Codman noted: ‘There are two or three boys who are left in

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38 Shari Benstock writes that Howard Sturgis was Codman’s cousin; see page 81.
England at Eton. I think I wish they were coming and the not the girls who are ugly as fiends.” Little’s response adds illumination: “Certainly the Sturgis boys would be much more fun in a sexual way than girls! Girls have such an inconvenient way of wanting to be virgins where as boys are never virgins when they have a right hand and are perfectly formed.” (455)

Here, the eroticization of the Sturgis brothers (the younger two were Julian and Howard, respectively) as expressed in the letters between Codman and Little relies very little on euphemism or cunning double entendres. Instead, Arthur Little tells Codman that his attractive cousins are more sexually appealing than girls, for boys are “never virgins” due to their tendency to masturbate, with their “right hand.” Yet, it is Codman who mentions Eton, the single-sex public school where boys often formed homoerotic attachments to other boys, flirting with sexuality through such performed acts as mutual masturbation, hand-jobs and fellatio, without necessarily crossing the Rubicon into full anal intercourse. Codman writes to Little about his cousins at Eton, knowing that Little would take an interest in erotic tales of boys at English schools. Little had written earlier in January of the same year to Codman that “Bowdoin says English schools are terrors for it [homosexual behavior], he wanted to know if they did much at Harvard!” (468) Aware of the association of same-sex male desire and “romantic schoolboy friendships” (as Benson called them) with the English public school, Codman expresses his wish that it were Julian and Howard who were coming to visit him, rather than the “girls” who he considered “ugly as fiends,” because he most likely suspected that the boys had already been introduced to homoerotic pleasure at Eton. Such comments demonstrate that Codman speculated about the queer sexuality of two individuals who would later become integral members of Wharton’s most intimate group of friends. The word “queer” here becomes extremely important, for Doyle argues that both Codman and Little repeatedly
used the word to signify a homosexual subject position as early as the beginning of the 1890s. Like Haralson's claim that Henry James employed the word "queer" as a preferred term to "homosexual," so, too, does Doyle contend that Codman and Little used the term "queer" to represent same-sex sexuality between men. Doyle continues:

Their use of "queer" certainly referred to the identity of those attracted to their own sex; the examples in the letters are unmistakable on this point. Thus, a word Chauncey has traced back to the 1920s as signifying an identity centered on same-sex attractions was used by Little and Codman at least a full thirty years earlier, beginning in the early 1890s. More than anything else, this linguistic construct indicates a fully developed identity that was surprisingly free from the ignorance, fear and guilt that has so long been held as representative of same-sex attractions from this period. (475-6)

By focusing on the open and consistent use of the word "queer" in the Codman/Little correspondence, Doyle counters the prevailing historical interpretation that this period remained one of fear and furtiveness for men who experienced same-sex desire. His essay provides a case study of two queer men who openly discussed their desire for other men and related their suspicions of who they felt shared their sensibilities. More importantly, Doyle reveals that Ogden Codman "was relatively daring and open in communicating his desires" for other men and that he "could afford to be bold because his mainstream gender behavior placed him above suspicion" (451). In other words, by mastering the codes of heteronormative behavior, Codman could outwardly have the appearance of a heterosexual man, while privately maintaining his real identity as queer man, which in turn allowed him more freedoms in terms of his same-sex desire.

When Wharton hired Codman in the spring of 1895—only a year after Codman's remark about Lapsley in his letter to Little—to work on her home Land's End, in Newport, Rhode Island, he had become the hottest new architect in the town, the architect...
de jour. Earlier in 1894, the Cornelius Vanderbilts commissioned Codman to “decorate ten bedrooms on the upper floors of The Breakers”; Edith Wharton and her husband learned of Codman most likely through their friends the Vanderbilts, whom they visited (Benstock 79). Soon afterward, Wharton enlisted Codman’s help in adding a new glass veranda to Land’s End, and their work together over the next two years culminated in The Decoration of Houses. During her collaboration with Codman, Wharton apparently felt comfortable enough in her friendship to pay his cousin Howard Sturgis a visit during an eight month European tour in 1896: “In May they [the Whartons] spent ten days in Venice and attended a Tiepolo exhibition; they then went to Paris before crossing the channel to England to stay with Codman’s cousin, Howard Sturgis, at Windsor” (81). Wharton’s “stay” with Howard Sturgis in 1896 in Windsor suggests that she must have formed more than just an acquaintance with Codman’s cousin, despite the fact that it would not be until 1904 that their friendship would deepen. Wharton had already developed an easy relationship with Codman—she affectionately called him “Coddy” and named herself “Mrs. Pusscod.” Though she and Codman were estranged for an estimated ten years after his work on The Mount, Codman reentered her life and resumed the friendship; it would eventually be at Codman’s chateau where Wharton would suffer the stroke, on June 1st, 1937, that led to her death, months later on August 11th. Given both Codman and Howard Sturgis’ identification with a markedly queer subject position and considerable openness about the feelings for other men with close friends, as demonstrated in their personal writing, I believe that Wharton would have been privy to an understanding of their relationships with other men. Certainly, Wharton’s connection to and association with these men prepared her for her eventual and most important
friendship with Henry James, for she could sense in James the same queer interiority she observed in their mutual friend Sturgis.

The 1998 publication *Improper Bostonians: Lesbian and Gay History from the Puritans to Playland*, compiled by The History Project as a result of an exhibition “Public Faces/Private Lives: Boston’s Lesbian and Gay History” at the Boston Public Library in 1996, provides a detailed assembly of figures and events that make up an alternative history of Boston life over three hundred years. By focusing on the “rich contributions” of gay men and lesbian women within Boston history, The History Project supplements a traditional heteronormative perspective of the past with the evidence of a long-ignored history, which shows that Boston men and women experienced a queer interiority and subject position prior to the coining of any term that signified their sexual difference. Among the important people listed and described, both Ogden Codman and his brother, Thomas Newbold Codman, are included. While Codman’s connection to Wharton and *The Decoration of Houses* are duly noted, his brother remains most well-known for being “a music critic and amateur photographer whose papers include a notable collection of male erotica” (87). Both Codman and his brother belonged to a Boston Brahmin family with a firm position in upper-class society. Codman is described alongside his close friend, Daniel Berkeley Updike, who was so “inspired by the aesthetic movement” that he founded his own printing house, the Merrymount Press. In

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39 The History Project “is a volunteer group of archivists, historians, researchers, writers, designers, and activists committed to uncovering, preserving, and presenting the rich contributions of lesbians and gay men over three and a half centuries of Boston history” (Kane 1).

40 Updike’s allusion to the story of Thomas Morton of Merrymount, as evidenced in the naming of his printing press, carried with it possible associations of queer sexuality that would have been recognized by contemporary readers who understood its meaning. In his essay, “‘Things Fearful to Name’: Sodomy and Buggery in Seventeenth-Century New England,” Robert Oaks suggests that, “There may have been problems with homosexuality in Plymouth as early as the mid-1620s. The well-known story of Thomas Morton of Merrymount could have homosexual overtones. William Bradford’s description of the ‘great
Improper Bostonians, Codman, his brother, and Updike represent queer men who influenced and helped to shape Boston history. According to Benstock in her biography, Wharton initiated contact with Updike through Codman, “convincing” Codman to ask Updike to “design the cover and title page” of The Decoration of Houses. As her relationships with both men grew, creating the pet names for Codman and Updike of “Coddy” and “Upsy,” Wharton came to know both men well, and Updike remained a favored “friend and traveling companion of Codman’s” (86). While Benstock confidently assures her readers that Updike “had been a little in love” with Wharton, such an account of his relationship with Wharton sits at odds with Updike’s inclusion as a queer man from Boston’s history represented in Improper Bostonians. Without any mention of Codman’s romantic attachments to other men, Benstock dismisses his companionship with Updike as strictly platonic, which it well may have been. Yet, Benstock’s direct assumption of heterosexual desire of on the part of Updike for Wharton seems misleading. Benstock claims that Updike “was not yet well acquainted with Edith” in 1897, but Eleanor Dwight, in contrast, dates their first meeting to the previous period when Wharton and her husband were living at Pencraig Cottage (1885-1893). The relationship clearly became an important one, as Updike developed a professional relationship with Wharton in the years that followed.

Oaks elaborates on the “beastly practices of the mad Bacchanalians” Bradford described: “It is not unreasonable to assume that some of those Englishmen voluntarily living in isolation from all women except a few Indians would have practiced homosexuality. For some, it may have been situational, stemming from limited opportunities for heterosexual activity; but, for others, homosexuality may have been the preference, as it undoubtedly was for English pirates in the West Indies later in the century” (269). Given the Updike’s connection to Codman, who actively expressed his desire for other men, the name of Updike’s Merrymount Press becomes all the more fascinating and telling, provided Oaks’ interpretation of the events that involved Thomas Morton. I must thank Sarah Sherman for suggesting that “Merrymount” as a possible allusion to Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “The May-pole of Merrymount,” which led to the discovery of this contextual information.

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In his study of Wharton, R.W.B. Lewis refers to Berkeley Updike as “the stylish craftsman who printed several of Edith Wharton’s early books” (68) and writes that he was “a tall, large-eared, and somewhat provincial young bachelor and Newporter” who “ran his own shop, the Merrymount Press in Boston, and was developing into the best commercial printer the country would ever know” (87). Through an agreement with Scribners, Updike printed six of Edith Wharton’s books and became one of Wharton’s good friends—years later, on June 12th, 1925, Wharton named Updike in a letter as one of the few “surviving intimate friends” she had left in America. When Eleanor Dwight calls Updike a “bachelor” friend of Wharton’s, she reinforces Lewis’ reference to the printer as a “provincial bachelor”—“bachelor,” of course, being a term that could allow queer men to “pass” as heterosexual. Benstock also subscribes to the belief that Updike remained a simple “bachelor,” adding him to the list of other “bachelors” whose company Wharton had sought out: “She had always enjoyed the friendship of bachelors (Walter Berry, Egerton Winthrop, Ogden Codman, Eliot Gregory, Berkeley Updike)” (179). Though the desire to categorize these men as “bachelors” may seem too difficult to resist, such a term can grossly oversimplify and even obscure the truth in regard to these men’s private lives. Oddly, Codman’s and Updike’s queerness never finds mention in any of Wharton’s biographies, despite clear evidence and the intimacy of their close friendships with her, over forty years. Furthermore, when Benstock leaps from Updike’s expressed sentiment that he had cared for Wharton “deeply” to the claim that he had fallen “a little in love” with her, the biographer blurs the line between friendship and romance, by assuming that Updike was straight and Wharton was his object of desire. Biographical assumptions of heteronormativity, combined with gaps or omissions within a particular
history, dangerously present a particular version of Wharton’s life that reifies expectations of compulsory heterosexuality. By ignoring the sexual subject positions of the men who were her closest friends, these biographers (Benstock, Dwight, Lewis) overlook the very cultural context that illuminates Wharton’s relationships with these “comrades.” Taken by themselves, Codman and Updike’s sexuality may not seem so important initially, but when they appear alongside the numerous friendships and contacts that Wharton would create during her literary career, a larger pattern begins to take shape. Is it coincidence that the men Wharton considered her closest friends, her most intimate “comrades,” all shared a similar trait? Could Wharton, with her sharp mind and talent for nuance, have really never picked up on the fact that these men were queer? Wharton’s friendships with Codman, his cousin Howard Sturgis, and Updike, during the mid-1890s prepared her socially and culturally for Henry James’ friendship only a few years later. Clearly, Wharton felt at ease with queer men and identified with their subject position, for she eagerly mastered the cultural “allusions and cross-references” that they used with one another. Wharton—who liked to refer to herself as a “self-made man” and became “confused” about her gender in letters to her friends—always saw herself as different from other women. As a result, the men whose company she most preferred also shared a sense of “otherness” and they created a tightly-knit society that fulfilled particular emotional and intellectual needs.

**Introductions**

The late summer and autumn of 1904 proved extremely important for Edith Wharton in terms of the deepening of several friendships that became the most important ones in her life. Shari Benstock, in her biography of Wharton, *No Gifts from Chance,*
dates Wharton’s introduction to Gaillard Lapsley to August of 1904, when they both attended a dinner held by the Warder sisters—who were friends of Walter Berry’s when he had lived in Washington, D.C.—at their Manchester home in Massachusetts.

Apparently, Lapsley must have impressed Wharton with his conversational skills, for the thirty-three-year-old, who had been a friend of Henry James for several years, had caught her attention and her ear. In his account, R.W.B. Lewis documents that Lapsley “was careful to pronounce his first name ‘Gillyard’” and appeared as “a tall, lanky man with an owlish appearance” (137), when Wharton met him. Lewis’ explanation for the pronunciation of Lapsley’s first name reveals why, in Leon Edel’s edited collection of James’ letters, James almost always orthographically wrote his friend’s name as “Gilliard.” Wharton’s meeting Lapsley represented a very important event, since they forged a lasting friendship that continued until Wharton’s death in 1937; Wharton eventually named Lapsley not only the executor of her estate and will but requested that he be a pall-bearer at her funeral. Percy Lubbock in his much later Portrait of Edith Wharton, published in 1947, recalled the sort of touching friendship that would develop between Wharton and Lapsley:

He had known her at home, in her American days, in her native air, and he seemed to know her differently from the rest of us—to know her as no one could who only beheld her as an event, a meteor from overseas, spreading her train. He appeared by contrast to know her quietly and privately, and when he talked of her the tone struck me; he seemed, even before he admired and applauded her, to be fond of her. (72)

Citing an American setting as the element in which Lapsley had been given the unique opportunity of seeing Wharton in “her native air,” Lubbock, here, suggests that Lapsley had been admitted into an intimate knowledge that occurred “quietly and privately” and which marked their friendship as “different” from those other friendships within her
circle. Lubbock, as we learned, would have been in a keen position to know Lapsley very well—well enough to discern the gradations of his friend’s tone of voice when speaking of others, like Wharton. Lubbock’s observations about Wharton’s relationship with Lapsley, here, seem tinged with a subtle jealousy, since Lubbock’s decision to marry Sybil Cutting had caused an estrangement with Wharton that lasted until her death in 1937. At points in his “portrait” of Wharton, Lubbock remains at a conscious distance, never quite accepted, the “unobtrusive young man” who lingered in the “background” (9)—a watcher of Wharton and the rest of the circle. By accentuating Wharton’s coldness, Lubbock plays into a certain public presentation of his friend, by (re)presenting an expected persona, so to say, that shared little of the private and quiet Wharton. “I had never seen a writer in our old world who kept up such state as she did,” Lubbock writes, “and I couldn’t go faltering up the royal carpet by myself, with my awkward step. It was a little disappointing—a little aggrieving too. But there it was; my place was in the shade” (9).

Lubbock’s “disappointment” and his expression of feeling “in the shade” next to the meteor-like Wharton, who purportedly “kept up such state” in a pompous fashion, skewed his account of their shared social scene. It is difficult to see Lubbock, in such accounts, as an impartial observer of Wharton within the circle, for his dismissive treatment of her as a writer and constant emphasis on her less desirable characteristics—a formidable nature, painful shyness, snobbish treatment of others, aloofness, detachment in friendship (Lubbock contends this detachment led to her preference for male friends), etc.—provide a less than flattering image of his “friend” Edith. Lubbock seemed to believe that James remained the real talent in the circle and, thus, treats Wharton as the
Master’s protégé, reinforcing the very characterization that Wharton abhorred. Though one must certainly value the views of such a witness of Wharton within her circle, Lubbock’s resentment, despite how tactfully or subtly presented, seeps through his patronizing and even biting biography of her. Lubbock does reveal certain images and details about the friends who met at Queen’s Acre that help one better understand the dynamic of their intermingling relationships, but he had not yet met Wharton in the autumn of 1904, although some of his later observations help flesh out what might have happened at the Mount that fateful October.

A little past the middle of October, in 1904, Henry James and Howard Sturgis arrived at the Mount—Wharton’s little “chateau” nestled in the heart of the Berkshires, in Lenox, Massachusetts. James had asked Wharton, earlier in September, if both he and Sturgis could visit her there, a request posed in a letter written from James’ brother William’s summer place in Chocorua, New Hampshire. On September 4th, James petitioned, “I shld. like of all things to be with you at the same time as dear Howard S.— & even, since you give me such license—at the same time as no one else. Kindly mention your date at your convenience, & I am meanwhile making as few engagements as possible” (Powers 37). Given the brouhaha surrounding Sturgis’ novel, towards the beginning of the year, and Wharton’s kindness demonstrated towards Howard during that time, a culpable James wisely arranged to share with Sturgis his stay at Wharton’s home. The next day, on September 5th, James would write a letter to Sturgis to confirm that he would time his visit to The Mount to coincide with his own: “I can’t stand an hour longer on this strange soil without doing something, however slight, that shall make for a
renewed relation with you: wherefore let this mere wild ‘waggle’\textsuperscript{41} serve. We must meet, we must mingle, we must talk—& I hope, dearly, that next month will allow us a margin for some indulgence” (138). Then, he uses a metaphor that has James expressing a desire to “eat,” which could be taken both figuratively and literally (in a sexual context), the younger Howard: “Mrs. Wharton has held you out to me as bait at Lenox and I have opened my mouth wide to the prospect of the same 2 or 3 days” (138). I find James’ repeated images of feasting upon Howard—here, as “bait,” later as a “richly sugared cake”—indicative of a playful flirtation that James felt comfortable expressing in his letters and conversation with and about Sturgis. The plan of a shared visit at The Mount seemed like a great idea, as Howard was known for making any social event all the more delightful by his simple attendance. Wanting to “renew” his relationship with Sturgis, James carefully arranged for their shared time when staying with Wharton, clearly demonstrating that their October sojourn would be of great import to James.

Accepting James’ proposal to have both James and Sturgis as simultaneous guests, Wharton would prepare her charming home to receive the two authors and men of letters. As regarded Sturgis, Wharton affectionately called him the “kindest and strangest of men” (Lewis 141), stressing how different he was from other men she knew. Yet, Howard had a way of bringing out such mirth and wit in Edith that usually resulted in ringing bursts of laughter. Ever an outside observer, Percy Lubbock, provides an intimate view of the dynamic that existed between the trio of James, Wharton, and

\textsuperscript{41} In his letter to Sturgis, written on March 4\textsuperscript{th}, 1900, in which he writes about the “lemon-coloured” covered book he gave to Sturgis as a gift, he begins the missive by adopting an oddly childlike and playful type of language: “Henry quite basks & waggles his head to be scratched, in the pleasant warmth of it.” It is in this same letter that James would write the double entendre of “our so happy little congress of two,” with “congress” meaning “coitus.” James’ use of the word “waggle” in this later letter certainly must hearken back to the earlier one.
Sturgis, which might have applied to their visit with each other at the Mount that October. In his description of their triangulated conversation, Lubbock posits Wharton between her two friends:

With Henry and Howard on either side of her she hadn’t a moment to lose; she seized the hour for such a play of talk with two such talkers, both giving her their best. It was for Henry to begin. He began, as usual, long before he reached the beginning; and she watched and waited, on the edge of laughter, while he plotted his course, while he hesitated and cast around over the vast field of possible utterance, the jungle of expression in which he must presently select the one shape of words, the one image, it might be the one epithet that would suit him—while his eyes grew rounder and larger with their rolling twinkle as he foresaw his discovery and relished his approaching success: wait, wait! he seemed to say—you shall enjoy this with me in a moment—give me time! (4)

In this part of his scene, Lubbock focuses on James and his characteristic mode of speech, which would strike some others as affectation or arrogance, making others wait to hear the witticisms (building up suspense through such delays in conversation).

Wharton would later dispel these misleading interpretations of James’ speech habits, in A Backward Glance, by confiding that James long fought a speech impediment, a strongly pronounced stutter, which caused him, self-consciously, to take long pauses when speaking to conversational partners. Here, in Lubbock’s presentation, these long pauses would allow James, with his large, round eyes that twinkled and rolled as he spoke, to dramatically “plot” the course of his expression—choosing the “one shape of words,” the “one image” or the “one epithet” that would reward his listener. Wharton would wait patiently, and almost amusedly, for James to wend his verbal way through some great drollery that resulted in laughter. Unlike James, Wharton did not hesitate in responding, as she had an arsenal of come-backs that would be ready for immediate use. Lubbock continues:
She waited, still precariously on the edge, all alert to receive it. Out it came, the period achieved, with a gathering momentum, and she snatched it away with her peal of mirth and carried it off in a further, wilder, airier flight. There was no hesitation in her; everything she possessed was at her finger's end, as quick as she needed it. She knew all that she thought, all that she remembered or fancied; she never had to look for the right thing, it was there; and her laugh, high and sharp, was cut short by the word that darted to meet the next challenge, the next absurdity—caught and returned in one movement. (4)

Lubbock reveals the acuity of Wharton's mind and her mental agility in thinking of the right thing to say at the right time, an incredibly useful conversational skill. Also particularly revealing in this image of Wharton is her willingness to "let herself go" among her friends, laughing almost uncontrollably. Lubbock not only writes that she would "snatch" up James' comments with a "peal of mirth," but that she, never missing a beat, would provide a droll quip of her own, to be followed by "her laugh, high and sharp." Within his depiction of the conversational exchange between James and Wharton—a snappy sort of repartee—Lubbock emphasized Wharton's claim in A Backward Glance that she and James shared the same sense of humor. The image of the two friends laughing together provides telling evidence of the nature of their relationship.

Within her own memoir, Wharton repeatedly reinforces a particular portrait of James that she regretted biographies and other depictions of him failed to capture—the impish and campy James who loved a good joke. Wharton confides that James' letters provided clues to his playful conversation, but that without the proper contexts, such writing failed to emit the lively spark that so characterized his dialogue with close friends. Since the letters could "give but hints and fragments of his talk," Wharton tried to describe the way he would communicate with intimate confreres. She claims that confabulations with James led to "the talk that, to his closest friends, when his health and
the surrounding conditions were favourable, poured out in a series of images so vivid and appreciations so penetrating, the whole sunned over by irony, sympathy and wide-flashing fun” (179). Furthermore, James would rely on close friends like Wharton and Sturgis to play along and add to the comical mode of discourse that would ensue, comprised of “old heaped-up pyramidal jokes” and “huge cairns of hoarded nonsense” (179). Certainly, Wharton felt comfortable in such a role as one accomplice to the elaborate flights of whimsy that defined the banter James would encourage, not only in person, but in correspondence. “Henry James’s memory for a joke was prodigious,” remembers Wharton, “when he got hold of a good one, he not only preserved it piously, but raised upon it an intricate superstructure of kindred nonsense, into which every addition offered by a friend was skilfully incorporated” (179). The hyperbolic language Wharton employs, here, with her image of the “intricate superstructure of kindred nonsense,” emphasizes James’ ability to use language in interestingly playful ways. Hugh Walpole, in 1928, would echo this view of James: “I knew him only during the last ten years of his life. I loved him, was frightened of him, was bored by him, was staggered by his wisdom and stupefied by his intricacies, altogether enslaved by his kindness, generosity, the child-like purity of his affections, his unswerving loyalties, his sly and Puck-like sense of humour” (qtd in Edel 402). Calling James’ sense of humor “sly” and “Puck-like”—with the allusion to Shakespeare’s Puck, here, of course, knowingly signifying “fairy,” a popular queer slang term—Walpole provides a clue as to the type of joking and playful sparring James would demonstrate, adding a more overtly recognizable queer element to Wharton’s description. More recent critics have reexamined James’ playful mode of speech in his letters for a distinct queer mode of
expression known as “camp,” suggesting that the well-informed Henry James used camp, a notable type of jest and elaborate humor, to resist a dominant heterosexual culture that prohibited undisguised and more lucid forms of queer self-expression.

Hugh Stevens, in his article “Queer Henry In the Cage,” seems to accept this non-traditional image of James as offered by friends like Wharton, and Hugh Walpole, who witnessed the Master of camp’s playful side. Though in his essay Stevens focuses mainly on James’ piece In the Cage, the critic’s treatment of James provides an interesting way of reading the man himself. Stevens centers on a Henry James who played the role of “the playful erotic punner, the teaser,” who took “pleasure in weaving a polyvalent erotic web which flickers between revelation and concealment” (132), positing such eroticism within expression of same-sex male desire. Later, in his insightful study Henry James and Sexuality, Stevens extends the ideas he proposes in his article, demonstrating that James’ “polyvalent erotic web” developed into camp itself. In his discussion of James’ letters to younger men, Stevens explains why James would utilize what he terms “camp affirmation”:

In his correspondence, however, James fashions himself in the spirit of camp affirmation. Sweeping aside the materiality and physicality of detail and fact, the letters—whether to A.C. Benson, Morton Fullerton, Howard Sturgis, Jonathan Sturges, Jocelyn Persse, Hugh Walpole or Gaillard Lapsley—lavishly construct a fantasy of absolute devotion to the beautiful object. Whether the object reciprocates affection is of no importance, for James is the adorer, he emphasizes the beloved’s charms, not his own. Physical expressions of affection are unchecked in these camp epistolary outpourings. (167)

The exaggerated language that James uses to express his affectionate feelings for younger men becomes directly linked by Stevens to the queer notions of “camp affirmation.” The Oxford English Dictionary defines the slang adjective “camp,” within this context, to
mean “ostentatious, exaggerated, affected, theatrical; pertaining to or characteristic of homosexuals,” while the noun signifies “‘camp’ behaviour, mannerisms; a man exhibiting such behaviour.” Dating the word’s emergence in print to 1909, the OED shows how “camp” becomes inextricably bound up in images of “homosexuals,” as noted in behavior, mannerisms, and even speech. Of the list of younger men that Stevens names, to whom James had adopted a camp affirmative tone, at least five would belong to the same social set, while three of those men would eventually become integral members of Wharton’s “Inner Circle.” As members of the Qu’Acre set, these men were not only close friends but involved in charged and even romantic relationships with one another. James, The Master, may have been the center of this set of queer men, but Morton Fullerton’s bisexuality was the “glue” that held the group together and Wharton’s initiation into this circle represents something much deeper than a simple literary discipleship. Lubbock’s detailed scene offers an intriguing perspective as to why Wharton might have been so drawn to queer men like James and Sturgis:

Here, in such talk, she let herself go; here was freedom and breathable air and the joy of exercise; and her companions encouraged her—they admiringly, half-indulgently, entertained and courted her to her heart’s content. It was more than a game of play, if you looked at them; it was like a sort of concerto, a concourse of instruments supporting the guest of humour. Henry James accompanied her with the whole weight of his orchestra. Howard Sturgis joined in with his nimble descant, so deceptively simple—joined in or dropped out as he chose; his way was always his own, whatever he did. (4-5)

Just as James signaled to Sturgis that they could “communicate freely,” since they both were of a certain likeness—here, a queer sensibility—Lubbock claims that Wharton could “let herself go” with these two men in the “freedom and breathable air” of their company. Claiming that James and Sturgis “encouraged her” and even “admiringly, half-
indulgently, entertained and courted her to her heart’s content,” Lubbock’s description emphasizes Wharton’s ease and acceptance with these men. Though Wharton remained biologically female, she saw herself in terms of an interiorized masculine queerness, with needs that only this group could possibly have fulfilled, due to a shared understanding of queerness. Lubbock provides a further clue when he writes: “It was once said of Edith Wharton, and she liked and repeated the remark, that she was a ‘self-made man’” (11). Certainly, her close friendships with queer men would help to shape the kind of the “self-made man” she eventually became.

**Reading Whitman**

During that memorable visit in October 1904, Wharton, James and Sturgis would learn a great deal about each other; the old friendship between James and Sturgis found renewal and a new beginning, Wharton began to find a kindred spirit and a new “comrade” in the older James, and Sturgis continued to entertain both Wharton and James, with all three experiencing a new level of camaraderie. R.W.B. Lewis claims that prior to his visit to The Mount, Sturgis remained more a Wharton acquaintance than a close friend, suggesting that during his stay something changed within their relationship: “She had known him since a meeting in Newport, not long after her marriage, but by the fall of 1904 she had not yet taken the measure of his delicately charged personality” (141). Asserting that this visit was the time during which Sturgis “won over” Wharton, Lewis suggests that all three found the conversation charming and each other’s presence delightful. Susan Goodman, too, in her *Edith Wharton’s Inner Circle*, signals this visit as a crucial time during which Wharton’s friendships with both men were starting to blossom. Goodman describes James and Sturgis’ stay at The Mount as a flurry of
activity—“motor trips every afternoon, picnics by the lake, tea in the garden, ‘evening
talks on the moonlit terrace and readings around the library fire’” (19). Given the idyllic
setting in the Berkshire countryside, James and Sturgis could enjoy the vibrant beauty of
New England foliage, a perfect complement to the colorful conversation that would occur
during that October. On one particular evening, Wharton and James learned that they
shared a passion for Walt Whitman’s poetry, and James read aloud certain poems from
Leaves of Grass.

The famous night of the Whitman poetry reading has become a popular tale in
Whartonian folklore—a moment when the mellow-voiced James crooned the lines of
Whitman to an enraptured audience. For R.W.B. Lewis, this event would stand as a
milestone in American literature, with the great Henry James finally recognizing the
worth of a quintessentially American author. Within Lewis’ treatment of James’ poetry
reading, Whitman’s words as spoken by James remain benignly literary, removed from
any context of queerness: “James read at length from Whitman’s Leaves of Grass, an
unforgettable occasion. James and Edith agreed in finding Whitman the greatest of
American poets, and they talked about him long into the night, exchanging favorite
passages” (140). Yet, the way that Wharton herself describes learning of James’ love of
Whitman betrays her feelings that such a discovery was pivotal. In A Backward Glance,
Wharton would recall:

Another day some one spoke of Whitman, and it was a joy to me to
discover that James thought him, as I did, the greatest of American poets.
“Leaves of Grass” was put into his hands, and all that evening we sat rapt
while he wandered from “The Song of Myself” to “When the lilacs in the
door-yard last bloomed” (when he read “Lovely and soothing Death” his
voice filled the hushed room like an organ adagio), and thence let himself
be lured on to the mysterious music of “Out of the Cradle,” reading, or
rather crooning it in a mood of subdued ecstasy till the fivefold invocation

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to Death tolled out like the knocks in the opening bars of the Fifth Symphony. (186)

Here, Wharton emphasizes the dramatic reaction of the listeners who were blessed with hearing the “organ adagio” of James’ melodic voice reading Whitman’s verse. The “rapt” audience, who remained in a “hushed room,” witnessed the “subdued ecstasy” of James’ “crooning” the lines of poems—an event Wharton describes with the intensity and reverence of an almost religious experience. Not only did Wharton spend “all evening” listening to James’ reading of *Leaves of Grass*, but they would share their favorite pieces with each other, discussing them well into the night. “We talked long that night of “Leaves of Grass,” Wharton writes, “tossing back and forth to each other treasure after treasure” (186). The “treasures” that Wharton and James privately shared were poems, with Wharton finding their common love for Whitman an intellectual space where their “intelligences” could “walk together like gods” (186). This is incredibly powerful language to describe the writing of a still controversial poet like Whitman, whose poetry had long been linked, to a homosexual male literary tradition. Though Lewis chooses to see the famed Whitman poetry reading as a high moment in the history of American literature, a symbolic act of recognition and nationalistic pride on the part of a reluctant Henry James, such a reading fails to acknowledge Whitman’s placement within contemporary queer literature and culture—an important aspect of that reading.

Given James’ reading of J.A. Symonds’ *A Study in Modern Ethics*, which his good friend Edmund Gosse had sent him in 1893, the Master would certainly have known of Symonds’ earlier work, *A Study of Greek Ethics*, although only ten copies had been printed in 1883. It would be reprinted as an appendix to Havelock Ellis’ *Sexual Inversion*, in 1897. The copies of *Sexual Inversion* with Symonds’ appendix would be
immediately suppressed, but new copies of *A Study of Greek Ethics* would circulate from two limited printing runs of 100 each, in 1901. Even though the copies were supposedly numbered, extant unnumbered printings of book have been found, indicating that the final tally of copies was actually greater. Since James had known of and reviewed Symonds’ *A Study in Modern Ethics*, it is certainly likely that he had known of or possibly even perused the pages of Symonds’ *A Study of Greek Ethics*, Ellis’ *Sexual Inversion* with Symonds’ appendix, or Symonds’ 1893 *Walt Whitman: A Study*. Symonds’ pioneering work on the study of male homosexuality included an examination of Whitman’s “Calamus” poems from his *Leaves of Grass*, which, according to Symonds, idealized same-sex male desire and “comradeship” as a positive masculine tradition, as seen in the ancient Greek practice of “paiderastia.” Symonds locates Whitman in terms of a male homosexual literary tradition, in *A Study of Greek Ethics*: “No man in the modern world has expressed so strong a conviction that ‘manly attachment,’ ‘athletic love,’ ‘the high towering love of comrades,’ is a main factor in human life, a virtue upon which society will have to rest, and a passion equal in its permanence and attention to sexual affection” (185). The emphasis on words like “manly,” “athletic,” and “high towering,” demonstrate that Whitman’s concept of “comradeship” provided not only positive characteristics of same-sex male desire but suggested that such desire had only extremely beneficial and healthy effects on men. As Whitman’s poetry had in part awakened in Symonds’ his own awareness of same-sex male desire, the paradigm of masculine love as exemplified in Whitman’s representation of comradeship in his “Calamus” poems figures largely here:

> The language of ‘Calamus’ (that section of ‘Leaves of Grass’ which is devoted to the gospel of comradeship) has a passionate glow, a warmth of
emotional tone, beyond anything to which the modern world is used in the celebration of love of friends. It recalls to our mind the early Greek enthusiasm—that fellowship in arms which flourished among Dorian tribes, and made a chivalry for prehistoric Hellas. (186)

In this passage, Symonds’ directly relates Whitman’s concept of masculine comradeship to flattering ideals of an ancient Greek past—the “fellowship in arms” of the “Dorian tribes” and the “chivalry” of “prehistoric Hellas.” Linda Dowling explains that, for Symonds, Whitman’s “Calamus” poems furthered a positive rendering of Dorian comradeship, first found in K.O. Müller’s Dorians, which provided a powerful counter-rhetoric and discourse that fought against homophobic readings of effeminacy in male homosexuality. “Dorian comradeship, especially as this ideal had been unconsciously but completely realized by Whitman in the ‘Calamus’ poems of Leaves of Grass,” Dowling contends, “could strengthen the foundation, as Symonds believed, upon which ‘to regenerate political life and to cement nations,’ by imparting to the amorphous old dreams of democratic ‘fraternity’ a new basis in men’s bodily experience” (130).

Clearly, for Symonds, Whitman’s poetry stood as a powerful contribution to his defense of pederasty, with the writer himself as identified as the “most Greek” man of his age. James, who remained so evidently interested in Symonds’ writing as well as aware of contemporary queer culture, certainly would have known of Whitman’s association with positive treatments of homosexual male love in literature. This key element—the

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42 No doubt, Dowling, here alludes to Symonds’ epistolary exchange with Whitman, where Symonds frankly asked Whitman to explain his views on “comradeship” as connected to same-sex male sexuality. Graham Robb contends that Whitman’s infamously emphatic denial, and subsequent rebuttal with the confirmation of his alleged heterosexuality (he claimed to have fathered six illegitimate children), resulted from a fear of being publicly “outed.” Robb writes: “The few writers whose works left the closet and who were recognized as homosexuals issued denials whenever someone tried to state the obvious. Walt Whitman had learned to stop worrying about his ‘FEVERISH, fluctuating, useless undignified pursuit of 16.4—too long persevered in’ and enjoyed a love affair of many years with Peter Doyle (16.4=P.D.) . . . But when Symonds naively asked him to clarify his position on ‘the intimate and physical love between comrades and lovers,’ Whitman not surprisingly pulled down the blinds” (136).
"Calamus" section of *Leaves of Grass*—cannot be ignored when considering what it was exactly that would keep James and Wharton talking long into the night.

In his study, Eric Haralson looks to James’ reading of Whitman’s poetry at The Mount as a performance that would signal something of the writer’s sexuality, in the scholar’s mission to “historicize Jamesian ‘gayness.’” When James’ characteristically melodious voice soothingly chanted Whitman’s verse, clearly he was moved by the words he was reading, having found deeper meaning in the lines. This remembered oratorical moment, on the part of Wharton, revealed to her a private side to James that had long remained hidden behind a public persona. Wharton was allowed, for the first time, to see the face underneath the “veil” or “mask,” as a witness to the display of emotion evoked in the Master by the poems within *Leaves of Grass*. Haralson writes, “As one learns from Edith Wharton’s memoirs, Henry James was among those who resonated—quite literally—to Whitman’s vibrations” (39). The “literal resonance,” here, that Haralson identifies stems from a shared feeling of same-sex desire on the part of James, as a vibratory echo of Whitman. Positioning Whitman and his poetry within a homosexual male literary tradition, Haralson questions whether James’ voice, within Wharton’s recollected scene, would have been “understood” as “queer.” Haralson enquires: “Is James’s voice to be understood, then, as a queer one, or as a marker of sexuality, either in playing its own airs—in prose and in life—or during his duet of sorts with Whitman for Wharton’s benefit?” (40) Not wanting to attempt to answer a rhetorical question, I will venture to offer my own assessment of this scene. Provided James’ and Sturgis’ knowledge of and participation in a homosexual male literary tradition, I find James’ performance to have signaled, as Wharton suggested, the personal
depth with which James' understood and identified with Whitman's poetry. Leon Edel supposes, “He [James] had indeed made his peace with Whitman in the long years since the Civil War. Perhaps it was a result of his renewed vision of America, the touching of old emotions; or Whitman’s homoeroticism” (255). Edel’s gesturing towards Whitman’s impassioned same-sex male desire in his poetry, as the cause for James’ newfound “peace” with Whitman, appropriately marks the American poet as a dominant influence in queer culture from the late Victorian period.

In The Male Tradition: A History of Gay Literature, Gregory Woods claims that Whitman became the “most influential modern homosexual writer in late nineteenth-century Britain,” predominantly read and alluded to by men from this period who were considered “the first generation of homosexuals” (177). Woods contends, “In the last years of his life, the most enthusiastic readers of Whitman’s poetry were not Americans at all, but Englishmen. And it was not primarily for the innovation of his poetic line that they read him, but for his exuberant homo-eroticism” (176-7). Woods emphasis on Whitman’s contribution to the evolution of the social construct of the modern male homosexual underscores a key aspect of James’ appreciation of Leaves of Grass. As a man who became more consciously aware of his own preference for the company of younger men, James, during his visit to Wharton’s home in October 1904, found that Whitman’s poetry provided a means for sharing his queer interiority to Wharton and his other friends. Certainly, Howard Sturgis would have been receptive to James’ reading of Whitman’s poems, for he himself had read and contributed to a homosexual male literary tradition, but the “test” would be the reactions of Wharton and her friend Walter Berry. The experiment was a success. Though Wharton never directly cites one of the
“Calamus” poems as one of the ones James “crooned,” we do know that they both talked for “hours” after his dramatic reading, sharing their “favourites” from the volume with one another. By not naming these “favourites” in *A Backward Glance*, Wharton, even decades later, continued to protect Henry James from a resistant homophobic audience that might read her memoir⁴³, while simultaneously revealing James’ queerness to those initiated, those friendly and knowing readers who picked up on Whitman’s significance in terms of queer culture. The famous reading of Whitman’s poems by James carries great significance for Wharton, and she describes the event as when their two “intelligences” could “walk together as gods”—with the word “gods” a reference to Hellenism—for she dated their common understanding of one another from this visit. Graham Robb writes: “From the 1860s, in Britain and America, Walt Whitman was probably the commonest key to further intimacy, the ‘password primeval’ that could be ‘flashed out’ ‘to such as alone could understand’” (144). Calling Whitman “a very great genius,” James and Wharton discovered a common admiration of and identification with the queer male subjectivity beautifully described in Whitman’s lines. Yet, why would such an outwardly hyper-feminine woman share the same identification with Henry James, whose masculine desire for other men marked him as queer?

The most prominent of Wharton’s biographers all support the view that Wharton certainly saw her artistic self as male and that she identified with a masculine intellectual subject position. In his “portrait” of Wharton, Lubbock lends considerable weight to this

⁴³Any overt mention of the scandalous “Calamus” poems could have marked James a “Calamite” (a pejorative slang term that meant “a homosexual man,” derived from Whitman’s infamous collection of homoerotic verse within his *Leaves of Grass*), which would have provided a reason as to why Wharton made no direct allusion to these poems. We know that Wharton felt protective of the privacy of her closest friends, but at the same time she left clues that hinted at the real identities of these men, providing more accurate representations of them. What ensued was a playful use of language “of allusion and cross-reference” that placed within the correct contexts exposed their users’ queerness to outside readers able to understand them, readers aware and knowledgeable in queer culture.
observation. As an intimate friend allowed into Wharton’s circle, Lubbock emphasizes the vexed duality embodied by Wharton, who possessed both a “very feminine consciousness” and a “very masculine mind,” as a sort of queer figure in relation to gender construction:

More than one of her friends have already noted, without surprise, that she preferred the company of men; and indeed there were some obvious reasons why she should, two of the more obvious being that she had a very feminine consciousness and a very masculine mind. She liked to be surrounded by the suit of an attentive court, and she liked to be talked to as a man; and both likings were gratified in a world of men and talk . . . She perhaps felt safer with men—safer from the claims and demands of a personal relation. (54)

Even Leon Edel, James’ most prominent biographer, suggested that Wharton’s masculinity led to her surrounding herself with the almost exclusive company of men, as she would have felt more comfortable in an atmosphere similar to the one within which she grew up: “The male circle which framed her childhood led Edith Jones to have more men friends than women, during her lifetime, and they were always men high in the life of the country” (200). In his characterization of Wharton, Edel accentuates the masculine aspects of her personality that had become openly acknowledged among the friends she knew best. Edel continues: “It was said of her that she brought a man’s strength to the sympathy and solicitude of a woman, and a man’s organizing power to a woman’s interest in dress and the decoration of houses” (210). What Edel cites as Wharton’s “woman’s interest” in “dress” and “the decoration of houses” correlates to the notorious mastering of “womanly arts” (e.g. couture fashion, cuisine, gardening, embroidery, interior design, etc.) on the part of the modern queer man.

Scholars like Lewis, Benstock, and Goodman have all provided nuanced portraits of Wharton, in their respective biographies, that reveal the inner complexity of a woman
whose gender construction challenged traditional views of womanhood. Yet both Lewis and Benstock’s studies of Wharton seem to ignore the sexual orientation of the men to whom the writer would feel most connected. While Benstock does write about James’ desire for Fullerton, she assumes that Wharton never knew the full extent of Fullerton’s bisexuality and remained fairly ignorant of the same-sex desire expressed by James, Sturgis, Lapsley and Lubbock—much like her ignorance of Codman and Updike’s sexualities. By using the innocuous description of “bachelors,” members of Wharton’s inner circle have been allowed to “pass,” within Lewis and Benstock’s histories, as non-traditional heterosexual men. A sort of historical and literary “closet” of sorts has been imposed upon their lives, a “closet” constructed of misleading information and politic omission. Lewis claims that Wharton, though she disapproved of male homosexuality, seemed to “tolerate,” inconsistently, queer men, at a distance: “Upon male homosexuals, whom she referred to collectively as the ‘The Brotherhood,’ she cast a generally knowing and tolerant eye” (443). Lewis goes on to cite a conversation during which Wharton informed John Hugh Smith that a new friend she had recently met “looked rather like ‘a homo,’” as “he was ‘certainly swamped in sex, and will probably untergehen to that,” though she remained friends with the man in question44. Despite the evidence that Wharton’s closest friends were queer, Lewis suggests that the writer remained largely homophobic, only “tolerating” the company of homosexual men. Interestingly, Benstock, too, subscribes to the belief that Wharton only “tolerated” male homosexuality

44 Given Wharton’s acceptance and indentification with queer men, I find it very difficult to believe that Wharton’s use of the word “homo” carried with it a pejorative meaning, here. I believe that Wharton may have used this word as a slang term to Smith, as a permissible reference to male queerness that they both understood. Her concern about “untergehen” (succumbing or “falling under” in a sense) to same-sex desire had more to do a perceived excess of sensuality (linked more directly to Decadence and Oscar Wilde) than a rejection of male homosexuality, in my opinion. Since Wharton carried on the friendship with the man she memorably observed, I find it unlikely that Wharton’s conversation with Smith had the malicious intent of bigotry and stigmatization.
from a distance and remained fairly oblivious to the connections and expressions of same-sex desire that occurred within her own inner circle. In her account of Wharton during her later years in Paris, Benstock, in her Women of the Left Bank, writes: “In the salons that Edith Wharton attended, male homosexuality would indeed have been regarded as a sign of the moral bankruptcy of contemporary culture” (60). Transposing the prejudices of Faubourg society onto Wharton, Benstock leads her readers to believe that Wharton would have accepted the homophobic view of male homosexuality as a “vice as well as an illness” (60), as a part of the “preserved aristocratic prejudices” that she upheld. Though Benstock acknowledges Wharton’s peculiar trait of surrounding herself with the practically exclusive attention of men friends, she glosses over the fact that many of these men in fact were “homosexual.” Something in this line of logic fails. If Wharton—a genius in her own right, as a master of several modern languages, a prolific writer and scholar of philosophy, psychology, and ancient history—had a first-rate intelligence and a keenly sharp mind, is it really possible that she could have remained so prodigiously ignorant of the atmosphere of same-sex male desire that enveloped her? Could she truly have entered into an “inner circle” almost exclusively comprised of queer men and have never “picked up” on their sexuality? Wharton’s own letters and memoirs—richly full of allusion and witty wordplay related to queer culture—prove that she understood her intimate friends and had an acute awareness of their personal and sexual preferences. Of these three biographers—Lewis, Benstock, and Goodman—it is Susan Goodman who begins the acknowledgement of Wharton’s place within a group of non-heteronormative men.
Though Goodman, who in her study *Edith Wharton's Inner Circle*, describes the Qu’Acre set as a group of men, apart from Wharton, who were “asexual, homosexual, or otherwise inclined not to wed,” she does not see such descriptors as specifically representative of queerness (i.e. where people are marked as “queer” through their resistance toward the expectations of compulsory heterosexuality). Goodman acknowledges that these men would have been considered “different” or “abnormal” in that they chose not to marry during the time of their friendship with Wharton—Percy Lubbock would be the only one to marry during Wharton’s lifetime. Interestingly, Goodman, in her analysis, seems to leave out full consideration or treatment of bisexuality and the bisexual men who played an important role in Wharton’s life—men like Fullerton, Walter Berry, Lubbock and Geoffrey Scott—whose dual sexuality occurred as a result of having to reconcile same-sex desire with the terrible pressure exerted by a dominant heterosexual culture. In other words, many men who could not openly identify themselves as queer chose instead to marry women and tried to become heterosexual in order to comply with the dominant culture; often, the result was the double life of the publicly heterosexual but privately homosexual man. Yet, in her account of the inner circle, Goodman does propose that Wharton sought out the company of these “sexless” or “homosexual” men for a good reason: “Men who were sexless or homosexual did not threaten either stance [of author and subject] and may have even given Wharton a secret sense of heterosexual superiority. In turn, the men of the inner circle, who viewed Wharton with affectionate skepticism, chauvinistically took their superiority for granted” (26). This claim, purported by Goodman, suggests that both Wharton and her closest men friends maintained a respectful distance from each other,
motivated by a sense of "superiority" in terms of either sexuality or gender. Despite the fact that Goodman addresses, even if fairly briefly, the private sexual lives of the different men who made up Wharton's inner circle in terms of non-heteronormativity, she reinforces the idea that Wharton remained, again, merely tolerant of the apparent sexualities— asexuality, homosexuality or "prolonged bachelorhood"— of these men. Such a view is misleading history: Wharton as a homophobe, or incredibly oblivious, pretending to ignore her friends' sexual preferences and partners, because of her puritanical and aristocratic upbringing. Such an interpretation of Wharton reduces her to the narrow-minded, straight-laced, and pretentious snob that outsiders perceived and does little to approximate who she truly was with her intimate friends. As a result, the image of Wharton presented in such a portrait is two-dimensional, leaving an important part of who she was— her interiorized self— hidden. By examining Wharton's complex relationships with these queer men, we can begin to see how Wharton truly remained a fascinatingly complicated woman, revealing to these friends a private internal self that differed greatly from the bodily performance of the grand dame she presented to her public. More recent scholars have been reexamining Wharton's works in terms of queerness and suggest that Wharton indeed picked up on key ideas within queer culture; Kenneth M. Price, for example, looks at Whitman's concept of comradeship as it appeared in Wharton's life and fiction— as a key model for same-sex male desire.

In his study To Walt Whitman, America, Kenneth M. Price, as referenced earlier in this study, asserts that Wharton knowingly understood Whitman's construction of "comradeship" and perceived Whitman to be a "liberator of the psychically oppressed," as a writer who would "overthrow the burden of the genteel tradition" (37). According to
Price, Whitman represented an author who would free Wharton from the constraints of strict gender roles and traditional treatment of sexuality through his eroticized and nationalistic vision of human connection as explored in his verse. Price also contends that Whitman’s poetry worked as the sort of glue that bound Wharton and the men who made up her closest social set together, with Whitman’s writing acting as a sort of nexus for the circle. “Wharton allied herself with men such as Sturgis, Lodge, Fullerton, Berry, Santayana, and Henry James whose ambiguous sexuality was especially suggestive for her art,” claims Price, “for their lives threw into question established gender roles” (41). These men all understood the idealized paradigm of same-sex male desire articulated in *Leaves of Grass* as representative of advanced and modern thought, rooted in a practice of male bonding initiated by the ancient Greeks for military training. Such thought challenged contemporary social mores and codes by advocating same-sex male desire and even bisexuality. Price continues:

Wharton’s connection with this network of men went hand in hand with her interest in Whitman, a poet widely admired by these individuals, the acknowledged source of much avant-garde thinking about sexual mores, and a rallying point for reformers of literature. There was at this time a growing sense of homosexual consciousness to which Whitman contributed significantly. These men appealed to Wharton because they seemed to offer freedom from conventional limitations and perspectives. (41-2)

In this passage, Price stresses that Whitman’s association with a “growing sense of homosexual consciousness” represented “avant-garde thinking” and “freedom from conventional limitations and perspectives” for Wharton and the men who became her most intimate friends. In fact, by writing that “Wharton’s connection with this network of men went hand in hand with her interest in Whitman,” Price intimates that Wharton not only comprehended what Whitman and his poetry signified to the queer men of the
Qu’Acre circle and the peripheral male figures who associated with them, but that Wharton knowingly drew closer to these men because they “seemed to offer freedom” from “conventional limitations and perspectives” (42). The scholar then goes on to claim that Wharton would purposefully adopt the concept of “comradeship” within her relationship with her lover Morton Fullerton, as well as those with her closest of men friends. Though Price focuses largely on Wharton’s relationship with Fullerton, his ideas about how Whitman’s poetry influenced the ways in which she viewed her own sexuality and connection to her lover in terms of same-sex male desire are illuminating. Whitman symbolized for Wharton’s inner circle a positive view of male homosexuality that was not only permissible, but laudable—a beneficial masculine sexuality that had once been responsible for the greatest achievements of Greek civilization. The knowledge that both she and James loved Leaves of Grass, which contained the highly-charged “Calamus” poems, and both considered Whitman the “greatest of American poets,” signaled an unspoken understanding to each another of what drew them to Whitman’s verse—a mutually felt sense of queerness.

Another poet who Wharton tellingly identifies as a “favourite” of James, and whose poetry was memorably read during an outside tea during that October visit, belonged to an established homosexual male literary tradition—A. C. Swinburne. Unfortunately, the oppressive heat of the “Indian summer” experienced in that month in the Berkshires would prematurely curtail the reading of Swinburne’s poetry that afternoon. Wharton recalls:

On another afternoon we had encamped for tea on the mossy ledge in the shade of great trees, and as he seemed less uneasy than usual somebody pulled out an anthology, and I asked one of the party to read aloud Swinburne’s “Triumph of Time,” which I knew to be a favourite of
James’s; but after a stanza or two I saw the twinkle of the beatitude fade, and an agonized hand was lifted up. “Perhaps, in view of the abnormal state of the weather, our young friend would have done better to choose a poem of less inordinate length.” (188)

Here, we see another moment in which Wharton demonstrates her knowledge of a more private James, who liked to read Swinburne’s poetry and appreciated his verse with the “twinkle” of “beatitude.” Wharton uses powerful language to describe James’ reaction to Swinburne’s verse, again with the same sort of reverence as witnessed in his reading of Whitman during the same visit. Wharton knowingly draws attention to these two memorable poetry readings, fully aware that Whitman and Swinburne belonged and contributed to the literary tradition of masculine homoerotic writing. The two poets did have a direct connection. Richard Dellamora, interestingly, reveals that Whitman had inspired Swinburne with his impassioned verse in *Leaves of Grass* and claims that the “closest that Swinburne ever came to acknowledging an investment in male-male desire occurs in a letter in which the specific referent is Whitman” (89). Though Swinburne would later, two years after the passing of the Labouchère Amendment, publicly “turn against Whitman” in his essay “Whitmania,” Dellamora argues that Swinburne continued to show “himself preoccupied with finding euphemisms, in this case ‘Whitman,’ for sexual desire between men” (92). A case where “the lady doth protest too much,” Swinburne’s anxiety over a public distancing from Whitman’s homoerotic verse, despite his concentrated interest in same-sex male desire in literature, betrayed his private struggle with his sexual identity. Dellamora asserts that Swinburne’s abandonment of his friend Simeon Solomon, after Solomon’s arrest “on a moral charge in a public washroom in central London in 1873,” was not only “ugly,” but “hypocritical.” Despite his own private feelings of same-sex desire, Swinburne, after homophobic legislation threatened
men whose homosexuality became public, cut off ties to men and literature that would make him appear guilty by association. Yet, already, a contemporary reading public recognized in Swinburne’s poetry the “perversity” of the *effeminatus*, connecting the poet to a queer subject position, as Thaïs E. Morgan argues in his piece, “Victorian Effeminacies.”

Included in Richard Dellamora’s edited collection of critical essays, *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*, Morgan’s essay focuses on the Victorian literary critic Robert Buchanan who publicly attacked the “Fleshly School” of poets, whom he thought guilty of promoting “sickness and effeminacy.” Primarily, Morgan centers on Buchanan’s vituperative critiques of Rossetti, Swinburne and Morris, which he believes largely contributed to a modern association of effeminacy with male homosexuality, or what he rather terms “sexual dissidence.” He contends: ‘Effeminacy’ is widely interpreted as the visible sign of sexual dissidence in men who reject the hegemonic norm of heteromasculinity. Buchanan’s use of the term ‘effeminacy’ verges on and lends itself to the formation of discourse of sexual dissidence which has informed it since the 1890s” (109).

Recognizing a feminized subject position in the poetry of Swinburne, Buchanan accentuated the public image of the poet as an *effeminatus* whose character and example presented a “threat to British society” (112). Buchanan loudly voiced his opinion that “most fundamental values of society” were being undermined by Swinburne and other poets of the “Fleshly School,” whose encouragement of “debauchery” and “obscene, indecent and offensive” works challenged the moral fabric of his readers. Buchanan and Swinburne’s critical volleys would culminate in the 1876 libel suit brought against the *Examiner* for the printing of a letter by Swinburne that lampooned Buchanan as “Captain

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Shuffleton” of the “steam-yacht Skulk.” Though Swinburne would try to side-step any connection to Whitmanian homoeroticism or overt effeminacy during the 1870s, when association with male homosexuality became legally dangerous, his writing would become a part of a homosexual male literary tradition.

Byrne R.S. Fone, in his fine study *A Road to Stonewall, 1750-1969: Male Homosexuality and Homophobia in English and American Literature*, examines the explosion of literary texts, in the decades that followed the 1850s, that investigated same-sex desire. Addressing the fascination of writers with homoeroticism, Fone writes that, “After 1850 it almost seems as if homosexuality became for a time the subject for more authors than any other” (89). Fone asserts that a “bibliography of texts dealing with homosexual subjects written by homosexual and nonhomosexual authors in England and on the Continent would include many of the major literary figures of the time” (89) and then provides a telling list of writers whose works would belong to such a bibliography. Of the twenty-one writers listed, sixteen were represented in Wharton’s library, Swinburne among them. Fone explains that poetry became “the most prominent homoerotic genre of the nineteenth century,” with authors, like Swinburne, whose famous poem “Hermaphroditus” contains “bisexual desire.” The specific use of language in such homoerotic poetry separated such verse from heteronormative texts, as distinct “locales,

45 Fone lists the writers as “Byron, Tennyson, Symonds, Joris-Karl Huysmans, Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, Honoré de Balzac, Théophile Gautier, August von Platen, Goethe, Paul Verlaine, Alexander Pushkin, C.P. Cavafy, Hopkins, Pater, Swinburne, Carpenter, Oscar Wilde, A.E. Housman, Forster, and Havelock Ellis” (89). Though she may have owned works from sixteen of the authors listed, Wharton details in her letter to Lapsley, from October 22, 1922, that she had read Housman’s *Last Poems* and *A Shropshire Lad*, enjoying both (Lewis 458-9). Wharton also wrote of meeting E.M. Forster, during a chance meeting after lunch, in July, 1936, in a letter to a friend (596). Thus, out of this list, there are only three who do not find direct reference by Wharton—Cavafy, Carpenter, and Ellis. Adding to this list all the additional works that Wharton read that also belonged to the male homosexual literary tradition, one soon sees that Wharton educated herself on the subject of a queer masculine subject position, seeking out texts and even personal contacts to promote her understanding of her interior self.
characters, and passions" carried with them an association of queer desire. References to Greek myth that contained homoerotic elements, certain usage of flower imagery connected to those myths (like the narcissus or water lily) and floral or exotic allusions that signified homoerotic content, all acted as recognized markers of non-heteronormativity in literature that, to a knowing reader, revealed expression of same-sex desire. "The homoerotic suggestiveness of Swinburne's 'Hermaphroditus,' for example," argues Fone, "and the well-established imputation of effeminacy as a characteristic of sodomites and later of homosexuals, reflects the general confusion on behalf of homosexuals and non-homosexuals concerning the 'nature' of homosexuality and the sexual makeup of homosexuals" (96). Through his poetic forays into the questioning of heteronormative desire and in his distinct voicing of sexual "otherness" in his verse, Swinburne, like Whitman, represented a queer male voice within a specific tradition of literature—a canon of sorts that appealed to queer readers. Clearly, for Wharton the association between Swinburne and Whitman was obvious, for she directly links the two authors together in her memorial essay on her good friend George Cabot ("Bay") Lodge, who died in the August of 1909. In this piece, Wharton likens the poetry of the younger Lodge to the two authors who had unmistakably inspired him: "It was inevitable that George Cabot Lodge, like other young poets, should pass through the imitative stage of which his first three volumes give occasional proof, and equally inevitable that the voices of Whitman and Swinburne should be those oftenest heard in them" (Wegener 46). Wharton first met Bay Lodge through Walter Berry and the young man proved to be not only a close friend, but one whose death at the premature age of thirty-six, due to a heart attack "brought on by food poisoning" (221), left her in shock. Wharton connected both Whitman and Swinburne to an aesthetic sensibility she witnessed in Lodge.
190). Yet, why should those two poets have appealed so greatly to Bay Lodge? The answer can be ascertained from the portrait Wharton paints of him.

Though Wharton knew both Lodge and his wife, she stresses a particular reading of Lodge that placed him within definitively queer historical and literary contexts. By mentioning Lodge’s “close comradeship with his friend Joseph Stickney,” during Lodge’s two years of study at the Sorbonne, she draws, again upon the charged Whitmanian term “comrade.” Both Lodge and Joseph Trumbull Stickney (1874-1903) excelled in their studies in Latin and Greek at Harvard, both graduating in 1895, and would go on to study together at the Sorbonne—indeed, Stickney became the first American to earn a doctorate from the Sorbonne in 1903, for his second thesis Les Sentences dans la Poésie Grèque. The “close comradeship” was publicly acknowledged by Stickney, who dedicated his 1902 published volume Verses to Lodge, and who looked to Lodge to help him co-edit a collection of his poetry that appeared posthumously in 1905. Stickney maintained his ties to Harvard, as he became a Greek instructor there in 1903; Lodge kept up friendships with another Harvard man whose flamboyant sexuality not only could not have been misconstrued or hidden but stood as a prominent figure in “Boston’s bohemia.” Like the Hellenistic ties to his friend Stickney, an association of distinct queerness colored Lodge’s friendship with Sturgis Bigelow, as Bigelow never married nor had children and, at his Nantucket home Tuckernuck, entertained only men with a curious request: “The rule was no clothes at all until dinner, when, of course, one was expected to appear in formal dress” (Shand-Tucci 49). The guest list at Tuckernuck

47 I cannot help but think of Wharton’s depiction of Owen Leath in The Reef, as a “musical” young man whose close male friends attended the “Beaux Arts” to study art in Paris, as somewhat related to this image of Lodge who studied at the Sorbonne with his “comrade” Stickney. Perhaps Lodge helped to inspire Wharton’s characterization of Owen Leath.
included "vigorous young men like the Harvard poet George Cabot Lodge, son of Senator Henry Cabot Lodge," demonstrating that Lodge apparently must have had little problem with the idyllic male nudity at the "island paradise," where, as John Crowley recalled, men "often took their ease, often naked, in an untamed natural setting" (49). Certainly, such display of male nudity not only echoed Whitman's poetic impulse to shed his clothes in a symbolic freeing of the human body, but the male nudity within the "country setting" provided visual allusion to the Greek homoerotic texts and aesthetic that gained popularity within queer male circles. When Wharton connects Whitman to Swinburne in her memorial essay on Bay Lodge, she calls upon two prominent authors within a male homosexual literary tradition in order to signal to an initiated reading public, "allusions and cross-references" that signified queerness. By stressing Lodge's "beautiful boyish freshness" that never faded, and calling him a "good 'Grecian,'" "a sensitive lover of the arts," and citing his "dreaming youth on the lonely beach of Tuckanuck Island," Wharton provides multiple clues to the distinctly queer context that Whitman and Swinburne represent. Despite Lodge's wife and three children, whom she never mentions, it is his associations with men that Wharton tellingly pronounces and preserves in her essay.

In terms of a contemporary reading public, many people would have been able to make the connection between Whitman and Swinburne in terms of their treatment of same-sex male desire. By linking the two poets together in her memory of James at The Mount, in her autobiography, Wharton, as she had done for Lodge, places James within a distinctly queer male literary space. For James, Swinburne figured largely as a subject of queer humor and camp. Wendy Graham, in her essay "Henry James and British Aestheticism," finds Swinburne not only to be the "linchpin" of her argument that
"James’s forays into aestheticism, timid as they might seem in comparison, represented a conscious move towards literary eroticism" (271), but she contends that James used Swinburne as a target of queer humor: "Elsewhere, I have argued that Jonathan Freedman overestimates James's priggishness with regard to Swinburne's material and mannerisms, objecting that James's derisory remarks about Swinburne partook of the queer sensibility and camp humor he is accused of reviling" (272). The "elsewhere" to which Graham refers is her full-length study of James and homosexuality, *Henry James's Thwarted Love*. In her book, Graham asserts that the younger James, who criticized Swinburne in his essays, reveled in his effeminate pose of the aesthete and teased Swinburne in a "condescending" rather than "sanctimonious" tone. She elaborates: "In the 1870s, when James conceived these review-essays, he apparently felt at liberty to flaunt his effeminacy and sexual nonconformity. Superficial primness notwithstanding, the reviews are pitched to an audience of cognoscenti, men on whom no hint of eroticism is lost" (128). In the years that followed Wilde's imprisonment, Wharton, who clearly was aware of James’ connection to Swinburne, by naming both Whitman and Swinburne as two of James’ “favourite” writers, motions towards a male literary tradition that was unmistakably recognized as queer and, through his association, exposes a private aspect of the Master himself.

By the time that Wharton was writing her memoir, she had certainly known of Swinburne’s association with same-sex desire and the importance of his relationship with his close friend, Theodore Watts-Dunton—with whom the former lived at “The Pines,” in Putney. In a letter written to Bernard Berenson, on December 12th, 1920, Wharton makes reference to Max Beerbohm’s essay, “No. 2, The Pines,” which provided an entertaining
“reminiscence” of his visit to Swinburne and Watts-Dunton’s home, in the spring of 1899. “The Pines” belonged to Watts-Dunton, who cared for Swinburne there for some years and eventually weaned the poet from his dependency on alcohol. Wharton, in her missive, eagerly confesses that she and Robert Norton had impatiently wondered if “B.B.”—as he was known to his friends—had read Beerbohm’s piece yet. “We absolutely ache to know if you’ve read Max’s ‘No. 2, The Pines,’ his perfectly exquisite reminiscence of the old Swinburne & the old Watts-Dunton at Putney,” exclaims Wharton. “I don’t send it, because you probably saw it when it came out in the Fortnightly” (433). Here, Wharton employs James’ camp language, by stressing the word “ache” in conjunction with the piece by Beerbohm on Swinburne and Watts-Dunton. Those who visited Swinburne and Watts-Dunton had no illusion as to the relationship that existed between the two men. A.C. Benson remembered witnessing the physical affection between the two men in his diary: “Watts-Dunton stroked Swinburne’s small pink hand, which lay on the table, and Swinburne gave a pleased schoolboy smile” (65). The hand-stroking, for Benson, represented an openly tactile intimacy that revealed the deeper feelings they felt for one another; at the same time, he also refers to a pederastic tradition by calling Swinburne’s facial expression “a pleased schoolboy smile” as a reaction to the older Watts-Dunton’s affectionate “stroking.” Though Benson usually was put off by public displays of affection, he did not only find the gesture not objectionable, but confessed that the two men’s affection for each other was moving: “I was somehow tremendously touched by these two odd fellows living together (Swinburne must be 66, Watts-Dunton about 72) and paying each other these romantic compliments and displaying such distinguished consideration, as though the world was
young” (66). “Tremendously touched” by the “two odd fellows living together,” Benson watched the body language between them—the little “romantic compliments” and gestures of “distinguished consideration”—and found their love for each other, usually ripest in its youth, had not waned despite their advanced ages. Given Benson’s close association with James, Sturgis, and Lapsley, it was more than likely that Wharton learned of the “close comradeship” that existed between the two men living together (not unlike Lodge and Stickney) through a discussion of Swinburne and his poetry, or even during a tea-time chat, with one of these men. By repeatedly alluding to the connection between Whitman and Swinburne in her memorial pieces on two of her good friends—calling both “comrades”—Wharton drew upon a queer context of male desire, recognized by a knowing contemporary audience, which informed the portraits of both Bay Lodge and James. Wharton herself acknowledged the special language that she and her friends, particularly those of Henry James as well, used in their dealings with one another—represented by such subtle positioning of literary, cultural and social contexts in these “allusions and cross-references.”

When Wharton defined the key members who later became the core figures within her inner circle, she noted that these men engaged in a “secret participation” with one another, creating an “immediate sympathy” that drew them together in an established intimacy. Wharton dates the smallest emergence of the “nucleus” that would form her “inner group” to the visit of James and Sturgis to The Mount, in October 1904. After providing personal anecdotal sketches of James during his stay, Wharton adopts a more serious tone, realizing that visits to The Mount in the summers and autumns of the following years represented the development of what would become her coterie of most
important friends. Beyond the trio of James, Sturgis and herself, Wharton reminisces about the men who would join them and flesh out their set: Walter Berry and three other men, “dear friends from England, Gaillard Lapsley, Robert Norton and John Hugh Smith” (192). Though Wharton refers to Lapsley, in 1933, as a “dear friend from England,” at the time that she actually met him, he remained very much an American anglophile who had recently relocated to England, with a characteristically “detestable accent” that his soon-to-be friend A.C. Benson would later describe. Yet, these men, for Wharton made up a group of distinctive friends, united by an unnamed but common bond:

These, with Henry James, if not by the actual frequency of their visits, yet from some secret quality of participation, had formed from the first the nucleus of what I have called the inner group. In this group an almost immediate sympathy had established itself between the various members, so that our common stock of allusions, cross-references, pleasantries was always increasing, and new waves of interest in the same book or picture, or any sort of dramatic event in life or letters, would simultaneously flood through our minds. (192)

In this description of her “inner group,” Wharton alludes to “some secret quality of participation” beyond mere proximity that allowed these men to form fast and firm friendships with one another, creating a social set that understood one another. Citing an “immediate sympathy” as the connective tissue that held the circle together, Wharton notes that they as a group employed a unique language of a “common stock of allusions” and “cross-references,” that often sprung from interest in the “same book or picture” or experience from “any sort of dramatic event in life or letters.” Furthermore, Wharton suggests that the minds of her friends were so in tune with her own that such interests, feelings and life events were experienced almost telepathically, as the resulting sensations “would simultaneously flood through” all their minds. Wharton’s emphasis on the
"secret quality of participation" and the "immediate sympathy" that led the members of the group to become friends shows that she not only understood the queerness that defined her closest "comrades," but that she felt akin to their subject position. In order to ensure that her readers perceived the private sameness that characterized what would become the Qu’Acre set, as the locale for their meeting would change from The Mount to Sturgis’ home Queen’s Acre, Wharton reinforces her claim that James never was as uniquely “good” as when she and her friends “had him” in their company: “I think I may safely say that Henry James was never so good as with this little party at the Mount, or when some of its members were reunited, as often happened in after years, under Howard Sturgis’s welcoming roof at Windsor” (193). Wharton locates, again, a common language of interests and allusions as the stimulus for unmatched conversational communion. “The mere fact that we had in common so many topics, and such innumerable allusions,” claims Wharton, “made James’s talk on such occasions easier and wider-ranging that I ever heard it elsewhere” (193). This would not be the first or the last time that Wharton would suggest that she had known James during his most vibrant years or that she, along with her other friends, had been able to enjoy the “best” of him. Such insistence on knowing a private James that few others knew, not to mention the particular range of conversational topics that were endemic to the group’s entertaining confabulations, betrays, on the part of Wharton, a sense of possessiveness in terms of the Master—a sort of ownership of the “real” James a wider audience would never know. Though she provides hints and clues as to the sort of banter that volleyed back and forth between James and other friends of her group, Wharton protects her memories by
mentioning only a few important examples that knowing readers would recognize—cues that signified a specific understanding of queer culture.

**Walter Berry**

Following this first important gathering at The Mount, the intimate circle of Edith Wharton’s friends would start to come together at Howard Sturgis’ estate, Queen’s Acre, in Windsor, England. At James’ and Sturgis’ visit to Lenox, in October, 1904, the two met Wharton’s very close friend Walter Berry, a man whose sexuality has remained ambiguous in historical accounts, though his relationship with Wharton greatly influenced her life and art. On November 18th, 1904, James would write to Edith and send her and advance copy of his forthcoming novel *The Golden Bowl*, which Scribners had published in a fine set of two volumes that pleased James greatly. Notably, he then requested Berry’s address in Washington so that he could send him a copy as well, as Berry had left a very favorable and lasting impression on the Master. Walter Berry (1859-1927), from the time of his initial meeting with James, became a revisited topic in the Master’s letters to Wharton, as Berry had clearly struck James as a fascinating and charming man. James’ letters adopted the familiar tone of camp affirmation that Stevens describes, the hyperbolic language of erotically charged excess—full of caresses, yearnings and the characteristic gnashing of teeth. For Wharton, Berry ranked as the other most important man of her adulthood—apart from her mature friendship with James—who influenced not only her life greatly, but acted as a literary critic and advisor for numerous works of fiction. Many biographers have told the story of their failed courtship in Bar Harbor, Maine, as an awkward and unfortunate affair, with the

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impoverished Berry feeling not worthy to ask for Edith’s hand in marriage. Berry’s failure to propose purportedly disappointed the expectant Edith, who then turned her affections towards another suitable man chosen by her parents, Edward (Teddy) Wharton. Despite their bungled romance in youth, Wharton and Berry renewed their friendship fourteen years later, according to R.W.B. Lewis, in 1897, Wharton having recovered from her “humiliation” years before. Apparently, Berry “cut a dashing figure,” towering over others at an impressive six-feet-three, with a frame that looked “strikingly tall” and “strikingly thin.” With a well-groomed mustache and piercing blue eyes, Berry’s too-perfect taste in dress and condescending mastery of manners seemed off-putting to certain members of Wharton’s circle, like Percy Lubbock, who saw Berry simply as a pretentious snob.

In his *Portrait of Edith Wharton*, Lubbock believed that Wharton felt she owed much of her success as a writer to the sort of literary mentorship Berry provided, that his guidance in matters of her fiction writing helped to shape many of her finest works. Yet Lubbock disagreed with what Wharton thought she owed to Berry, suggesting rather that Berry acted as a limiting force in her life, whose arrogance, self-centered demeanor, and painfully narrow-minded views hindered her from even greater accomplishment:

The education that she took from him was long to hold her fast, and I believe that whenever she seemed (as there were times when she did) to shut up her mind in a box, and so much for that, the reason went back to Walter Berry. Anyhow there he was, an inevitable factor in her circle—he was not one whom she had to seek out in a different world—but not a favoured figure among those who loved and prized her. Whether his presence in her life made more for her happiness or the reverse there was only one person, herself, who ever knew, and the knowledge died with her—if even she had ever known. (43)
Lubbock's dislike of Berry sours his recollection of him here, calling Berry "not a favoured figure" among those friends who "loved and prized" Wharton the most. Perhaps, the rumors which had abounded, which connected Wharton to Berry in a torrid affair, prior to the discovery of the Fullerton letters decades later, led Lubbock to despise Berry as a sort of "love 'em and leave 'em" lothario. Berry's notoriety with his lady-friends caused many an eyebrow to arch and the gossip to twitter in the high-pitched circles of upper-class gossip. Lubbock described Berry as a sort of aged playboy: "Calm and strong, a man of the world and of the best world, ripely experienced in the ways of the world and in the knowledge of men and women—especially women, for he is reported a man of powerful passions, with something of a stormy past behind him, stamp and guarantee of his masculinity" (228). The repetition of the word "world" in this passage reveals how Lubbock linked Berry to knowledge of vice and sophistication in the "ways of the world," that made him a "man of the world." Though he circulated in exclusive social sets of the "best world," meaning "high and fashionable society," Berry demonstrated a particular intelligence as a "man of the world"—which the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as "a worldly or unspiritual person, a person who has a broad experience of society and a pragmatic understanding of its flaws and vices." When Lubbock calls Berry "ripely experienced" in "the ways of the world," especially "in the knowledge" of not only "women," but "men," he emphasizes Berry's well-known image as a turn-of-the-century Casanova. Repelled by what he perceives as an over-the-top performance of the "man's man," Lubbock only points to Berry's "stormy past" with women that provides a "stamp and guarantee" of "masculinity," with biting sarcasm. His use of the absolute phrase "stamp and guarantee" suggests that Lubbock publicly
questioned Berry’s too-overt performance as the ladies’ man, possibly a persona that
masked or veiled Berry’s anxiety over his own sexuality. According to such a portrayal,
Berry, unable to acknowledge an open affection for men, appears in Lubbock’s account
as a man who kept up a sham of a life absent of true human connection: “Long before this
the worst has happened: a tap from a man of real bone beside him, any of a score in the
jostle of the crowd, and this admirable figure, this gracious mould of a man, is dead upon
our hands, a shell, a simulacrum with nothing inside it to match the flesh and blood of its
vulgar neighbour” (228-9). Berry’s abhorrence of same-sex physical touch, recorded in
Lubbock’s memoir—here by “a man of real bone”—betrayed his inability to feel the
warmth of human connection and, in turn, created a man who was not a man, but a
walking corpse, a “shell” or “simulacrum.” These words are powerfully damning,
providing a terrible image of Berry as he appeared to one of Wharton’s closest friends. I
believe that Lubbock’s portrait of Berry proffers only one piece of a sizeable puzzle that
tells the story of who Berry was to Wharton and her friends; the solving or approximation
of that puzzle might just provide the key to understanding what role Berry truly played in
Wharton’s life.

In the history of Wharton studies, Berry long acted as a decoy that prevented
scholars from discovering the truth of Wharton’s extramarital affair with W. Morton
Fullerton, the man who awakened her to new passions and a heightened awareness of
sexuality. Realistically, Wharton’s history with Berry remained a complicated one—
sexually charged, but supposedly never consummated—a blurred line between friend and
lover. Berry’s ambiguous sexuality has raised certain questions in Wharton scholarship.
Claudia Roth Pierpont, for example, in her article “Cries and Whispers: How Much of
Edith Wharton’s Life Is in Her Short Stories,” printed in The New Yorker, on April 21, 2001, calls into question the vague sexual history of Berry and Wharton, by wondering if Wharton destroyed Berry’s letters for “what they didn’t say” (70). She pointedly reports: “On Berry’s death, in 1927, Wharton requested that his ashes be scattered over the garden of her home in France. His funeral wreaths, however, were placed by his close and loving cousin on the grave of Oscar Wilde” (70). Pierpont’s little factoid about Berry’s funeral wreaths, which were placed on Wilde’s newer tomb—the first had been a “cheap grave” at Bagneaux—in Père Lachaise, “with a beautiful sculpture by Jacob Epstein” (Tóibín 83) that had been erected there in 1909, demonstrates that Berry’s cousin thought Wilde’s grave a fitting place to bring the wreaths. As Wilde had become, by 1927, an iconic symbol of male homosexuality during the years that followed his infamous trials, this gesture is significant. Wilde, through his trials and public views of male homosexuality, had not only provided James with an opportunity for discussing his own same-sex desire, as shown earlier, but he clearly represented a significant figure to Berry as well—as his cousin later revealed—for, in 1903, James would make a present of Wilde’s poems to Edith Wharton.

According to his catalogue of Wharton’s personal library, George Ramsden, who acquired Wharton’s collection of books from two separate libraries (private collections owned by those who had inherited her books), notes that a particular volume of Oscar Wilde’s poetry had been inscribed by Walter Berry and given to Edith Wharton. The book was an elegant one, published in 1903 by Mosher, in Portland, Maine, as one of a limited edition of only 600 copies “printed on hand-made paper” (143). Wilde’s volume contained a wide selection of his poetry—including Ravenna, Poems, The Sphinx, and
The Ballad of Reading Gaol. Within the handsome edition, Walter Berry simply inscribed, “Edith Wharton—from W.B.” Given the significance of Wilde’s trials in terms of scandalized same-sex male desire, I find Berry’s act of “passing” the volume of Wilde’s poetry to Wharton’s hands a symbolic gesture of a privately acknowledged understanding they shared. The gift of the book represented a clear interest in and understanding of masculine same-sex desire. Certainly, were Wharton a man, the importance of such a gift would have been read in a different light before now, as “pages passed from hand to hand” signified a distinct continuation of homosexual male literary tradition, with an older man handing a book to a younger man. Yet, due to Wharton’s biological sex, with Wharton rooted into her body as a woman, this gesture has “passed” to an outside audience as a simple gift of a book to a woman from a man, a result of an assumed expectation of heteronormativity. By looking at the significance of this same act as a trope within queer culture and keeping in mind Wharton’s admittedly complex gender construction, this gift belongs to a specific tradition that members of Wharton’s circle recognized related to queer masculinity. When we consider the gesture of Berry’s “close and loving” cousin, of symbolically placing Berry’s funeral wreaths on Wilde’s grave, the fact remains that those who knew Berry most intimately, like Wharton and Berry’s family, understood Berry’s connection to Wilde. Since Berry surrounded himself, like Wharton, with numerous men friends, many of whom were openly and even notoriously homosexual—such as Marcel Proust\(^{48}\), André Gide, and Jean Cocteau—and

\(^{48}\) Scholars have examined how Proust struggled with his friendship with Berry, claiming not to desire him but then telling him in a letter from February 17, 1918, “I am bored and I long for you. I distract myself in the midst of this boredom by saying from time to time that I know nothing finer for one’s eyes than the sight of your face, nothing more agreeable to one’s ears than the sound of your voice” (Edel 519). In his article, “Walter Berry and the Novelists: Proust, James, and Edith Wharton,” Edel explains how Proust (in what I see as an almost Jamesian voice of camp language) revealed, “How I would love to see you... It’s sad to think that I got to know the man I had the most pleasure in seeing at the very moment when I was falling

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kept himself abreast of popular cultural interests within a queer community in Paris, during his years there as a diplomat, his influence on Wharton, like that of James, schooled Wharton in the ways of queer masculinity. Given the danger of exposing Berry’s bisexuality to a homophobic public audience, Wharton would go to great lengths to protect her friend’s image, burning all of his correspondence to her and meeting with a young Leon Edel to “block” a proposed biography he wanted to write on Berry. What would cause Wharton to feel so threatened that a “gossipy” piece would be written about Berry? The seeds of a mystery, planted by Wharton, here, starts to ripen into the fruit of very secretive Berry.

**English Hours**

Wrapping up his missive to Wharton, from November 18th, 1904, James reminded Edith that should she visit England, as she had proposed earlier, he would be very happy to receive her “for a week or two” during her stay, at Lamb House, in Rye. Clearly, the signs of their growing friendship were beginning to show, as Wharton, since August, had recommitted herself to the writing of *The House of Mirth*, which centered on the very New York society James had so dramatically advised her to study. Soon after, on the day after the New Year, James paid Wharton a visit at Park Avenue, in New York, having traveled through a snow storm. Benstock notes, “This was the first of two visits he made to Edith in 1905” (145). Between them, the level of friendship clearly had deepened, as James’ letters to her reveal, for his “puckish” sense of humor and exaggerated phrasing peppered his written lines. By the end of the month, James started to reveal the camp language of his attachments to other men in his letters to Wharton when he wrote about into this night of suffering.” Like James, who late in life regretted not acting on his desire for younger men when he was physically capable, it is possible that Proust expressed a similar sadness, and regret, which stemmed from his attraction to Berry. Clearly, Proust’s feelings for Berry were powerful and complex.
Berry, confessing, “I miss, intensely, Walter Berry—and fear I shall continue to do so, as I seem destined to retire, sated (with everything but him) about the moment he comes back” (342). Playfully teasing Wharton about wanting to be “sated” by Berry—with the flirtatious “with everything but him”—James assumes a familiarity that acknowledges same-sex desire with his characteristic flourish of humor. As his confidence in their connection increased, James demonstrated the certain intimacy building within their budding friendship. As for James’ growing attachment to Walter Berry—they traveled together, crossing the Atlantic on the Saxonia, and developed, prominently, at least on James’ part, a playful sort of friendship that was delightfully entertaining. Edel describes their epistolary banter: “James corresponded with him playfully, amusedly, ironically” (256). James reveled in the camp language he used in his letters to Berry and to Wharton (about Berry and later other men)—the same camp language that coquettishly expressed the desire he felt for younger men in his missives to Sturgis, Lapsley, and Fullerton (not to mention numerous others). As the camaraderie between James and Wharton, as well as with Walter Berry, grew, so too did new associations between other future core members of Wharton’s circle, before they would come together to form a tightly-knit group.

New connections and friendships were emerging in England, since also during the month of November, in 1904, A.C. Benson had recorded his first meeting of Gaillard Lapsley at Trinity College, Cambridge. Describing Lapsley as a “bright, intelligent man, glittering like a diamond, polished, hard as nails” (Newsome 175), Benson initiated a fast friendship with the younger American medieval historian who years before had caught the eye of James; by May of the following year, Benson felt so comfortable with Lapsley
that they began to openly discuss their feelings about the “ethics” of “romantic schoolboy friendships” as well as to what degree “romance” should enter into such connections. Uncomfortable about his own queerness, Benson leaned towards utmost discretion and privacy when it came to his attachments to other men. He believed that “romantic friendships” between men were “better not spoken about, either by people writing about them, or by friends to each other” (196). Clearly, the conversation shared by Benson and Lapsley went well, since the former strongly encouraged their relationship; by the summer, they had grown so close that Lapsley reconsidered his planned trip to visit his relatives in the United States, preferring to stay with Benson in Cambridge for the season. Benson’s praise of Lapsley revealed that they maintained directness in their dealing with one another, with a “frankness” that pleased them both: “He is a fine creature; and I seem to have established a friendship of great candour and frankness with him. He thanked me, with great emotion, for being so good to him. But it is all the other way’” (175-6). Citing “great candour and frankness” as the most valued characteristics of their friendship, Benson notes Lapsley’s “great emotion” and obvious attachment to him, which he, in turn, eagerly reciprocated—“But it is all the other way.” Involved in their own age-defined “romantic friendship,” the older Benson and younger Lapsley developed a confidence and intimacy with one another that allowed them both to express their private feelings of same-sex desire, which in turn provided a safe zone for the free and open discourse that had been prohibited in a public sphere. Yet what sparked their important conversation about romantic relationships between men might have related to the emerging connection between men who were their mutual friends—more specifically, the growing attachment between “P.L.” and “H.O.S.”
When Arthur Benson speculated on the nascent “romantic friendship” occurring between the younger Lubbock and the much older Sturgis, he found the alliance to be not only a favorable, but mutually beneficial one. At the same time, he confessed that he had certain reservations. He revealed that the current and prevailing views on male relationships, strongly modeled on Hellenistic ideals of pederasty, carried with them particular ageist biases. His views on Lubbock and Sturgis help elucidate his thoughts on same-sex male relationships:

P.L. is making a romantic friendship with H.O.S. I think it will do him good—he wants sympathising with. H.O.S. struck me very much last night by saying that he didn’t want to be one of those men who go on always having romantic friendships with young men—so undignified—but that if he carefully eliminated the mawkish, it would be better—did not give way to sentiment—and pleased me more by saying that he used not to care whether he did a friend harm or not by spoiling—but now cared very much and would rather break off a rising friendship than do so. (196)

In this entry, Benson describes an important conversation with Sturgis that exposes Sturgis’ own struggle with his sexuality and the damaging repercussions of his attachments to younger men. Knowing his friend’s strict attitude towards male friendship and keeping in mind certain restrictions (such as age, amount of public physical contact, privacy, etc.) that Benson maintained, Sturgis gauged his conversational partner’s expectation and complied with his views during their verbal exchange. We know this because Benson’s account provides the telling details. When Sturgis claims that “he didn’t want to be one of those men who go on always having romantic friendships with young men,” the word “always” reveals that there existed a definite time constraint on the length of time deemed acceptable for age-defined same-sex male relationships. Benson exposes his own feelings on the matter when he interjects with the negative expression,
“so undignified.” By “eliminating the mawkish,” Sturgis hoped to limit the amount of “sentiment” involved in his romantic friendships with younger men, demonstrating that he had to consider who might make a reasonable partner and who might end up embarrassing him.

Obviously approving of his friend’s resolution to be more careful in his private affairs with younger men, Benson felt clear relief when Sturgis explained that he understood that he could ruin other men’s lives by encouraging sentimental attachments. When he suggested that he would rather “break off a rising friendship” than do new friends “harm,” Sturgis “pleased” his listener by claiming that he would be more careful in his dealings with younger men. Benson, in writing about Sturgis’ previous attitude of not caring if he did another “harm or not by spoiling,” does not define what sort of conduct would lead to “spoiling,” choosing rather to leave such acts unnamed and exiled to the imagination. This discussion shows that Howard Sturgis remained conscious of other people’s attitudes toward his relationships with other men; even though he had established a strong camaraderie with Benson, he remained aware of Benson’s observations and judgment. Anticipating Benson’s approval, Sturgis must have provided his friend with an “appropriate” view of pederastic relationships that favored a curbing of outward displays of affection, to which Benson so strongly objected. In fact, the strong contrast between Arthur’s frigidity and Howard’s affectionate warmth created a comical scene at Magdalene College, Cambridge—a scene that was recorded in Benson’s diary.

After a visit with Benson at Magdalene, Sturgis and Lubbock were making ready to leave, embraced and “parted with a long and loverlike kiss” (qtd in Masters 176) that apparently made Benson extremely uncomfortable. Sturgis must have picked up on
Arthur’s discomposure and understanding that he had disturbed the older pedagogue, Sturgis quickly apologized, explaining that such displays of “sentimentality” were understandable, even expected, given the right circumstance of emotional distress. Though Benson reluctantly acted as if he were appeased, he later confided to his diary, “To me it is very distasteful. After all it is only a symbol, but I don’t want that kind of symbol” (176). Trying to make light of the situation, Sturgis, after the pregnant moment of awkwardness, teased the diarist by threatening him with a kiss: “He said afterwards he would have kissed me if he had dared. I am glad he did not, tho’ the fact that he could rather relieves my perpetual sense of physical repulsiveness. Indeed, to hear Howard talk, one would have thought I were handsome!” (177) Clearly, Sturgis must have gained a physical ease with Lubbock to have so freely offered him as intense kiss as one that Benson would perceive as “loverlike,” demonstrating that a certain physicality existed in Sturgis’ relationships with other men, similar to James’ customary pats and squeezes. When he informs Benson that were he more daring he would have kissed him too, Benson associates his friend’s impulse to kiss him, in a “loverlike” way, with a feeling of sexual attractiveness and concludes, “Indeed, to hear Howard talk, one would have thought I were handsome.” Thus, Benson saw Sturgis’ kisses as sexually motivated, since he linked a feeling of handsomeness to Sturgis’ desire to touch him as he had Percy Lubbock. Though reassured that he was not “physically repulsive,” Benson coolly responded to Howard’s advances with a sort of agitation that betrayed his anxiety around tactile men. Despite his desire for younger men, Benson confessed that his “Anglo-Saxon temperament” made him “excessively prudish” (Newsome 196) when faced with actual opportunities for sexual experimentation. In 1907, Benson reconsidered his
position when revisiting the subject of male sexuality in a conversation with Gaillard Lapsley, when he admitted that his native “temperament” regretfully turned “love into a secret and almost filthy business—but with the counterbalancing advantage of an ideal male chastity” (196). Benson’s frustration with having to furtively conceal “love” finds expression in his choice of the phrase “a secret and filthy business,” for why should the subject of love have been so forbidden? The love that “dare not speak its name” certainly remained a dangerous subject as Benson well knew, as his admiration of William Johnson Cory provided him with an all-too-real example of what could happen to his career if that love came out into the light. His reluctance to openly concede his desire for other men stemmed from a paralyzing anxiety of facing certain discrimination within his profession, observed in the scandal of Johnson Cory, and within a larger social context, as had been more recently demonstrated in the Oscar Wilde trials.
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CHAPTER VI

THE FLIRTATION

The Threat of Ruin

When James sent Fullerton to Wharton’s doorstep, with a letter of introduction he had written, he consciously arranged for a relationship within which he knew he would play a part. With his desire for the younger journalist and an understanding of how Fullerton and Wharton shared with him a deep comprehension of Whitman’s “comradeship,” James brought to life the kind of erotic triangle he had, until then, only imagined in his fiction. James’ presence throughout Wharton’s affair with Fullerton not only allowed her to overcome her paralyzing fear of sex but fueled her desire for Fullerton. Wharton’s desire for her father combined with her desire for James (as a father figure) and found tangible expression in her relationship with Fullerton. Fullerton’s bisexuality and complicated sensuality, much like that of James, stimulated Wharton’s imagination and caused her to explore more sophisticated renderings of sexual longing and its sublimation. During her affair with Fullerton, with James as one who vicariously experienced their passion, Wharton physically engaged in an initiation which led to her sexual and authorial maturation. The Master set the stage for Wharton’s affair, selecting for her a leading man he knew could play the role of her complicated lover.

Henry James wrote an impassioned letter to Morton Fullerton, on August 8th, 1907, using powerfully erotic language that revealed an intense sexual desire he felt for the younger journalist and displaying a freedom of expression that showed a great level
of comfort and trust in this relationship. James’ writing is unmistakably charged with yearning, as he stresses the immensity of his need for Fullerton and admits to feelings that only the most fervent of lovers would confess. His letter, in fact, is a love letter that eloquently conveys his devotion and attachment to Fullerton, whom he felt remained ever detached and elusive, even maddeningly aloof. James’ playful language employs double entendres that tease Fullerton flirtatiously with sexual innuendo, a characteristic element of his camp style of letter writing. In his missive, he pleaded:

My difficulty is that I love you too fantastically much to be able, in intercourse and relation with you, in such a matter as answering you celestial letter, to do anything but love you, whereby the essence of the whole thing is simply that you divinely write to me and I divinely feel it: all which indeed, in respect to all your special and beautiful import itself doesn’t, I am perfectly aware, see you much “forrarder.” You touch and penetrate me to the quick, and I can only stretch out my hand to draw you closer. (453)

Here, James’ choice of the words “intercourse” and “relation,” which could carry innocuous meanings of “conversation” and “friendship,” also imply definite connotations of the sexual “congress” to which James refers in his infamous letter to Howard Sturgis, written many years before. It is difficult to shrug off the pairing of the words “intercourse” and “relation,” especially given James’ admission, “You touch and penetrate me to the quick,” a few lines afterwards. When James followed his claim “I love you too fantastically to be able . . . to do anything but love you” (here, James’ original use of italics) with “I can only stretch out my hand to draw you closer,” he reveals the tactile and physical quality of the desire he experiences for Fullerton. Again, longing to make their relationship a more sensual one, James’ writing assumes the tone of a fevered lover, whose yearning seems overwhelmingly pressing. Clearly, James was
smitten. Yet, he did not let Wharton in on the magnitude of these feelings when he wrote to her only three days later from Lamb House, in Rye.

In James’ epistle to Wharton, he expresses his concern for Howard Sturgis, whom James had visited at Edward Boit’s summer home Cermitoio, in Vallombrosa, Italy—“a dream of Tuscan loveliness”—in June. Apparently, during his sojourn there, James felt that Sturgis appeared to be scattered in mind and wrote to Wharton of his uneasy impression of their friend’s health:

Howard has found a harbour of refuge there for the summer, and a much needed—for he is literally in pieces, as far as ‘character’ goes, and I don’t see his future at all. It’s the strangest disintegration of a total of which so many of the pieces are good—and produced by no cause, by no shocks, reverses, convulsions, vices, accidents; produced only by charming virtues, remarkable health and the exercise of a cossue [comfortable; read: prosperous] hospitality. It’s all irritatingly gratuitous and trivially tragic. The Babe rallies really excellently—all his friends rally. (458)

The “strangest” sort of mental “disintegration” James observed in Sturgis became even more of a pressing concern in the years that followed, as his friend suffered a nervous collapse during the outbreak of World War I. Yet, here, in this letter, James reveals his belief that Sturgis’ “hospitality” and habit of wearing himself ragged with perpetual visitors at Queen’s Acre, contributed to his mental instability. Uncharacteristically, James pays even The Babe—who, according to A.C. Benson, annoyed James to no end—a compliment in that he tried to rally “really excellently,” even if somewhat ineffectually, to lift Sturgis’ spirits. Though James demonstrates genuine concern for Sturgis, his account demonstrates his less than kind judgment of that friend’s behavior, at Cernitoio, which James describes as being “irritatingly gratuitous and trivially tragic.” Prone to his own dark bouts of depression and rather eccentric behavior, James oddly finds little sympathy for Sturgis, in that, while he admires his friend’s “charming virtues, remarkable
health" and level of financial comfort, he is puzzled by Sturgis' morbid melancholy, especially in such a setting of the "dream of Tuscan loveliness." Looking for support from Wharton, James complains in his letter about Sturgis, warning her of their mutual friend's psychological troubles. Despite the fact that James wrote to Wharton only a few days after penning his love letter to Fullerton, he keeps this to himself, though he knew Wharton had been introduced to Fullerton earlier that January. Little did James know that he and Wharton were fantasizing about the same man during that late summer and early fall.

When Wharton first met Morton Fullerton, she was immediately struck by a strong attraction to him. They first met in January, 1907, at Rosa de Fitz-James' Parisian townhouse, where Fullerton accompanied his friend Paul Hervieu, the playwright, to the famous salon. He and Wharton soon discovered that they shared important common friends, including James and the Charles Eliot Nortons. Wharton was also intrigued with Fullerton's charming but detached demeanor. Before long, she was in contact with him to discuss the proposed project of the French translation and serialized printing of her novel *The House of Mirth*, for which Fullerton had offered his assistance. Later that spring, finding Fullerton ever enigmatic, Wharton confided to Sally Norton, in her letter written on April 21st, "Your friend Fullerton . . . is very intelligent, but slightly mysterious, I think" (113). Despite the fact that, during this time from spring through fall of 1907, Wharton remained mostly silent on the subject of her feelings for Fullerton, a year later, she quotes Sophocles—from a passage cited in Emerson—confessing, "The moment my eyes fell on him I was content." Both alluring and mysterious, Fullerton

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49 See Wharton's late February 1908 letter to W. Morton Fullerton in Lewis and Lewis' *The Letters of Edith Wharton*. 

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seemed to Wharton almost irresistible, though she carefully kept her sexual attraction to him hidden from those who were closest to her at this time, including James. Anticipating a visit from Fullerton to her Lenox home in October, Wharton wrote to James of Fullerton’s impending arrival, confessing nothing of her excitement or Fullerton’s appeal, though James sensed enough in her letter to suspect that her eagerness was motivated by something more than good conversation. The response she received from James was more than cool.

On October 15th, 1907, Wharton begins her letter to Fullerton by relating what James pessimistically had told her in regard to expecting his arrival for a promised visit. James had been disappointed in the past by Fullerton, who was apt to make commitments to visit or write letters but seldom followed through, and tried to spare Wharton the slight Fullerton might cause by forgetting her. He warns, “You won’t see Fullerton” (Lewis 116). According to an October 4th letter to Wharton, James also warns of Fullerton’s inscrutable nature: “I wish you Fullerton rather more than I believe in his playing up; he’s so incalculable” (Edel 463). James’ concern for Wharton betrays his own doubts about Fullerton’s sincerity underneath his charm, flattering manner, and his ability to appear the most devoted of admirers. An experienced friend of Fullerton, James knew too well his flirtatious attentions and his changeable nature to expect that his latest infatuation would last very long. Given James’ love letter to Fullerton from August, James’ cool assessment of Fullerton’s lack of fidelity and reciprocity more than likely colors his comments about his “playing up” to Wharton. Possibly jealous and more likely concerned about Wharton’s growing interest in Fullerton, James tries to dissuade her from placing too much stock in his advances.
If Wharton seriously considered James’ half-hearted warnings about Fullerton’s character and chameleon-like demeanor, she did not reveal any of her own skepticism to Fullerton. In her October 15th letter, Wharton assumes a very familiar tone, as she reveals to Fullerton what James had written to her and expresses her delight in having succeeded, unlike James, in capturing Fullerton’s notice and time. To obscure her own singular pleasure, Wharton purposely uses the first person plural “we,” repeatedly, to demonstrate that her feelings of eagerness and mirth were shared by her husband as well, although it is doubtful Teddy Wharton truly shared Edith’s sentiments. Wharton then tellingly switches from “we” to the first person perspective at the specific point in the letter where she addresses what she has planned for his visit: “We shall hope for you, then, either on Friday, evening, or on Saturday morning, & your ‘few hours’ will, I trust, be elastic enough to extend over Sunday, as I want to show you some of our mountain land-scapes, & have time for some good talks too?” (116) Beginning with “we,” Wharton swiftly changes to “I” when she expresses her wish to share some moments only with Fullerton, not only to show him the landscapes the Berkshires offers in the fall but also to have some memorable confabulations. This excerpt reveals Wharton’s guarded hope that she and Fullerton might be able to have some time alone, despite the presence of her husband at The Mount. Noting that Fullerton was in the area to deliver a lecture at Bryn Mawr on Henry James, Wharton then closes her letter by writing that she was glad he was giving a talk on their “dear” friend, foreshadowing the participatory role James would play in her relationship with Fullerton, even from its genesis.

After Fullerton’s visit to The Mount, in October, Wharton writes in her Love Diary, called “L’ame close,” that she received back from Fullerton the sprig of “wych-
hazel,” “the old woman’s flower” they had discovered together. Fullerton symbolically encloses the sprig in a note to her, indicating that he felt the same as she when they had found the plant blossoming in the autumn woods. To the diary, she confided, “But you sent the wych-hazel—and sent it without a word—thus telling me (as I choose to think!) that you knew what was in my mind when I found it blooming on that wet bank in the woods, where we sat together & smoked a cigarette while the chains were put on the wheels of the motor.” The time that Wharton and Fullerton shared alone in Wharton’s mind is a communion, and Fullerton senses her silent desire. To Wharton, the sprig signifies the bloom of desire—as the plant usually blooms in winter (unusual in the fall) as a “final fling”—late in Wharton’s life.

Wharton’s “Love Diary,” as Kenneth M. Price and Phyllis McBride describe it, in their article “‘The Life Apart’: Texts and Contexts of Edith Wharton’s Love Diary,” covers the span of seven months in the author’s relationship with Fullerton, beginning October 29th, 1907. Wharton explains that the purpose of her journal is to communicate with Fullerton: “Now I shall have the illusion that I am talking to you, & that—as when I picked the wych-hazel—something of what I say will somehow reach you” (670). First and foremost, Wharton considers the connection between herself and Fullerton a mental one, showing that their intellectual attraction eventually progressed into and stimulated the sexual relationship they shared. Secondly, as she engaged in the writing process of keeping a private diary addressed to Fullerton, Wharton was able to work through her thoughts and emotions, reinforcing the fact that their relationship predominantly fueled her mental development. Yet, during the same time that Wharton first began her diary
and recorded how her feelings were deepening for Fullerton, James had been let in on an important secret from Fullerton’s past.

In a letter written on November 14th, 1907, Henry James responded to Fullerton’s confession of his past sexual relationship with Lord Ronald Gower and the money he had to pay to keep an ex-lover quiet about his queer past. Now privy to the fact that Fullerton had engaged in sexual relationships with men, James was intrigued with Fullerton all the more, chiding him for not having signaled previously his queer sexuality. Although James’ flirtations with Sturgis, Lapsley and Lubbock, never became full-fledged sexual relationships, James found Fullerton even more enticing. His allure, combined with his tragic vulnerability, struck a chord in James:

Regret what you must and what you may, but for God’s sake waste no further compunction for the fact of your having so late, so late, after long years, brought yourself to speak to me of what there was always a muffled unenlightened ache for my affection in my not knowing—simply and vaguely and ineffectually guessing as I did at complications in your life that I was utterly powerless to get any nearer to, even though I might have done so a little helpfully. (473)

James admits to Fullerton that he suspected that the “complications” in his life included a sexual past with men, but such speculation was never confirmed. Describing his intuition of Fullerton’s queerness as “simply and vaguely and ineffectually guessing,” James claims that, even though he was not fully aware of Fullerton’s past affairs with men, he sensed that “a muffled unenlightened ache” for his “affection” provided a strong charge in their relationship. James boldly elaborates on this point to suggest that if he had known earlier of Fullerton’s actively queer sexuality, he would have been in a position to act on the desire he felt for the younger man:

50 See Marion Mainwaring’s Mysteries of Paris: The Quest for Morton Fullerton for a full account of Fullerton’s blackmail by a former mistress/landlady in Paris—what R.W.B. Lewis calls the “Mirecourt Affair.”
I seem to feel now that if I had been nearer to you—by your admission of me (for I think my signs were always there) something might have been advantageously different, and I think of the whole long mistaken perversity of your averted reality so to speak, as a miserable personal waste, that of something—ah, so tender!—in me that was only quite yearningly ready for you, and something all possible, and all deeply and admirably appealing in yourself, of which I never got the benefit. (473)

James overtly reveals to Fullerton his disappointment in having only just discovered, through Fullerton’s own admission, that they could have exchanged more than just flirtatious banter and could have possibly shared a more intimate connection. Carefully choosing vague phrasing, so as to avoid yet another compromising letter that could lead to blackmail, James stresses particular words which carry a specifically implied meaning. When James writes, “I think my signs were always there,” he is assuring Fullerton that he is a more than sympathetic correspondent, confirming his own queerness—here, the italicized “my”—and shared attraction towards other men. Then, James adopts a regretful tone when he writes that his unawareness of Fullerton’s openness to same-sex sexual relationships prevented the possibility of their having had a romance, while he was still young enough to entertain such an opportunity. He calls their unfortunate timing “a miserable personal waste” of “something—ah, so tender!” in himself—here, with an italicized “me”—that remained “yearningly ready” for Fullerton. Clearly disappointed and even annoyed at having missed his chance with Fullerton, James plaintively notes that he “never got the benefit” of the knowledge of his friend’s queerness nor his sexual experimentation.

The most important result of Fullerton’s application to James for help with his blackmail remains James’ eloquent epistolary response, which not only reveals quite overtly James’ sense of his own queer sexuality but demonstrates that James has given
same-sex male relationships a great deal of thought. After James’ eyes fully open to the
truth of Fullerton’s sexuality, he becomes bolder in his discussion of same-sex male
relationships and ponders the question of male desire in writing:

The clearing of the air lifts, it seems to me, such a load, removes such a falsity (of defeated relation) between us, that I think that by itself is a portent and omen of better days and of a more workable situation. The difference, I agree, is largely that of my “aching,” as I say, intelligently now, where I only ached darkly and testified awkwardly before; but I can’t believe I can’t somehow, bit by bit, help you and ease you by dividing with you, as it were, the heavy burden of your consciousness. Can one man be as mortally, as tenderly attached to another as I am to you, and be at the same time a force, as it were, of some value, without its counting effectively at some right and preappointed moment for the brother over whom he yearns? (473)

James tries to demonstrate to Fullerton that he could “help” and “ease” his “heavy
burden” of “consciousness,” since he now fully comprehends his admitted sexuality and past romantic involvements with men. With their “clearing of the air,” James suggests that since the “falsity”—of only pretending or playfully teasing with same-sex desire, as opposed to direct admission of desire—that obscured their relationship was eradicated and they now could use their frank understanding of each other’s queerness to provide support to one another. No longer “aching darkly” nor “testifying awkwardly,” James now allowed himself a certain freedom in his connection to Fullerton, as his role as the older, wiser mentor affords him the opportunity to offer advice and counsel to the younger writer. Calling Fullerton a “brother” for whom he yearns, James reinforces the fact that he feels “mortally” and “tenderly attached” to Fullerton, that he feels privileged to have his confidence and trust. (The idea, here, too of the “brother” carries multifold ramifications, given James’ sexualizing of his relationships with his own brother, William, and the idea of comradeship, which appears in Wharton’s allusion to “we happy
few,” as the band of brothers who made up their Qu’acre set.) As a result of Fullerton’s revelation to James, their charged friendship deepens, at least for James, as he is able to confide things to Fullerton that were previously forbidden—hence his consistent and clever use of playful, camp language.

Shifting back to the pressing matter at hand—Fullerton’s predicament of blackmail and the threat of ruin—James reassures the journalist that he will do what he can to help allay his worst fears and offers sound advice. James, in good faith, tries to demonstrate his devotion and concern for Fullerton, though he lacked the financial resources to help him out of his difficult situation. He proffers a promise of loyal assistance and counsel, “The letter I return to you—exquisite and sacred—represents a value of devotion, a dedication to you, so absolute and precious that I should feel but one thing about it in your place (as for that matter I perceive you to feel)—that it will be more than anything else, than all together, the thing to see you through” (474). James hoped that his ardent support and shared sense of difference, in terms of a queer sensibility, would strengthen Fullerton’s position in his dealings with his blackmailer. Most importantly, Fullerton was not alone. James continues to advise: “So sit tight and sit firm and do nothing—save indeed look for that money; for while I wish to goodness I could help you to look, better than my present impotence permits. But even this may miraculously happen” (474). Interestingly, James employs sexual language when he regretfully declares that he does not have the financial means for helping Fullerton out of his tight spot, using the word “impotence” to describe his inability. Yet, almost playfully, James teases, “But even this might miraculously happen,” suggesting that his “impotence” might evaporate and allow him to assist Fullerton in satisfying any needs he
may have—financial or otherwise. He intimates that he might be able to help him “look” for the money that will release him from the bonds of blackmail. As a final postscript, James orders Fullerton, “Destroy these things—when you’ve made them yours” (474); in other words, he urges Fullerton to rid himself of any evidence of his queer past—which his suggestive letters to Gower\textsuperscript{51} and even James’ letters to him substantiated.

According to Marion Mainwaring, in her study \textit{Mysteries of Paris: The Quest for Morton Fullerton}, Morton Fullerton’s sexual liaisons with men stemmed from his belief that men possessed a finer intellect than women, which, combined with the right attributes in potential sexual conquests, such as power, money, and position, made certain men irresistible to him. Mainwaring asserts, “As you mouse about the Fullerton files, power keeps appearing on the screen. As an unusually beautiful youth he found that he could exert influence over older, well-to-do, important men who took him to Europe, took him to Greece and Egypt, found him a professional position beyond his qualifications” (243). Furthermore, unlike other men who were specifically attracted only to men, Fullerton’s “attraction to men did not debar attraction for women.” As a result of his bisexuality, he could seduce the most powerful individuals he could target, so long as he kept his same-sex relationships discreetly hidden. Perhaps, James understood Fullerton’s habitual practice of aligning himself with the most powerful lovers and suspected that any flattery he paid him had a motive; this would explain James’ suggestion of Fullerton’s “playing up” to Wharton in his letter to her. Mainwaring also emphasizes Fullerton’s past connections with other classmates from his

\textsuperscript{51} A noted sculptor, Lord Ronald Gower inspired Wilde’s character Lord Henry Wotton in his \textit{The Picture of Dorian Gray}, whose decadent and seductive personality opens up Dorian’s eyes to the pleasures of same-sex desire. An almost perfect aesthete, Wotton’s characterization suggests that the real figure of Gower must have been quite charismatic and disarming.
graduating class at Harvard, as well as his association with Oscar Wilde, in terms of his exposure to contemporary queer culture:

My early investigation of Morton’s American life had uncovered friends his own age, men he knew while he was Samuel Longfellow’s protégé, before his intimacy with Aïde and R.G. and acquaintance with Wilde. Some of them were homosexual. Santayana was, in orientation, romantically. He wrote a love poem to a classmate, Ward Thoron. After college he was close to another classmate, the art critic Charles Loeser (said to have been in love with Berenson). Loeser, like Santayana, kept up with Morton, who went to Chantilly with him to look at paintings and introduced him to James, perhaps to Aïde (who introduced him and Berenson to R.G.) and to the Whartons. (241)

Mainwaring lists numerous influential relationships Fullerton maintained with not only former classmates like Santayana, but with other important cultural figures (such as Longfellow, Loeser, and Berenson) within a transatlantic queer community from this period. Much has been made of Wilde’s request for financial assistance, which Fullerton was unable to provide, as well as his proximity to Wilde as the lover of the model for Wilde’s Lord Henry Wotton in The Picture of Dorian Gray, Lord Ronald Gower—or “R.G.” Given the public humiliation and imprisonment of Wilde, Fullerton was only too aware of the dangerous consequences of being publicly “outed,” something which compromising letters certainly could have accomplished. According to Mainwaring, Fullerton’s ex-wife Camille Chabbert suggested that her former husband was a “pédéraste” (the French term for a man who engages in sexual activities with other men) to a neighbor, revealing that those closest to Fullerton were aware of his dalliances with male lovers. Aware of the potential ruin that might result from the public exposure of Fullerton’s same-sex relationships, James offered what support and advice he could to help soothe the younger man’s anxiety, but he lacked the financial resources to bail

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Fullerton out of his predicament, and the situation was delicate enough that he was cautious about any open application to mutual acquaintances for monetary aid.

Five days after his first response to Fullerton’s predicament, James wrote another letter to reassure his friend that he empathized and would try to help him. The tone of the letter seems almost hyperbolic, full of the camp language of affection he employed in his earlier correspondence but, nonetheless, sincere. He cannot help but use erotic imagery in describing his feelings for Fullerton:

> Your letters would make me weep salt tears if I hadn’t almost outlived them, and I unspeakably ache and yearn, at the same time that I howl and gnash my teeth over you—though absolutely without detriment to my conviction of being able somehow to help you, to watch over you and prevent grave harm. Believe this, believe in this, lean on me hard and with all your weight. (474)

Again, James emphasizes the “aching” and “yearning” he feels for Fullerton by drawing upon a theatrical performance of despair—here, the “howling” and “gnashing of teeth”—which conjure up images of those doomed to a Biblical hell. James’ urging of Fullerton to lean on him “hard” with “all” his weight reveals a desire for a tactile relationship that beyond familial pats and squeezes to leaning, drawing close, and touching and penetrating “to the quick.” Another important point of advice James extends concerns leading a double-life, where a superficial façade presented to the public masked or distracted others from the hidden life one maintained in private. He recommends: “For the rest, throw yourself outside the damned circle with a cultivated and systematic intensity, throw yourself on your work, on your genius, on your art, on your knowledge, on the Universe in fine (though letting the latter centrally represent H.J.)—throw yourself on the blest alternative life” (475). The “alternative life” James describes is the “life of art,” which “religiously invoked and handsomely understood ... never fails the invoker”
and “sees him through everything, on the contrary and reveals to him the secrets of and for her doings so.” In a moment of almost confession, James admits that he has shared Fullerton’s feelings of desperation and futility, only to console himself by throwing himself into his “art,” claiming, “She has seen me through everything, and that was a large order too” (475). Like Wilde’s imprisonment, Fullerton’s blackmail provides James with an opportunity for discussion and expression of same-sex desire with other men. Through tragic circumstance, James is allowed into Fullerton’s confidence, and confirms his suspicion that Fullerton was indeed not only attracted to men but carried on sexual relationships with them. In turn, James intimates to Fullerton how those feelings of same-sex desire also resided in him, although he concealed his queer sexuality from a public audience and found solace from close friends who understood his private self, as well as in his art, his writing.

In order to resist the demands of compulsory heteronormative society, James and his friends created for themselves a community of queer men where their “difference” or “otherness” could be celebrated, even lauded. Once admitted into this community, men could safely discuss the benefits of “higher sodomy,” “paiderastia” or “comradeship,” without fear of violence, blackmail or imprisonment. This community provided an atmosphere where literature could flourish, cultural interests could be shared, and desire could be expressed to fuel imaginative achievement in the arts—visual and performing. Certainly, one might have to possess a split life of double-consciousness, but the art that resulted from such a unique life experience made such hardship worthwhile, according to James. By describing his own feelings of a dual existence, James tries to supply Fullerton with the means for coping as a queer man in a homophobic society; that is, he
instructed Fullerton to keep his public and private selves separate and contained and pursue the arts—advice he himself heeded carefully.

Even though a major discovery had occurred in James’ relationship with Fullerton, James remained silent, at least in his letters, about Fullerton’s sexual past with Wharton, despite the fact that Wharton was becoming everyday more smitten with Fullerton herself. From a letter written to Wharton on November 24th, 1907, we know that Fullerton paid James an overnight visit at Lamb House, “from 6.30 one P.M. to 9.30 the next A.M.,” though James fails to mention to Wharton what it was that brought Fullerton to his door. This omission is significant as James admits that Fullerton’s visit was “the only visit he had paid me in all these years” (477). It certainly was not a coincidence that James recorded a visit from Fullerton in his letter to Wharton only ten days after his first response to Fullerton’s confession of his potential scandal. In fact, James, in his letter to Wharton, responds to the “brave messages,” “beautiful Terrace photograph,” and news of the “final installation in the Revue de Paris,” of the French translation of The House of Mirth, which Wharton had sent to James through Fullerton—demonstrating that Wharton must have had knowledge of Fullerton’s planned visit to James, for she had given him these things to pass along. Two days after his letter to Wharton, James wrote to Fullerton, expressing his concern for what he considered a foolish mistake on Fullerton’s part—that he believed that Fullerton was making a colossal mistake in keeping up his association with the woman who was blackmailing him: “It is detestable that you should still be under the same roof with her—but if you should remain so after she had lifted a finger to attempt to colporter [peddle] her calumnies—you would simply commit the folly of your life. My own belief is that if you
really break with her—utterly and absolutely—you will find yourself free” (479).

Beyond the advice in regard to Fullerton’s confronting and terminating his connection with Henrietta Mirecourt, James also writes to reassure his younger friend that even if his letters to Gower were exposed to the public, he would have nothing of which to be ashamed.

Since over 12 years had passed since the Wilde trials, there was greater tolerance for same-sex sexuality in England, especially between men and especially in upper-class social circles. Furthermore, James claims, Fullerton’s former lover, Lord Ronald Gower—whose direct connection to Oscar Wilde had once been cause for knowing snickers—now had developed “all the appearance” of a “regularized member of society,” despite his earlier show of same-sex relations. James contends:

As for R[onald] G[ower], he is very ancient history and, I think, has all the appearance today of a regularized member of society, with his books and writings everywhere, his big movement (not so bad) to Shakespeare, one of the principal features of Stratford on Avon. However, I didn’t mean to go into any detail—if you [have] known him you’ve known him (R.G.); and it is absolutely your own affair, for you to take your own robust and frank and perfectly manly stand on. Many persons, as I say, moreover, knowing him at this end of Time (it is my impression); the point is what I especially insist on as regards your falsified perspective and nervously aggravated fancy. I have a horror-stricken apprehension of your weakening, morbidly, to her; the one and only thing that could lose you. (479)

Interestingly, in this passage, James downplays Fullerton’s affair with Gower as nothing that would be too upsetting or shocking if word were to get out. Citing Gower’s past flamboyance and public homosexuality as “very ancient history,” James assuages Fullerton’s fear of his same-sex liaison being discovered and the negative impact such a scandal would incur in regard to his social relationships and standing. Given that “Time” had bleached social memory, James rallies Fullerton to take a “robust and frank and
perfectly manly stand” against the blackmailing Mirecourt, as others would follow his cue and believe his word over hers. If he acted weak-willed and furtive (attributes James considered unmanly and effeminate), then others would think the worst; but, if he took a forceful and honest approach to his problem, as well as Mirecourt, then he would find that his situation would not be nearly as disastrous as first thought. The advice that James gives to Fullerton reveals much about his own personal view, as a man, of queer identity—an identity that was not only powerfully masculine but direct and forceful, even dominant.

James’ word choice is of great import, here. Worried that Fullerton’s “falsified perspective” and “nervously aggravated fancy” would lead to his “weakening, morbidly” to Mirecourt, James curiously uses psychologically charged phrases to emphasize to Fullerton the damaging repercussions of his continued association with his former mistress. In a final literary flourish, he closes his letter by again stressing the “manly” role Fullerton needed to assume: “Don’t again in any degree however small or indirect, temporize an inch further, but take your stand on your honour, your manhood, your courage, your decency, your intelligence and on the robust affection of your old, old, and faithful, faithful friend” (480). By calling attention to masculine traits and behavior, James steers Fullerton away from the submissive traits that would mark him as not only effeminate but as the negative stereotypical image of the queer man, as exemplified by Oscar Wilde, which persisted in a social memory that would only “forgive” so much.

According to Marion Mainwaring, Fullerton’s relationships with men were motivated largely by his drive for power. He aligned himself with men who were able to offer him valuable assistance—monetarily, socially or professionally. Possessing no
exclusive attraction to men, Fullerton did not suffer the same anguish over his sexuality as queer men who were only drawn to other men, like James or A.C. Benson; his sexual versatility allowed him to pass more easily as straight. Thus, when James suspected Fullerton of “playing up” to Wharton, he had an understanding from years of knowing Fullerton and how he could be a fickle admirer. In fact, James had been the one to introduce Fullerton to Margaret Brooke, the wife of the Rajah of Sarawak, James Brooke—who continued to live in India, while his wife enjoyed the pleasures of England. Shari Benstock refers to James in the Fullerton-Brooke affair as a “facilitator-voyeur” who arranged “lunches and dinners á trios” (170). Though Benstock surmises that James’ “interest in these meetings was fueled by his erotic interest in Fullerton, who teased and tantalized him,” she never fully unpacks the complexity of James’ role in Wharton’s affair with Fullerton. Benstock claims that James had been in love with Fullerton but surprisingly pinpoints the climax of his sexual interest in Fullerton to the late 1890s, writing, “James had visited him in Paris on several occasions, his interest peaking in the late 1890s; the affair was never consummated” (170). If James lost sexual interest in Fullerton after the late 1890s, then why would he urge Fullerton to disclose the details of his blackmail, and, again, why would he encourage Wharton, repeatedly, to carry on a romantic liaison with Fullerton, as he had when he advised Fullerton to engage in an affair with Brooke?

James’ participatory role in Wharton’s relationship with Fullerton is the key to understanding how and why Wharton changed so dramatically after the affair ended. The period of time between 1905 and 1910 became a critical stage in regard to Wharton’s initiation into, and identification with, queer culture, as represented by the men who
provided admission into a distinctly queer male academic community. James, along with Sturgis, allowed Wharton a sense of sameness in that they were considered “others”—either by a larger heteronormative society or in their own personal views of themselves—in that they defied mainstream definitions of gender and sexuality. As he presided over Wharton’s affair, again performing the role of the “facilitator-voyeur,” James tried to consummate his desire for Fullerton by living vicariously through Wharton’s experience; Wharton, who encouraged James’ parasitical position as a quasi-sexual participant, allowed herself to be the conduit through which James could attempt to fulfill his “yearning” for Fullerton. As a result of the complexity of that triangulated relationship, Wharton began to investigate her sense of gender in terms of her interiorized self, psychologically unearthing aspects of her personality she recognized in the queer men with whom she so closely identified, and James maintained a key function within that triangle.

From Frank Kaplan, we know that James tended to be drawn to artistic men. In his biography, Kaplan writes that James fell in love with Paul Joukowsky, whom James met through his friend Turgenev, in 1876. Shortly after meeting Joukowsky, whom Kaplan describes as “an amateur painter” and “languid, drifting, handsome,” who was six years younger than himself, James found his new friend “irresistibly attractive” and pursued a relationship with him that included “dinners and long talks.” His attachment to Joukowsky was not lasting, however, for he became offended when Joukowsky took up with Wagner and his entourage—who maintained an “open homosexual and adulterous atmosphere.” By 1880, James felt disgust instead of admiration for the younger friend. When James met the sculptor Hendrik C. Andersen in 1899, he was charmed by the
attractive, slim, blonde Norwegian-American who was only too appreciative to win the Master’s notice. Within a year of their meeting, James had offered the young sculptor his patronage, similar to a proposal from Lord Gower, and Bell speculates that James may have known of Gower’s previous offer. James also considered making Andersen “the beneficiary of his life insurance policy” (xx), demonstrating the seriousness of their relationship from James’ perspective.

Two years prior to meeting James, Andersen charmed Lord Gower who was also well-known and respected as a sculptor and art critic. As Andersen recounts in a letter to his sister, Gower offered to become his patron but, in actuality, made Andersen feel more of an offer of adopting him. “He had proposed in short order nothing less than to adopt Hendrik—since he had no children of his own—and make him heir to his estate,” writes Millicent Bell, in her work Edith Wharton and Henry James: The Story of Their Friendship. “Perhaps Andersen refused the implied bargain; perhaps Gower changed his mind and withdrew his proposal. However it happened, another candidate was named Gower’s adoptee” (xx). So, when James made his offer of assistance to Andersen, the Scandinavian was only too pleased to accept his aid. Bell goes on to show how James introduced Andersen to the “old Newport crowd,” which included such notable figures as Bernard Berenson and Isabella Gardner and became the instructor to Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (xxi). One need not look too far to understand James’ fascination with the young sculptor. James first novel, published between January and December, 1875, centered on male homoeroticism—an older patron’s desire for the young sculptor whose career and art he encouraged—Roderick Hudson.
Recently, *Roderick Hudson* has become a popular text for reexamining James’ works from the new perspective of queer theory, especially given the revisionist biographies that have been published that reclaim James as a queer author. For the writers of these studies, from Wendy Graham to Eric Haralson, the relationship between Rowland Mallet and Roderick Hudson is instrumental in determining the author’s own feelings about male homosexuality. Hudson’s provocative form of Hellenism, according to Graham, references Pater’s *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* and is best demonstrated in the piece of statuary which celebrates nude male beauty and youth (and first catches Mallet’s eye): “On the base was scratched the Greek word *Δίψα*, Thirst. The figure might have been some beautiful youth of ancient fable—Hylas or Narcissus, Paris or Endymion” (59). James plays with a reference to the Greek mythological figure Ganymede, the irresistibly beautiful cup bearer whom Zeus seduces, and the statue shows a youth drinking water from a gourd, in an erotic pose: “The lad was squarely planted on his feet, with his legs a little apart; his back was slightly hollowed, his head thrown back; his hands were raised to support the rustic cup. There was a loosed fillet of wild flowers about his head” (59). The posturing, here, is seductively and unmistakably sexual—“legs a little apart,” with a back that is “slightly hollowed” and a head that is “thrown back”—the image of orgasm. James’ direct references to notorious men in Greek myth—such as Hylas (lover of Hercules), Narcissus (often considered homosexual, due to his masturbatory self-love), and Endymion (a popular subject of much homoerotic art, particularly of nude young men bathing, from the period)—emphasize the connection between the image of the boy in Hellenistic art and literature to same-sex desire. As Rowland Mallet admires the figure, he experiences desire, as an older man, for a young
boy—that of the *erastes* for the *eronemos*—which foreshadows his attraction to the statue’s creator, Hudson. Not coincidentally, Mallet’s immediate interest in the statue’s creator at first is physical, admiring the beauty of the younger man. Mallet, in fact, observes the sculptor with the same exacting eye and attention to sensual detail that he pays to his art.

When Mallet first sees Hudson, he is struck by the younger man’s innate physical beauty and his cultivated appearance, perhaps resembling the aesthete or dandy from the period. Hudson’s frame is slight, making him the beautiful boy, the *eronemos*. As a “tall slender young fellow,” Hudson is not only “remarkably handsome,” but he is almost a piece of sculpture himself, with his features “admirably chiselled and finished” (64). His frame is underdeveloped, like that of an adolescent boy—with a bodily structure in “excessive want of breadth,” too “narrow” a forehead, and markedly “narrow” shoulders and jaw—giving an overall impression of “insufficient physical substance” (64). Again, James reiterates the fact that Hudson’s build is slight, as a “fair slim youth,” and that he possesses a “delicate countenance” and “harmonious face” of “extraordinary beauty” (64). Here, Hudson’s boyishness and physical vulnerability lend him a feminized appearance that is delicate rather than robust, slight instead of muscular, and more beautiful than handsome. The associations of innocence and purity that the figure of the beautiful boy in late nineteenth century fiction—not to mention James’ works like “The Author of Beltraffio” and “The Pupil”—ironically created unsettling desire in the older men who were their observers, teachers or patrons. In this particular novel, though, Hudson is not a boy, but only possesses a boyish appearance. The suggested virtue of his physical features (keeping in mind the Greek belief in the direct relationship between
form and content) contradicts the artificiality of his self-presentation. Mallet assesses his costume:

He was clad from head to foot in a white linen suit, which had never been remarkable for the felicity of its cut and had now quite lost its vivifying and redeeming crispness. He wore a bright red cravat, passed through a ring altogether too splendid to be valuable; he pulled and twisted, as he sat, a pair of yellow kid gloves; he emphasized his conversation with great dashes and flourishes of a light silver-tipped walking stick, and he kept constantly taking off and putting on one of those slouched sombreros which are the traditional property of the Virginian or Carolinian of romance. When his hat was on he was very picturesque, in spite of his mock elegance . . . He evidently had a natural relish for brilliant accessories and appropriated what came to his hand. (64)

This image of Roderick Hudson, though it predates Huysmans’ *À Rebours* (1884) and Wilde’s crafting of an effeminate public persona as a dandy\(^\text{52}\), presents what Eric Haralson asserts becomes the “protogay” figure in James’ fiction—the precursor of the fully developed gay man—and anticipates and emphasizes the pronouncedly theatrical nature of the effeminate queer man of the modern period. Of course, this performance of identity through artifice, posturing and contrived self-presentation by men called “aesthetes” and “dandies” was associated with a specifically queer subject position—especially by a predominant heteronormative society, after the Wilde trials. As early as 1875, James presents a vivid version of the dandy, even if experimental or in a “protogay” form, as a younger, beautiful, male artist who attracts the attention of and inspires same-sex desire in an older man in a position of becoming a mentor or patron. Hudson’s grand “flourishes” of his walking stick, his nervous use of his gloves, his dramatic manipulation of his exotic hat and his exaggerated gestures together signify

\(^{52}\) Alan Sinfield, in his *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment*, claims that “Wilde had adopted the manners and appearance of an effeminate aesthete in 1877” and “since 1882 he had presented himself as an effeminate dandy” (2), which would place James’ novel as having come out two years prior to Wilde’s public transformation into the “effeminate aesthete.”
Hudson’s mastering of a social artificiality that would later become associated with notoriously dandyish queer men—such as Robert de Montesquiou (the man upon whom both Huysmans’ des Esseintes and Proust’s Baron de Charlus were largely based), Oscar Wilde and even Fullerton’s own Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower—from the late nineteenth century.

While it is fascinating that James named *Roderick Hudson* his first novel (even though his work *Watch & Ward*, a novel that addresses similar themes of same-sex desire between men, had been written earlier), it is even more fascinating that James chose this particular novel to be the first to appear in print in his New York Edition form in December, 1907, only one month after his epistolary exchange with Fullerton about the latter’s affair with Lord Gower. The close proximity of the publication date of James’ newly revised novel to the discussion that ensued between James and Fullerton must have stirred up conflict in terms of his reinvention of his public self, for when James first wrote his novel *Roderick Hudson*, the aesthete/dandy had not yet been clearly designated as a specifically homosexual figure within society (either in Great Britain and in the United States). According to Alan Sinfield, even Oscar Wilde’s most flamboyant characters in his plays from the early 1890s—characters that now represent iconic images of queer men and masters of camp in the English literary canon—were able to flirt with queerness, while never directly taking on exclusive identification in terms of same-sex, male sexual orientation. Rather, due to social convention and a privileged class sensibility, the dandy had been allowed to be effeminate without any suspicion of non-heteronormativity, since effeminacy did not definitively denote queerness. “The history of effeminacy as I have been tracing it—as it runs through the rake, the fop, and the man
of feeling—means that the Wildean dandy—so far from looking like a queer—was
distinctively exonerated from such suspicions,” explains Sinfield. “Because of his class
identification, or aspiration, he above all need not be read as identified with same-sex
practices” (71).

Interestingly, Sinfield suggests that an unforgivable violation of upper-class
sensibility remained at the root of Wilde’s downfall and the resulting condemnation of
the effeminate dandy. After the Wilde trials, male effeminacy implied either active or
latent homosexuality when observed by homophobic individuals in society. Sinfield
continues: “The image of the queer cohered at the moment when the leisured, effeminate,
aesthetic dandy was discovered in same-sex practices, underwritten by money, with
lower-class boys. This was not at all what other idealistic, same-sex apologists had
admitted, or perhaps meant—neither the public-school boy-losers, nor the manly-
comradely types” (121). Sinfield therefore suggests an explanation for what I feel was
James’ deliberate abandonment of his earlier image as the aesthete-turned-dandy (his
well-groomed beard, his slim figure, his impeccable taste in tailored clothing, his love of
accessories) for a more manly image (his clean-shaven face, his rotund and more
substantial body, his disheveled appearance, his ill-fitted wardrobe). By assuming the
“noble Roman mask” Wharton later described in her memoir, James presented to a
potentially prejudiced public an image of manhood that correlated to a definitive
masculinity. By rejecting those characteristics that were perceived to be effeminate
(suggesting that only women could be interested in things like personal appearance,
fashion, grooming, etc.), James reinvented himself as the manly Master, demonstrating
his own maturation from the eronemos (the effeminate and boyish dandy) to the erastes
(the masculine and manly mentor who loves younger men). Thus, when James advised Fullerton to act “robust” and “perfectly manly,” he counseled the younger man to fashion a public image that would side-step any implication of sexual abnormality. When Sinfield refers to the “public-school boy-lovers” and the “manly-comradely types,” he locates two forms of queer male identity directly represented in Wharton’s Inner Circle—friends like Howard Sturgis, Gaillard Lapsley, and Percy Lubbock.

Despite James’ full knowledge of Fullerton’s sexual indiscretions, he never warned Wharton of Fullerton’s compromised past or threatened blackmail during the time when she developed romantic feelings for the “mysterious” journalist. Given the immediate proximity of James’ discovery and Wharton’s burgeoning interest in Fullerton during the late autumn of 1907, one might expect that James would have cautioned Wharton—beyond his vague comments about not expecting him to visit or that he might be “playing up” to her—about Fullerton’s past liaison with Lord Gower, which was costing him not only financially, but emotionally. James had also certainly demonstrated frustration with Fullerton’s continued association with Madame Mirecourt and begged him to no longer share the same address with such an “atrocious creature” and “mad, vindictive and obscene old woman” (478). In his letter from November 26th, James pleads with Fullerton to come to his senses:

> It is detestable that you should still be under the same roof with her—but if you should remain so after she had lifted a finger to attempt to colporter [peddle] her calumnies—you would simply commit the folly of your life. My own belief is that if you really break with her—utterly and absolutely—you will find yourself free—and leave her merely beating the air with grotesque gestes and absolutely “getting” nowhere. (479)

Using such strong phrasing as “the folly of your life” to describe Fullerton’s living situation with Mirecourt, James did not hide his feelings about his friend’s former
mistress but reprimanded Fullerton for his foolish decision to maintain a connection with the woman who was extorting money from him. In a fascinating twist of scholarship, Marion Mainwaring speculates that Fullerton may not have been giving James an accurate account of his dealings with Mirecourt and instead suggests that Fullerton may have worked in collusion with his former lover—who indeed might not have been so “former” a lover. It is clear that this woman had an inexplicable hold on Fullerton, a hold that mystified those closest to Fullerton, including his own father.

Fullerton’s father, Bradford M. Fullerton, was fully aware of his son’s numerous affairs during his youth with both men and women. Mainwaring provides a transcription of an important letter from Fullerton’s father that shows that he was less than pleased with his son’s profligate ways. In his letter of May 13th, 1904, the elder Fullerton chastises his son for applying to his family for financial support for an insurance policy not only for himself but for his mistress, the infamous Mirecourt. The father writes: “If money must be paid to that scheming woman who seems to have complete control of you, and with whom you are so unwise as to dicker, we will let you have a reasonable sum which you (not she, on your honor) may name, provided you give me a legal title to the policy. This will involve real sacrifice on our part, but I would rather make than have you disgrace yourself and your family” (60). Even as early as 1904, Morton Fullerton was soaking his parents for money, using his mistress as an excuse, which lends interesting support to Mainwaring’s supposition of Fullerton’s collusion with Mirecourt. In this letter, Bradford Fullerton implied that his son is so absorbed with his own wants and needs that he is draining his family’s bank accounts as well as burdening their hearts. The father continues: “You are deceiving C[famille], and in an effort to ‘liquidate’ the
situation to please her are simply getting yourself deeper and deeper into the mire . . .

Mamma is weakening by your neglects, and, I am afraid, will not last long. You seem to be wholly absorbed by Madame M[irecourt] or by something so that you do not think much of the people this side the sea” (60). The elder Fullerton bemoans the fact that Morton remains married to Camille Chabbert, while conducting an affair with Mirecourt and points out that his dishonorable behavior reflects not only on himself but also on his family.

Jaded by his son’s sexual past, the patriarch also makes allusion to Fullerton’s reckless youth, which included sexual involvements with numerous people male and female alike. Reminding him of his past indiscretions, the father begs his son to finally grow up, take responsibility for his own actions, and act morally, in a tone of castigation. He scolds: “You remember the two or three early love episodes in this country which seem to me excusable because of your youth—then the lamentable Kellogg affair. Afterwards, Percy Anderson, Lord Gower, etc., associations—the dangerous complications with Lady Brooke… Within the last few years Mde Mirecourt has reigned supreme” (61). Surprisingly, Fullerton’s father named at least two of his son’s male lovers, demonstrating that he was under no illusion as to his son’s sexual past and present and that he clearly understood that his son was bisexual. While he excuses his son’s dalliances with Anderson and Gower, as something excusable in a young man, he also anticipated his maturation into heteronormativity and prescribed social mores. The concerned and weary father no longer wants to fund his son’s reckless lifestyle. His exasperation and disbelief are eerily similar to James’ sentiments, in a letter to Fullerton over three years later.
When Henry James offered counsel for Morton Fullerton, he, in a sense, took over the paternal role as advisor and mentor, the older and wiser queer man. Painfully aware of the social codes that he so brilliantly investigated in his novels, James offered a voice of reason, warning his friend to conduct himself in a more masculine manner and assume a mask of heteronormativity, until the danger of blackmail subsided. When he commands Fullerton to take an assertive and dominant role in his dealings with Mirecourt, he does so with an unmistakably firm tone: “Don’t again in any degree however small or indirect, temporize an inch further, but take your stand on your honour, your manhood, your courage, your decency, your intelligence and on the robust affection of your old, old, and faithful, faithful friend” (480). Again, James emphasizes Fullerton’s “manhood” and reaffirms his own masculinity by describing his affection for Fullerton as “robust”—words that both resist any connection to the effeminacy or effemeness were linked, after the Wilde trials, to same-sex male desire. Only three days after his letter to Fullerton about Mirecourt, James penned another missive, on November 29th, 1907, that reassured Fullerton of his support and sympathetic understanding of his position. Using strong language, James emotionally responds to Fullerton, by claiming, “I am with you, in the intensity of my imagination and my affection, at each moment of the day—and I immensely cultivate the feeling that you know I am and that such knowing, such absolute consciousness and confidence, does say something valuable to you” (480). The dramatic effect of this powerful declaration by James left Fullerton with no way of misunderstanding the Master’s deep attachment to him. When James so strongly pronounces, “I am with you, in the intensity of my imagination and my affection,” he reveals almost a fixation with Fullerton “at each moment of the day,” using the
exaggerated language of a lover. The intensity of James' meaning could not have been misunderstood. When he asserted, "I immensely cultivate the feeling that you know I am," James hopes that such open expression of his devotion, on his part, will provide Fullerton with "something valuable." How strange to think that during the very same time that Wharton first became infatuated with Fullerton, James' relationship with the same man was profoundly changing and deepening, their mutual understanding of their queer sexualities providing a bond of sympathy and desire—at the very least on the part of James. It is safe to say that not only were Wharton and James both in love with Fullerton at the same time, but the complicated desire within that triangle fueled the affair between both Wharton and Fullerton.

The French Connection

On February 21st, 1908, Edith Wharton confided to Fullerton, in her "Love Diary," that she had experienced a moment of disillusionment, springing from her fear that her biological sex, as a woman in body, negatively impacted their intellectual connection, as male equals. Wharton again suggests that her interiorized self is male, like Fullerton. After Wharton read aloud to Fullerton from an article on George Meredith, she sat in awe, listening to him discuss the "finer values" in the essay that she had overlooked. Amazed by his intelligence, Wharton remembered, "As I followed you, seeing your mind leap ahead, as it always does, noting how you instantly singled out the finer values I had missed—discriminated, classified, with that flashing, illuminating sense of differences & relations that so exquisitely distinguishes your thought—ah, the illusion I had, of a life in which such evenings might be a dear, accepted habit" (671). The spell of the moment shattered when Fullerton apparently said something that
“distressed and confused her,” with a “characteristic swing from the intellectual to the erotic,” according to R.W. B. Lewis. In her private writing, Wharton tried to explain her confusion:

Why did you spoil it? Because men & women are different, because—in that respect—in the way of mental companionship—what I can give you is so much less interesting, less arresting, than what I receive from you? It was as if there stood between us at that moment the frailest of glass cups, filled with a rare colourless wine—& with a gesture you broke the glass & spilled the drops . . . You hurt me—you disillusioned me—& when you left me I was more deeply yours . . . Ah, the confused processes within us!

Wharton questions their gender difference as the cause of the disruption of their mental connection, calling into doubt the traditional notion that “men & women are different” in “the way of mental companionship.” She needles Fullerton, by asking, “What I can give you is so much less interesting, less arresting, than what I receive from you?” Offended by Fullerton’s lack of faith in the acuity of her mind, Wharton describes how “hurt” and “disillusioned” she felt, when she had, only moments before, thought that they had reached an intellectual understanding. Lewis contends that Fullerton ruined the moment by intimating that mere mental stimulation was not enough, that he needed sexual fulfillment that Wharton was not quite yet ready to give: “Fullerton, she thought, unsatisfied in his masculine way with a mere union of minds, was demanding of her something that she had no capacity to engage in, no real experience of” (206). Both intrigued and frightened, Wharton could only describe her tumult of emotion as “the confused processes within,” as she longed only for a “comrade” with whom she could enjoy an intense intellectual connection.

By March 3, 1908, Wharton described in her diary entry a feeling of mental communion with Fullerton, when they went to the theatre together: “I felt for the first
time that indescribable current of communication flowing between myself & someone else—felt it, I mean, uninterruptedly, securely, so that it penetrated every sense & every thought” (673). Wharton’s language is sexual, as she suggests that Fullerton “penetrated every sense and every thought,” entering the very core of her being. Like James, Wharton is mentally seduced by Fullerton, entranced by his ability to seep into her thoughts and inspire sexual desire. Yet, their intellectual intercourse provided only a frustrating sense of prolonged foreplay. When their continued flirtation continued into April, Wharton anxiously kept returning to the subject of gender construction. Surprised by her own feelings, on April 20th, she reveals, “Nothing else lives in me now but you—I have no conscious existence outside the thought of you, the feeling of you. I, who dominated life, who stood aside from it so, how I am humbled, absorbed, without a shred of will or identity left” (673). Describing her amazement at finally experiencing “what happy women feel,” Wharton seems to embrace her femininity and womanhood in expressions of desire for Fullerton, recorded in her “Love Diary.” Throwing aside her male subject position in terms of intelligence and mental self, as a force that “dominated life,” Wharton now feels helpless, submissive and vulnerable—all characteristics she linked to being a woman. She struggles, however, with the deeply-rooted conflict between her exterior and interior selves and the mainstream dominant culture that strongly preserved polarized gender constructs.

Describing her mind as more intimate than her body, Wharton tries to convince Fullerton that she can be as intellectually stimulating, a man: “there is a contact of thoughts that seems so much closer than a kiss.” Then, she sadly admits, “There are other days, tormented days—this is one of them—when that sense of mystic nearness
fails me, when in your absence I long, I ache for you, I feel that what I want is to be in your arms, to be held fast there—'like other women!'" (674) Wharton’s language echoes that used by James. She even uses James’ characteristic phrase, “I long, I ache for you,” to express desire, while her plaintive refrain “like other women” betrays a private awareness that she was not like other women. Wharton is seeking reassurance from the non-committal Fullerton, who could run hot, then cold, and mystify those who longed for him.

When Wharton wrote this entry in her diary, she knew that James would be arriving soon for a visit. According to Lewis, James had planned to join her in France for a two-week visit, beginning April 24th: “He had finally agreed to come over in the third week of April. Edith suggested that they join up in Amiens and asked if he would mind Fullerton’s being with them. ‘It will be adorable to have W.M.F.,’ James replied. ‘Kindly tell him so with my love’” (216). Oddly, at the point when Wharton was feeling most vulnerable and most open to Fullerton, she invites James into their presence, knowing that James still harbored feelings for Fullerton. The day after James’ arrival, on April 25th—they met in Paris instead of the proposed Amiens—Wharton’s investment in Fullerton exponentially increased, fed by the connection that they forged in their overheated conversations. In a reverie, she remembered, “The day before yesterday, when I made you some answer that surprised & amused you, & you exclaimed: ‘Oh, the joy of seeing around things together!,’ I felt for the first time that you understood what I mean by the thoughts that are closer than a kiss.—And yet I understand now, for the first time, how thought may be dissolved in feeling” (674). It is more than coincidental that, just at the time when Wharton’s and Fullerton’s liaison was starting to “heat up,” James
entered into the relationship as a participant in their discussions and excursions. We know that James dined with Wharton and Fullerton on the night of his arrival and all three lunched together the next day before paying a visit to the Blanches at their “Sunday open house in Passy” (216). Jacques-Émile Blanche, the celebrated portrait painter, added another complicated layer to the dynamic was beginning to develop between Wharton, Fullerton and James, providing another reminder of the queer cultural sphere in which they all circulated. To better understand the context of the open environment found at the home of the Blanches, I will examine how Blanche himself figured as an important artist, an artist who had many connections within a specific queer subculture which flourished in France, especially during this period. Through Fullerton, Wharton’s introduction to queer culture, through meetings with artists like Blanche, was reinforced and encouraged, even furthered, with James as a participant and observer.

When Wharton visited and met Jacques-Émile Blanche for the first time, on April 13th, 1908, in Rosa de Fitz-James’ salon, she in fact had been introduced to an artist who notoriously circulated in queer communities in both Paris and London—as well as to the endearing little Abbé Mugnier (Lewis 213). Apparently, Wharton was charmed by Blanche, for on Easter Sunday, April 19th, Wharton and Fullerton lunched at the Blanches’ home in Passy, among a gathering of guests. During this visit, Wharton viewed several of Blanche’s finest portraits, including those of “Thomas Hardy, George Moore, Aubrey Beardsley, and the lesser known Marcel Proust” (213). The presence of Proust’s portrait is of import, here. In her study *Proust’s Cup of Tea: Homoeroticism and Victorian Culture*, Emily Eells claims that Blanche—who famously became fast friends with Walter Berry, in his later years—provided his friend Proust with a source of
knowledge about "the English and their art," since he split his time between "the artistic Anglo-French communities of Dieppe and London" (12). When Wharton first saw Proust's portrait, she saw an image of the writer which was very likely influenced by Oscar Wilde himself. Eells writes: "Blanche did Proust's portrait—for which Wilde allegedly chose the dove-grey silk tie—portraying him as a wan aesthete with drowsy eyes" (12). Not only did Blanche cater to queer artists and writers, but he became the premier portrait painter within the queer community in Paris and London. "Blanche's paintings form a collection specializing in the portraiture of contemporary gay artists: in addition to Proust's, Blanche's gallery includes the portraits of Aubrey Beardsley, Arthur Symons, André Gide and Jean Cocteau," observes Eells. "His depiction of Roy Kennard was so revealing of his true nature that it has since become known as 'The Picture of Dorian Gray'" (12). Blanche, too, became the most vocal confirmer of the speculation that surrounded his contemporary John Singer Sargent—that he was queer and preferred the company of men to women—when he famously exclaimed that Sargent's sex life "was notorious in Paris, and in Venice, positively scandalous. He was a frenzied bugger."53

Blanche and Sargent had come to know each other in Paris and both began an association with Oscar Wilde when the playwright came to Paris in February, 1883; Fullerton was also no stranger to the unmistakably memorable Wilde. During 1889, when Fullerton was living in London, he met Wilde and, after moving to Paris, kept up the connection through periodic correspondence—even offering support to the flamboyant Irish author after his imprisonment. R.W.B. Lewis recounts Wilde's request

53 Patricia Failing, in her article "The Hidden Sargent," in the May 2001 issue of ARTnews, provides this quote by Blanche in her discussion of Sargent's sexuality.
for monetary support, from Fullerton, after his release. Fullerton, who never seemed to have enough money himself, was unable to give the assistance Wilde needed:

It might be added that, though Fullerton only observed from across the channel the trial instigated by Oscar Wilde’s libel action against the Marquis of Queensbury—the second of two cases which most shook European society in these years—he was brushed lightly by its epilogue. When Wilde came to Paris in 1899, broken and ill after his release from Reading Gaol, he sent Fullerton a copy of his play *The Importance of Being Earnest* and asked him for a loan of a hundred francs. Fullerton wrote so ornate an apology for not being able to come to the aid of so great an artist that Wilde was moved to remonstrate mildly: honest feeling, he said was never in need of stilts. (185)

Fullerton had once lingered on the fringes of Wilde’s circle as Lord Gower’s consort and lover and still clearly admired Wilde’s genius in terms of his literary production but was typically short the money Wilde requested. When Fullerton too profusely praised Wilde to cover his embarrassment, Wilde coolly reminded him that, in such a circumstance, hyperbole seemed disingenuous. Marion Mainwaring, in her study of Fullerton, provides Wilde’s actual response. “His refusal of Wilde’s request for a loan drew the barbed: ‘Sentiment, my dear Fullerton, need not borrow stilts,’” Mainwaring reports. “The most telling comment on his attitude is his own note on the ex-convict’s letter: *Parbleu! What he called stilts were Johnsonian tongs*” (241). Fullerton’s substitution of sugar tongs for the “stilts” that Wilde described shows that he did not consider his approbation of Wilde in the letter “over the top.” Stung by Wilde’s reprimand, Fullerton kept the correspondence nonetheless, possibly as a reminder of the danger that he himself could face if his own private same-sex sexual relationships were made public knowledge54.

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54 The significance of Fullerton’s keeping the letter resonates with Walter Berry’s connection to Wilde, when one of Berry’s funerary wreaths was placed on Wilde’s grave in memory of Berry, by a close friend who understood the importance of the Irish playwright in his life, when Berry died. I find it more than coincidental that the core three closest men in Wharton’s life—James, Fullerton, and Berry—all took great
As one who maintained connections in specific queer communities in both London and Paris, Fullerton met many influential writers, artists and cultural figures. Mainwaring confesses her own surprise that Fullerton knew the poet Paul Verlaine, whom he met through Arthur Symons. Interestingly, Verlaine wrote in one of Fullerton’s notebooks, when Fullerton had taken him out to dinner one November night, in the early 1890s, at the Saint-Lazare Station café-restaurant. Fullerton remembered Verlaine as a tragic figure: “Curious fact: in the three hours we spent together Verlaine appealed to me like Jesus Christ and Socrates. I thought of him as a Man of Sorrows, with the Socratic cheerfulness and winningness of spirit behind that ugly mask” (94). In his description, Fullerton likens Verlaine to Christ, whose devotion to his apostles, preference for male company and tragic suffering provided a seemingly appropriate context. He also emphasizes twice Verlaine’s resemblance to Socrates, whose teaching practices and support of pederasty made him an obviously important figure in terms of queer history. Fullerton must have been aware of Verlaine’s relationship with Rimbaud, which had led to the filling of another notebook—one containing bawdy poems, known as the *Album zutique*. Verlaine’s and Rimbaud’s famous sonnet “Le sonnet du trou du cul,” which glorified the pleasures of the anus—like the English prose piece *Teleny* (a pornographic work that celebrated same-sex male sexuality, which several scholars contend Wilde had written)—provided a voice for the love that “dare not speak its name.” Translated, the poem opens: “Dark and puckered like a violet carnation, it breathes, humbly hidden among the froth, still humid from love that follows the soft slope of a white ass down to its deepest rim” (Schultz 711). The imagery that Verlaine and Rimbaud create of the interest in Oscar Wilde, each having a personal fascination with his writing, and that Wharton understood what that interest represented in terms of the queer male literary tradition.
anus—a primary site of pleasure for sex acts between men—is meant to arouse a male reader. Unlike *Teleny*, which describes fellatio and mutual masturbation in graphic detail, as pleasurable sex acts performed by men, Verlaine’s and Rimbaud’s sonnet instead eroticizes sodomy as the culminating expression of same-sex male desire. Verlaine, who, like Wilde, suffered an imprisonment that had been brought on by his relationship with a younger male lover, suffered a public “outing” of his same-sex sexual relationship with Rimbaud, and the result was that he was a scandalized figure, forever connected to male homosexuality, despite a heterosexual marriage. After having shot Rimbaud, during a row in Brussels, Verlaine served a two year sentence in a Belgian prison, after a humiliating rectal exam had proven the nature of their association as sexual. By the time that Fullerton met Verlaine, the former saw the aged writer as a victim, like Wilde—a pitiful genius broken by a hostile society that would not tolerate open homosexuality.

Fullerton, therefore, not only participated in queer communities in both London and Paris, but also reinforced Wharton’s connection to queer men (beyond those men already in her inner circle) who would figure largely in her life. Through Fullerton, Wharton met Jacques-Émile Blanche, a painter whose ties to queer men were quite well-known. While Lewis contends that Wharton met Blanche at Rosa de Fitz-James’ salon, Eleanor Dwight suggests that Wharton was introduced to the painter “through Paul Bourget” (155). Whatever the case, at the time when they first met, Blanche had become the “most fashionable portrait painter in France at the time” (156). Wharton, herself, hints to the knowing reader that Blanche’s most prominent works created a particular pattern linking the individuals who were their subjects. “Among them, or else in the
upper gallery, some of the most notable of our host’s own portraits,” Wharton remembers. “The perfect study of Thomas Hardy, the Degas, the Debussy, the Aubrey Beardsley, the George Moore and the young Marcel Proust—for Blanche, with singular insight, began long ago that unique series of portraits of his famous contemporaries which ought some day to be permanently grouped as a whole” (284). By finishing her list of Blanche’s works with those of Aubrey Beardsley, George Moore, and the “young Marcel Proust”—perhaps Blanche’s most notorious portrait—Wharton calls attention to the artist’s “unique series” that should be displayed “permanently grouped as a whole,” quite aware that most of these portraits were of queer men (Eels 12).

Beyond the impressive collection of portraits, Blanche also had mentored an up-and-coming young English artist, Duncan Grant. Grant, who became one of the core members of Bloomsbury Group and a lover of both Lytton Strachey and John Maynard Keynes, studied under Blanche in 1906, according to The Queer Encyclopedia of the Visual Arts (161). Grant, like Wharton’s good friend Geoffrey Scott—whom she would meet at the Berensons’ in 1913—had been lovers with two of the men who had, in a sense, been the greatest supporters of “The Higher Sodomy” at Cambridge. According to Douglas Blair Turnbaugh, “Despite the oppressiveness of British law and social attitudes condemning homosexuality, Grant lived openly as a gay man. ‘Never be ashamed,’ he liked to say. He remarked that his moral sensibility came from the Regency period, the pre-Victorian era noted for its relaxed sexual mores” (161). I find it more than coincidental that Blanche specialized in the portraiture of “contemporary gay artists” and that he maintained friendships with many queer men whose homosexuality became widely known (like Wilde, Gide, Cocteau, Proust, Beardsley, etc.). Though Blanche
himself was married and never intimated that he was not heterosexual, his continued placement within a clearly defined queer community demonstrates that the associations he developed fulfilled certain needs (artistic stimulation, male friendship, etc.).

During the late nineteenth-century in both London and Paris, many fin de siècle artists and writers believed that beauty in art meant everything, and their artistic credo influenced a generation of artists, writers and thinkers who would be categorized as “Decadents.” Blanche’s recognized himself, in both London and Paris, in two social circles, whose members were the leading figures of the Aesthetic Movement. When the Wilde trials publicly “outed” the “homosexual undercurrent of the Aesthetic Movement” (Robb 36) in London, Paris, as a place of refuge, became a city that allowed more sexual freedom in the way of same-sex relationships—which explains why many queer artists and writers took refuge there. An eccentric, Blanche seemed to have prided himself on his English connections and unconventional beliefs. R.W.B. Lewis describes Blanche as a quite a character:

A very different friend, and before long a closer one, was Jacques Emile Blanche, a man of Edith’s age and a gifted if unadventurous portrait painter. He was a hefty individual with a strong square jaw, and a fluent and malicious conversationalist, much of his talk being given to allusions to his aristocratic friends in France and even more (he was an Anglomaniac) in England. Edith quite enjoyed his genial pomposity.

(213)

Given Blanche’s rather shocking description of John Singer Sargent’s sex life, Lewis’ reference to the painter’s being a “malicious conversationalist” does not seem unfounded, for, if Blanche could call Sargent a “frenzied bugger,” then he certainly did not mince words. Surprisingly, Wharton did not seem deterred by Blanche’s biting confabulations

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and instead praised the painter for his cultural connections. In her *A Backward Glance*, she recalled:

Blanche, besides being an excellent linguist, and a writer of exceptional discernment on contemporary art, is also a cultivated musician; and in those happy days painters, composers, novelists, playwrights—Diaghilew, the creator of the Russian ballet, Henry Bernstein, whose plays were the sensation of the hour, George Moore, André Gide, my dear friend Mrs. Charles Hunter, the painters Walter Sickert and Ricketts, and countless other well-known people, mostly of the cosmopolitan type—met on Sundays in the delightful informality of his studio or about a tea-table under the spreading trees of the garden. (283)

Wharton refers to many men whose connections to queer culture would have been well-known to her contemporary readers of the 1930s. By connecting the names of Diaghilev, Moore, Gide, and Ricketts to Blanche, Wharton stresses the artist’s popularity with a specifically queer artistic community: Diaghilev, who carried on a tempestuous and torrid affair with his principal dancer Nijinsky; Moore, whose unique brand of queerness caused his biographer Adrian Frazier to describe him as a “homosexual man who loved to make love to women”; Gide, who celebrated and defended male homosexuality in his book *Corydon*, and Ricketts, who was the real life model for Wilde’s character Basil Hallward in his *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

All, within artistic and literary culture, maintained specifically queer associations. Even Wharton’s inclusion of seemingly satellite figures, who only liked to be near or a part of queer culture, like her “dear friend Mrs. Charles Hunter,” still carries import here.

Mrs. Hunter, whose sister was Dame Ethel Smyth—an “unapologetic lesbian” who belonged to “an informal queer freemasonry of artists, writers and musicians, including Proust, Cocteau, Romaine Brooks, Serge Diaghilev, Violet Trefussis, Radclyffe

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55 James S. Saslow, in his fine work *Pictures and Passions: A History of Homosexuality in the Visual Arts*, contends that Ricketts was the model for Wilde’s character, page 187.
Hall, and Oscar Wilde (to whose brother she became briefly engaged during a railway journey)\textsuperscript{56}—preferred, as Wharton did, the company of artists and writers, who often collected at her home for social events. Many of their friends, in fact, overlapped, in terms of hers and Wharton's "inner groups." Wharton claims, "Mrs. Hunter's watchful solicitude made her combine her inner group with a view to the enjoyment of all its members, and when I went to Hill I usually found there some of my own friends, among whom Henry James, Percy Lubbock and Howard Sturgis were the most frequent" (300). It was also at Hunter's Hill House that Wharton often encountered George Moore, who "hated and envied James, and missed no chance to belittle and sneer at him" (302) and grated on Wharton's nerves. Though Mrs. Hunter's position in such social gatherings, as the hostess, echoed the role of Rosa de Fitz-James (as one who presided over a salon), her investment in those cultural figures who congregated at her English home related to a distinct awareness of a specific artistic milieu that challenged traditional gender constructs and heteronormative sexual mores. Though Hunter, like the more formal Fitz-James, organized events and enjoyed those unique individuals who visited her, she, unlike Wharton, did not possess a need to connect largely with queer men. From Wharton's account, at Hunter's Hill House, a mélange of cultural figures appeared, such as "Sargent, Walter Sickert, Rodin ... Professor Tonks, Mr. Steer, Claude Monet and

\textsuperscript{56} According to Tamsin Wilton, in The Queer Encyclopedia of Music, Dance and Musical Theatre, page 239. Interestingly, it was to Dame Ethel Smyth that Virginia Woolf wrote her response to Wharton's A Backward Glance, in a letter written on May 21\textsuperscript{st}, 1934. Woolf revealed to Smyth, "I lit the fire and read Mrs. Wharton; Memoirs and she knew Mrs. Hunter, and probably you. Please tell me sometime what you thought of her. Theres the shell of a distinguished mind; I like the way she places colour in her sentences, but I vaguely surmise that there's something you hated and loathed in her. Is there?" (The Letters of Virginia Woolf 305). Given the fact that Smyth was a vociferously adamant feminist, who became an active suffragist, Woolf perhaps had anticipated that Smyth would have found Wharton's open misogyny and preference for men's company offensive. Aware that "Mrs. Hunter" was Smyth's sister, Woolf suspected that Smyth would have had distinct opinions about how Wharton had portrayed both of them in her memoir, had she read the recent publication.
Jacques-Émile Blanche” (300), and, while some of these male artists were queer, the majority of them were not. Hunter did not derive an identity from their queerness. As a friend of Jacques-Émile Blanche, Mary Hunter maintained connections to people who were a part of their social set—artists, writers and thinkers of varied sexual persuasions.

Though Lewis leads one to believe that Wharton met Blanche in the spring of 1908, Wharton’s own recollection challenges this date. In A Backward Glance, Wharton recalled having convinced James to sit for a portrait by Blanche, which Wharton considered humorous, since James was acutely self-conscious about his now rotund silhouette. Clearly entertained, Wharton revealed that her friend very much cared about how he appeared to others in his portrait: “Once, when my friend Jacques-Émile Blanche was doing the fine seated profile portrait which is the only one that renders him as he really was, he privately implored me to suggest to Blanche ‘not to lay such stress on the resemblance to Daniel Lambert’” (175). When Wharton alludes to James’ sitting for a portrait by Blanche again, later on in her memoir, she dates the event to 1905, which would have been almost three years prior to the year that Lewis and Benstock date the portrait’s creation. Wharton continues: “It was in that year [1905], I think, that James, through my intervention, sat to Blanche for the admirable portrait which distressed the sitter because of the ‘Daniel Lambert’ curve of the rather florid waistcoat; and during those sittings, and on other occasions at the Blanches’, he made many new acquaintances, and renewed some old friendships” (306). Unfortunately, Wharton’s use of “I think”

57 Daniel Lambert (1770-1809), at the time of his death, weighed an impressive 739 pounds, though he was 5 foot 11 inches tall. Lambert became famous for his obesity and was forced to tour England in order to earn money as a spectacle, since he required special clothing, carriages and furniture to be made for him. James’ reference to himself as having a “resemblance to Daniel Lambert” exposes the author’s anxiety concern with his weight and his wish not to follow in Lambert’s footsteps as a man primarily known for his size.
undermines her chronology, for it would make more sense that James’ sitting for Blanche would have occurred during his visit to France, in April, 1908. When James arrived in France, he became a focal point in Wharton’s life by participating in her budding romance with Morton Fullerton and it seems quite plausible that, during the same time that Wharton was frequenting the Blanches’ home (for Easter, and other events during the months of April and May), she arranged for James’ portrait to be painted by the host. Lewis certainly provides support for this dating of the painting. He writes that after James had accompanied Wharton and Fullerton to lunch on the second day of his visit, all three ventured to the Blanches’ “Sunday open house in Passy, where *cher James* consorted with Rosa de Fitz-James and a good many others” (216). Shortly following, Wharton worked her magic and convinced James to sit for his portrait: “At Passy, Edith had helped persuade James to sit for a portrait by Jacques Emile Blanche, and James spent part of each of the next few afternoons in Blanche’s studio. The immediate result, James thought, made him look ‘brainy and awful’; but Blanche redid it with the help of photographs” (217). Though James may not have liked the portrait, Wharton certainly did, as she felt that Blanche had captured, more than any other artist, the essence of her friend.  

58 According to the National Portrait Gallery, at the Smithsonian Institute, in Washington, D.C.—where the second attempt at James’ likeness, his portrait, by Blanche is housed—the artist described his subject James as looking like “a Poet-Laureate, with a faraway, meditative look, against a William Morris wallpaper of gilded vine leaves and grape clusters the sort you’d find in the study of an Oxford or Cambridge don.” Given the connotations of the pederastic tradition within the academic setting of the British educational system in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Blanche’s comparison of James to “an Oxford or Cambridge don” denotes an understanding of The Master that only those who knew him best would comprehend, in terms of his queerness. The “gilded vine leaves” Blanche mentions also alludes to the Decadent penchant for gilding objects from Nature, “gilding the lily” or bejeweling tortoise shells like Des Esseintes in Huysmans’ *À Rebours*—strengthening his treatment of James as connected to popular images of male queerness from this period.
On the afternoons that James was required to sit for Blanche, Wharton had ample time with Fullerton. Most likely, Wharton’s fond memories of Blanche’s portrait of James were enhanced by the association with Fullerton. “Edith, proud of her part in the enterprise (she may have paid for it, if anyone did), always regarded it as the best portrait of Henry James ever done,” Lewis contends (217). By the time that April turned into May, Wharton considered James a necessary element in her fledgling affair with Fullerton and expressed this in her Love Diary. One particular passage reveals not only Fullerton’s discomfort in the odd ménage a trois but Wharton’s insistence that James’ presence allowed her to shed her usual shyness and awkwardness.

In her diary entry from May 3rd, Wharton discusses an event from the day prior, when Fullerton did not want to join her and James in an excursion to Beauvais. After pleading with Fullerton, Wharton finally convinced him to tag along, and to Fullerton’s surprise, they all really enjoyed themselves during the outing. Wharton writes: “You did not want to go, objecting that with H.J. it would not be like our excursions à deux. But I could not make up my mind to go without you, & I begged (so against my usual habit!), & you yielded” (675). So strong was her desire that she “begged” (Wharton’s use of italics) him to come, “so against” her “usual habit,” and Wharton was grateful that he relented. Wharton continues: “Alone with you I am often shy & awkward, tormented by the fear that I may not please you—but with our dear H.J. I felt at my ease, & full of the ‘motor nonsense’ that always seizes me after one of these long flights through the air! And what a flight it was! History & romance & natural loveliness every mile of the way” (675).
Rather than inhibiting Wharton’s romantic feelings towards Fullerton, James’ presence allowed her to shrug off her anxieties that impeded her from showing affection. While in the church at Beauvais, Wharton managed to find a moment alone with Fullerton, when James went off on his own: “While H.J. made the tour of the ambulatory … our little minute, sitting outside the steps in the sunshine; with the ‘Dear, are you happy?’ that made it all yours & mine, that drew the great miracle down into the compass of our two hearts—our one heart” (676). When a most likely uncomfortable James tottered off to “tour” the cloister, he allowed the two lovers some time together and, as was becoming the custom during his visit, found himself alone. James must have suspected that Wharton and Fullerton were teetering on the edge of transforming their intellectual flirtation into a full-blown sexual affair.

In another entry, dated also May 3rd, in Wharton’s Love Diary, Wharton decides to take the plunge and overtly signal to Fullerton that she was now ready to consummate their relationship. Oddly, after having spent the day as a threesome, Wharton returned to her private room to confide to her diary that she finally longed to have sex with Fullerton:

Sometimes I think that if I could go off with you for twenty-four hours to a little inn in the country, in the depths of a green wood, I should ask no more. Just to have one long day & quiet evening with you, & the next morning to be still together—oh, how I ache for it sometimes! But how I would ache for it again when it was over … As I wrote these lines I suddenly said to myself: ‘I will go with him once before we separate’ (676).

Wharton was able to express these feelings for Fullerton, because the added dynamic of James’ presence provided the key to her sexual awakening. While many scholars keep James to the periphery of the relationship between Wharton and Fullerton, I see James as the catalyst for Wharton’s sexual maturation and believe that, without James, Wharton
never would have discovered her true sexual and authorial self. Leon Edel speculates that the feminine component in Fullerton's personality is what attracted Wharton, that he had long been admired by James and that fact made the journalist all the more enticing. “He had some of the dignity and the bearing of Walter Berry; but he was also softer, more gentle; there was a touch of the feminine in his make-up,” Edel claims. “James had always been fond of him” (412). The famous James biographer also concludes that Wharton’s attraction to the feminine man, on the part of Wharton is what accounted for her very close friendships with the men who made up the Qu’acre Group. Edel continues, “Fullerton’s component of femininity may have made him in turn highly acceptable to her. Some such chemistry of personality was at work among Edith Wharton’s friendships—not least at Qu’Acre where the rites of Astarte were performed by a circle of younger men and not least the embroidering host, Howard Sturgis” (412-3). Fullerton’s perceived effeminacy and vulnerability appealed to Wharton; she saw that James desired him in the sexual way that she did and Fullerton’s “otherness” in terms of his recognized feminine traits and his bisexuality touched her, resonated with own gender confusion, and lent her desire the added spice of the forbidden and taboo. Fullerton’s bisexuality (even had it not been confirmed, Wharton clearly read the apparent “signs,” much like James) allowed Wharton the opportunity to consummate her desire for the queer man—a man who possessed feminine characteristics and participated in a “secret brotherhood” in a strongly patriarchal literary tradition. Certainly, Fullerton’s career as a journalist and writer added to this erotic equation. In a sense, she could replace James, the older, more masculine desirer (the erastes), in a quasi-pederastic relationship, with Fullerton as the younger, more effeminate object of desire (the eronemos). With both
James and Fullerton holding accepted positions in intellectual circles, Wharton felt the need for their validation, to be taken seriously as if she were a man—hence, her favorite epithet: the “self-made man.” Wharton understood that she was flouting social convention by engaging in an extramarital affair with a younger man, yet her use of an allusion to Nietzsche in the same diary entry to Fullerton signaled her awareness of the added implication of her choice of Fullerton as a potential lover.

“I will go with him once before we separate” (oddly reminiscent of Kate Croy in James’ *The Wings of the Dove* and Ellen Olenska in Wharton’s *The Age of Innocence*, who both participated in a triangulated relationships, much like Wharton):

How strange to feel one’s self all at once ‘Jenseits von Gut und Böse’ … It would hurt no one—it would give me my first, last, draught of life … Why not? I have always laughed at the ‘mala prohibita’—‘bugbears to frighten children.’ The anti-social act is the only one that is harmful ‘per se.’ And, as you told me the other day—and as I needed no telling!—what I have already given is far, far more. (677)

Wharton’s reference to Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil*, here, unmistakably signals that she understood she would be breaking convention by entering into a full-blown sexual affair with Fullerton. Just as Wharton’s allusions to Whitman and Swinburne, in her accounts of James in *A Backward Glance*, place the Master within literary contexts that relating to a male homosexual tradition, Wharton’s allusion to Nietzsche, tells us something crucial about her conception of her relationship with her new lover, since Nietzsche also belonged to a male homosexual literary tradition that celebrated pederasty. Wharton claims that she “always laughed at the ‘mala prohibita’”—a legal term which, in its plural form, means that “which is not intrinsically wicked, but which is regarded as wrong because it contravenes a law or regulation,” according to the *OED*. Extramarital affairs certainly violated social convention and could lead to divorce, but such
relationships did not violate any actual "law or regulation." Wilde, who had read and
drew upon Nietzsche's philosophy, however, was tried and imprisoned due to his same-
sex sexual relations with younger men that would also be "mala prohibita." Wharton also
uses the fascinating phrase, "bugbears to frighten children," and the word "bugbear"
sounds not unlike the word "bugger." Of course, the word "bugbear" (dated to 1581) is
"an object of dread" and "an imaginary terror" (OED), while the word "bugger" (dated to
1555) is the legal term used to describe a man who engages in sodomy with either men,
women or beast and circulated as a derogatory term for men who had sex with other men.
I find the similarity between these two words striking, considering the context of
Nietzsche and his connection to male homosexuality. When Wharton claimed that she
had "always laughed" at unlawful sex acts (here, "mala prohibita") and what other people
considered "bugbears," she demonstrates in her diary her openness to her sexuality—a
surprising revelation from a woman who had become (and still remains) so well-known
for the preservation of the very social convention and mores that she was about to flout.

In her Epistemology of the Closet, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explores the
importance of Nietzsche's influence on Oscar Wilde's work, as one who explored the
significance of same-sex relationships in a homosexual male literary tradition. Sedgwick
explains that, despite the fact that the philosopher wrote "of an open, Whitmanlike
seductiveness, some of the loveliest there is, about the joining of men with men," he
explored male bonding with a continued, even purposed, "absence of any explicit
generalizations, celebrations, analyses, reifications of these bonds as specifically same-
sex ones" (133), which may have lead to a reluctance in scholarship centered on
Nietzsche to acknowledge this subject. Whether due to "academic prudishness,
homophobia, and heterosexist obtuseness,” or Nietzsche’s own careful evasion of any incontrovertible pinning down of his literature, the fact remains that Nietzsche contributed greatly to an existing homosexual male literary tradition and that his work largely impacted other writers who explored this tradition in this period. Sedgwick asserts, “Nietzsche’s writing is full and overfull of what were just in the process of becoming, for people like Wilde, for their enemies, and for the institutions that regulated and defined them, the most pointed and contested signifiers of precisely a minoritized, taxonomic male homosexual identity” (133). Furthermore, Nietzsche’s appreciation of the Hellenistic models of male bonding, as related to a tradition of pederasty, deeply colored his work:

The energy Nietzsche devotes to detecting and excoriating male effeminacy, and in terms that had been stereotypical for at least a century in anti-sodomitic usage, suggests that this issue is a crucial one for him; any reader of Nietzsche who inherits, as most Euro-American readers must, the by now endemic linkage of effeminacy with this path of desire will find their store of homophobic energies refreshed and indeed electrified by reading him. But far from explicitly making same-sex desire coextensive with that effeminacy, Nietzsche instead associates instance after instance of homoerotic desire, though never named as such, with the precious virility of Dionysiac initiates or of ancient warrior classes. Thus, his rhetoric charges with new spikes of power some of the most conventional lines of prohibition, even while preserving another space of careful de-definition in which certain objects of this prohibition arbitrarily be invited to shelter. (134-5)

Sedgwick draws a direct link between Nietzsche’s characterization of same-sex male relationships, with a lauded Hellenistic paradigm of a virile male homosexuality demonstrated by “Dionysiac initiates” and “ancient warrior classes.” In support of Sedgwick’s claim, William Armstrong Percy argues that Nietzsche upheld a view of pederasty as productive, beneficial, noble and educative, during the nineteenth century (1). Certainly, if writers like Wilde, who studied Greek concepts of comradeship,
recognized Nietzsche’s contribution to a specific literary tradition, then it would not be unreasonable to believe that Wharton, who had been reading numerous texts during her “mood for the Hellenic,” was aware of Nietzsche’s position within the homosexual male literary tradition that she was studying. In addition, when Wharton referred to Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil*, in her diary entry to Fullerton, she tried to signal her need to participate in a relationship modeled after those paradigmatic examples in the pederastic tradition.
CHAPTER VII

CONSUMMATION

Wharton and Sexual Science

Edith Wharton’s understanding of sexual science, as signified by her reading of Otto Weininger’s *Geschlecht und Charakter (Sex and Character)*, revealed how she started to broaden her understanding of sexuality and human desire during the same year that she began her affair with Fullerton. Her reading of several texts during the months leading up to Fullerton’s arrival at The Mount, in October, 1907, demonstrated a sense of curiosity about same-sex male desire and the challenging of gender expectations. This psychological preparation provided Wharton with the tools for understanding the complex desire that fueled her triangulated affair with Fullerton (actively her lover) and James (who passively observed through vicarious experience). Wharton’s rejection of traditional modes of Victorian desire in favor of a more liberating sense of Whitmanian sexuality exposed her own rebellion against the stifling memory of her mother, whose womanhood and lack of warmth seemed to embody all that was wrong with nineteenth century gender constructs and sexual mores. Wharton’s identification with complicated figures like George Sand and George Eliot therefore carries great significance, as a result of her reading of Weininger. This chapter examines Wharton’s interest in human sexuality and texts which informed her understanding of non-heteronormative desire.

Wharton’s unwavering interest in the subject of male homosexuality deepened, when she read Weininger. When Otto Weininger finished his major contribution to the
field of sexology and human psychology, Geschlecht und Charakter (Sex and Character), published in 1903, he sought his own theory of the roots of homosexuality, which differed from popular beliefs about how a person came to desire members of the same sex. Chandak Sengoopta, in his study Otto Weininger: Sex, Science and Self in Imperial Vienna, explains that Weininger worked against two dominant currents of thought within the burgeoning field of sexology, during the late nineteenth century.

Sengoopta explains:

Although [Weininger’s] argument on homosexuality was anchored in medical discourse, he rejected both the traditional medical opinion that homosexuality was a disease as well as the conviction of a younger generation of physicians that it was the result of a developmental anomaly. Instead Weininger adopted a populational perspective, arguing that homosexuality represented the inevitable consequence of human sexual intermediacy, and that homosexual mating demonstrated the truth of his own Law of Sexual Relations. (87)

Claiming that the human is, by nature, a bisexual species, Weininger aimed to show how male homosexuality was “neither a vice nor a disease” but an expected stage of sexual development. Motivated by his own struggle with same-sex desire, Weininger’s study almost exclusively examines male homosexuality and, at times, he refers to the author as an objective subject in practical examples. In his work, Sengoopta places Weininger’s text within appropriate historical and medical contexts, showing how most of the German sexologist’s sources had been predominantly concerned with male homosexuality as well, which may have partially explained the bias. In order to describe and explore his paradigm of the Law of Sexual Relations, using his psychological approach, Weininger created a spectrum of human gender development and sexual orientation to present to a public audience. Sengoopta elaborates on this spectrum:

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According to his Law of Sexual Relations, the partners in a fully compatible couple must together amount to one ideal male and one ideal female. The perfect partner for a man with 48 percent of masculinity would, therefore, need to be 52 percent male. Such a mate could be found most easily only among men. A homosexual, then, was a markedly feminine male but not qualitatively different from the average human being, who, too, was neither completely male nor completely female. The homosexual was situated in the middle of the spectrum of sexually intermediate forms extending between two imaginary poles of absolute masculinity and femininity. (87-8)

Here, Weininger's Law of Sexual Relations provided a useful explanation for why many of Wharton’s close friends—most explicitly, Henry James, Howard Sturgis and Gaillard Lapsley—not only desired other men but challenged normative constructs of gender. Perhaps, this is why Wharton liked the book so much. Additionally, Wharton—who perceived herself as having an interiorized masculine self—according to Weininger’s model—found a viable justification for her attraction towards a man like Morton Fullerton, who was perceived as feminine among his friends and whose bisexuality was well known in private circles. Instead of viewing the male homosexual as a social deviant, a biological degenerate or a mentally diseased individual, Weininger created a Law of Sexual Relations that provided a space for acceptance of such sexual orientation and furthermore suggested that bisexuality and homosexuality were natural, innate and, therefore, “normal.”

In Chapter Four, “Homosexuality and Pederasty,” in Weininger’s study, the German sexologist proposed many ideas that today would be considered fairly modern views on human sexuality, in relation to contemporary beliefs from a psychological perspective, in regard to male homosexuality. Since Wharton had read, recommended, and sent this text to her friends, it is important to unpack Weininger’s work to better understand his theoretical “take” on male homosexuality, to which Wharton may have
well subscribed. Despite Weininger’s blatant misogyny and anti-Semitism that heavily
taint his writings, his theory of the spectrum of human sexual orientation certainly
remains intriguing. Weininger argues against “sexual inversion” being acquired,
inhaled, or a bodily weakness, claiming: “In fact sexual inversion has usually been
regarded as psycho-pathological, as a symptom of degeneration, and those who exhibit it
have been considered as physically unfit. This view, however, is falling into disrepute,
especially as Krafft-Ebing, its principle champion, abandoned it in the later edition of his
work” (46). Through the use of a formula, Weininger explains how men and women
could come to desire members of the same sex, depending upon their inherent
masculinity or femininity—or even hermaphroditism. Weininger reveals that all
suspected “inverts” are inherently “bisexual” and that their choice of sexual partner
demonstrates their attraction to their sexual complement, according to his paradigm. He
continues:

There are no inverts who are completely sexually inverted. In all of them
there is from the beginning an inclination to both sexes; they are, in fact,
bisexual. It may be that later on they may actively encourage a slight
leaning towards one sex or the other, and so become practically unisexual
either in the normal or in the inverted sense, or surrounding influence may
bring about this result for them. But in such processes the fundamental
bisexuality is never obliterated and may at any time give evidence of its
suppressed existence. (48)

According to Weininger’s explanation, any seemingly heterosexual person could later
display an inherent, even if somewhat “suppressed,” bisexuality by eventually acting
upon same-sex desire. His theory explained why so many married husbands entangled
themselves in same-sex sexual dalliances unbeknownst to their wives and why women
who “passed” as feminine heterosexuals, were partners in “Boston marriages.” Here,
Weininger warns that evidence of same-sex partnering did not prove homosexuality or
“sexual inversion,” as the terms had been popularly defined in late-nineteenth century sexological texts. “Inverts” were not sick and diseased individuals who fell prey to vice, but rather only exhibited innate behavior, based upon their placement within the spectrum of gender relations. “Homo-sexuality is merely the sexual condition of these intermediate sexual forms that stretch from one ideally sexual condition to the other sexual condition,” Weininger explains. “In my view all actual organisms have both homo-sexuality and heterosexuality” (48). By suggesting that all humans could potentially, and most likely did, experience same-sex desire, Weininger removed the “sexual invert” from a space of alienation and ostracism to one of normalcy and ubiquity. Rather than being perverted or “abnormal,” homosexuality became not only a normal behavior but one that was natural and inevitable. Such a theory appealed to Wharton, who was wont to see herself and her closest friends as sexually abnormal. Through her reading of Weininger, Wharton tried to better approximate her own understanding of her sexual difference—or, rather, her normalcy.

When Weininger discusses the trajectory of human sexual development, he addresses why so many adolescent boys and girls, especially from that time period, found themselves forming very strong bonds with other members of the same sex, not unlike Tim in Howard Sturgis’ *Tim: A Story of Eton*. Weininger posits:

The rudiment of homo-sexuality, in however weak a form, exists in every human being, corresponding to the greater or smaller development of the characters of the opposite sex, is proved conclusively from the fact that in the adolescent stage, while there is still a considerable amount of undifferentiated sexuality, and before internal secretions have exerted their stimulating force, passionate attachments with a sensual side are the rule amongst boys as well as girls. (48)
Here, Weininger tactically points out to his readers that homosexual tendencies exist in even the most apparent heterosexual individuals, using their likely prepubescent same-sex attachments as evidence of such same-sex desire. In current understandings of the late-Victorian period in both Britain and the United States, there was a broadly accepted belief that same-sex friendships in childhood, among boys and girls, did not necessarily denote same-sex desire but were expected and encouraged by parents and teachers who did not want children to become too sexually curious at a young age. According to Weininger’s theory, of course, those friendships were not as simple or devoid of desire as previously thought, because they provided boy and girls with an opportunity to express those complicated same-sex desires that were a natural result of an innate element of their personality, a component of their sexuality that was inherently homosexual. This is a very dramatic discursive move. By removing homosexuality from the place of the “other” (read: abnormal, a mental sickness, a sign of degeneration), Weininger insisted that even the most “normal” person possessed a tendency to express same-sex desire or even become a fully active homosexual. Such an argument normalized the homosexual and undercut assertions that homosexuality could be acquired or transferred as a disease or inherited congenitally. Rather, the homosexual man or woman only acted upon desires that were inherent in every man or woman, since all human individuals were and are, according to Weininger, inherently bisexual.

59Chandak Sengoopta emphasizes the importance of Weininger’s concepts of sexuality within the early twentieth century, in Europe, in terms of their popularity among intelligentsia: “Some of the finest intellects of the early twentieth century—Franz Kafka, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Karl Kraus, James Joyce—were struck, although not necessarily persuaded, by Weininger’s arguments, while others wrote doctoral dissertations on arcane aspects of Weininger’s theories, treating them with a hushed reverence that seems almost risible today” (2). Sengoopta stresses Weininger’s impact on Joyce’s characterization of both Leopold and Molly Bloom, in Ulysses, and how Stein responded to the sexologist’s ideas in her The Making of Americans, concluding, “All in all, Geschlecht und Charakter, intended to be a philosophical resolution of a political question, had its most enduring success in the field of imaginative literature” (145-6). Clearly, Wharton,
When Weininger turned his eye towards male homosexuality, he argued, rather profoundly, that in all friendships between men there existed a sexual element, whether openly acknowledged or not. He explained that, from those friendships established in boyhood, men learned to create bonds with members of their same sex and, if they never fully awakened to experiences of desire for women, then these friendships very often developed into profound love relationships. “A person who retains from that age onwards a marked tendency to ‘friendship’ with a person of his own sex must have a strong taint of the other sex in him,” writes Weininger. “Those, however, are still more obviously intermediate sexual forms, who, after association with both sexes, fail to have aroused in them the normal passion for the opposite sex, but still endeavor to maintain confidential, devoted affection with those of the same sex” (48-9). The “devoted affection with those of the same sex” that Weininger describes provides a very different image of relationships between two persons of the same sex, since the words “devoted affection” translated into feelings of actual love, rather than promiscuous sex acts performed in alleys. The belief here is that two men who engage in a same-sex relationship are actually two people who are “intermediate sexual forms,” based on Weininger’s Law of Sexual Relations, who provide for each other their exact complement in terms of their components of masculinity and femininity. Weininger fully elaborates on his example of two men together:

There is no friendship between men that has not an element of sexuality in it, however little accentuated it may be in the nature of the friendship, and however painful the idea of the sexual element would be. But it is enough to remember that there can be no friendship unless there has been some attraction to draw the men together. Much of the affection, protection, and

like her contemporaries, developed a nuanced response to Weininger’s ideas in her private writing and fiction, as his treatment of sexuality provided interesting answers to questions that she had long been asking—concerning both gender and sexual orientation.
nepotism between men is due to the presence of unsuspected sexual compatibility. (49)

Interestingly, the paradigm that Weininger constructed supports the modern theory that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in her highly-regarded *Between Men*, has proposed about homosocial relationships between men, particularly formed during the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century. His ideas also help to flesh out and explain why the practice of pederasty in ancient Greece was such a useful and successful part of the civilization’s great achievements during the Hellenic age. If all friendships between men possessed a sexual element, even if never openly acknowledged, and all individuals, according to Weininger’s theory, had an inherent “homo-sexual” component and a latent tendency towards homosexuality, then the active homosexual became a person who only acted upon instinct. Instead of being a depraved individual who “chose” to engage in same-sex sexual relationships, the “homo-sexual” here became a person who merely found his or her complementary partner in a member of the same sex, as a natural result of their placement on the Weininger’s spectrum by being “intermediate sexual forms.” As a result of his sympathetic views on homosexuality, Weininger’s text provided Edith Wharton with evidence that the men in her inner circle were not “deviant,” as she knew they were not, and helped to show her how they were only acting upon their innate and natural human sexual instinct. Men like Howard Sturgis, who displayed pronounced effeminate characteristics, were intermediate sexual forms who could only find in a male sexual partner a complement according to the Law of Sexual Relations. Men like Morton Fullerton, who engaged in sexual relationships with both men and women, was also only acting upon a natural instinct in ever human being to be bisexual.
Weininger’s text, like other popular sexological works (from writers such as Havelock Ellis), sought to humanize and understand the “homo-sexual,” in ways that brought Wharton a greater understanding of the complexity of human sexuality. Since we only have tangible evidence to show Wharton read Weininger directly, the influence of other major sexologists on Wharton’s views of non-heteronormative sexuality cannot really be known. (We do know that she at least read Symonds’ work on Italy and there is also a suggestion that she may have possibly discussed the work of Krafft-Ebing with Walter Berry.60) Weininger’s proposed “cure for sexual inversion” was to essentially “live and let live” in a sort of early version of the “don’t ask don’t tell” policy of permitting while not condoning or condemning same-sex sexuality to occur:

If a cure for sexual inversion must be sought because it cannot be left to its own extinction, then this theory offers the following solution. Sexual inverted must be brought to sexual inverters, from homo-sexuals to Sapphists, each in their grades. Knowledge of such a solution should lead to repeal of the ridiculous laws of England, Germany and Austria directed against homo-sexuality, so far at least as to make the punishments the lightest possible ... Speaking from the standpoint of a purer state of humanity and of a criminal law untainted by the pedagogic idea of punishment as a deterrent, the only logical and rational method of treatment for sexual inverters would be to allow them to seek and obtain what they require where they can, that is to say, amongst other inverters. My theory appears to me quite incontrovertible and conclusive, and to afford a complete explanation of the entire set of phenomena. (51)

By calling the laws against homosexuality in “England, Germany and Austria” “ridiculous,” Weininger reveals his own bias towards the unfair treatment, even persecution, of homosexuals in Europe. He calls for the repeal of such laws, those like

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60 According to R.W.B. Lewis, Walter Berry, after reading Proust’s Cities of the Plain, in 1922, called the book, which explored themes of same-sex male desire with the character Baron de Charlus, “terrific,” claiming that there existed “nothing like it outside of Kraft-Ebbing” (443). Given the closeness of Berry and Wharton and that she had read the same novel that same year, it is not unreasonable to expect that they, as extremely close friends, discussed their opinions of the book with each other, perhaps leading to a conversation about sexuality and sexologists like Krafft-Ebing. Since Wharton had read Berry’s copy of Joyce’s Ulysses, in 1922, as well, it seems plausible that Berry might have loaned her his edition of Proust’s book, since Berry and Proust were close friends as well.
the Labouchere Amendment, or at least the lessening of punishment to such a degree to
be the “lightest possible” for those individuals found guilty of participating in same-sex
sexual relationships. He criticizes the “pedagogic idea of punishment as a deterrent”
which “taints” criminal law and instead proposes that the “only logical and rational”
solution to the issue of homosexuality in society is to allow “sexual inverts” to “seek and
obtain what they require” from other complementary partners. To further strengthen his
conclusion, Weininger uses the language of absolutes to drive home his point, calling his
theory “incontrovertible and conclusive,” to potentially keep at bay any of those
potentially homophobic readers who might strongly disagree with his argument.

Though Wharton, in her letters and writing, does not give her direct impressions
of Weininger’s book *Sex and Character*, we do know that she liked the book well enough
to send a copy to her friend Robert Grant, which indicates her approval. In her letter to
Grant, of January 4th, 1907 (when Wharton was in the midst of her “mood for the
Hellenic”), she ends her correspondence with, “Thanks for your book suggestions. I send
in return ‘Sex & Character’ by Otto Weininger, & Shaw’s new book ‘Dramatic
Opinions’” (110). In their footnote to the reference by Wharton to Weininger’s book,
R.W.B. Lewis and Nancy Lewis give the following synopsis of the text: “This book, by
the twenty-three-year-old writer, was an electrifying success in Europe, and was drawn
upon for four decades. It maintained that women were by nature (or character) physical
and brainless, and the more so, the more feminine. Men became more spiritual as they
became more male; and homosexuality was the ideal condition” (110). Despite the fact
that Wharton did not openly note her reaction to Weininger’s work in her letter, recent
critics, like Maria Magdalena Farland\textsuperscript{61}, have shown how Wharton’s reading of \textit{Sex and Character} had lasting repercussions on her fiction produced from that period. Yet, beyond even the claims of recent critical voices, the fact remains that Wharton, at the very time during which she was voraciously consuming texts concerned with all things “Hellenic,” she was also reading one of the most influential sexological texts of the early twentieth century and sent a copy to her close friend. Wharton held a vested interest in reading a sexological work that not only defended male homosexuality, but lauded it as the “ideal condition.” Deeply affected by her friendships and initiation into a group of intellectual and queer men—many of whom were students at educational institutions well-known for their acceptance of male homosexuality during the late nineteenth century and were especially influenced by the Greek paradigm of pederasty—Wharton found this modern, scientific voice a strong defense of male homosexuality. Even more critical to her thinking, Weininger addressed the position of the female intellectual by drawing upon two literary figures Wharton greatly admired—George Sand and George Eliot, writers to whom many of Wharton’s closest friends and contemporaries likened her.

In Chapter Six, entitled “Emancipated Women,” Weininger discusses women with mannish appearances, yet whose sexuality is heterosexual, despite their intellectual

\textsuperscript{61} Farland, in her essay “\textit{Ethan Frome} and the Springs of Masculinity,” shows how Weininger’s \textit{Sex and Character} influenced Wharton’s treatment of her title character in her novella \textit{Ethan Frome}. In her piece, Farland argues that Wharton’s reading of \textit{Sex and Character} during the composition of \textit{Ethan Frome} greatly impacted the apparent feminization of Ethan and the resulting masculinizing of Zeena. Her claim is that though gender might be linked to one’s biology, it is also heavily influenced by external forces and, as a result, gender, as conceived by Wharton and Weininger, is neither “static,” nor “essential.” Farland contends: “As the examples of Wharton and Weininger make clear, the very instability that we tend to associate with the behavioral category of gender can trace its origins to certain biological constructs such as the instincts. To embrace either the old or new biological model was not necessarily to endorse a static or fixed conception of what it means to be male or female” (725). See the Winter 1996 issue of \textit{Modern Fiction Studies}, pp. 709-29.
achievements and other seemingly “masculine” traits. Unlike “masculine women” who engage in sexual relationships with other women, these women, regardless of their outward masculine characteristics (which justified their emancipated existence in education and independence), felt erotic desire for men and participated in heterosexual relationships, with men who were their complements according to the Law of Sexual Relations. “Just as homo-sexual or bisexual women reveal their maleness by their preference either for women or for womanish men, so hetero-sexual women display maleness in their choice of a male partner who is not preponderantly male,” Weininger asserts. “The most famous of George Sand’s many affairs were those with de Musset, the most effeminate and sentimental poet, and with Chopin, who might be described as the only female musician, so effeminate are his compositions” (66-7). Here, according to Weininger, one’s choice of sexual partner, like one’s outward appearance, provides clues to one’s placement on the spectrum of sexual forms. Women who, like George Sand, donned “mannish” clothing and assumed a male pseudonym, exhibited outward characteristics that betrayed their sexual intermediacy. Furthermore, when Sand took “effeminate” men like de Musset and Chopin as lovers, she exerted her masculinity by her choice of sexual partners, men who were complementary sexual intermediate forms. Weininger elaborates on Sand’s telling courtship of Chopin by writing, “Chopin’s portraits show his effeminacy plainly. Merimée describes George Sand as being thin as a nail. At the first meeting of the two, the lady behaved like a man, and the man like a girl. He blushed when she looked at him and began to pay him compliments in her bass voice” (67). Self-presentation held the key to understanding gender in Weininger’s view. When Chopin blushed, he acted like a woman and when Sand made sexual advances with a
“bass voice,” she too challenged “normal” behavior associated with a female subject position. For Weininger, ladies who were seemingly plain or even masculine in their physical features exhibited their sexual intermediacy through those characteristics—especially if they were intellectuals or emancipated women, for only men possessed the mental faculty to pursue an advanced education, according to Weininger: “When there is no evidence as to the sexual relations of famous women, we can still obtain important conclusions from the details of their personal appearance. Such data supports my general proposition. George Eliot had a broad, massive forehead; her movements, like her expression, were quick and decided, and lacked all womanly grace” (67). Here, Weininger contends that form and content have a direct relationship, in that the more “masculine” a woman appeared, the more she possessed an innate masculinity that related to her sexual intermediacy. Again, describing George Sand, Weininger argues:

There is, then, a stronger reason than has generally been supposed for the familiar assumption of male pseudonyms by women writers. Their choice is a mode of giving expression to the inherent maleness they feel; and this is still more marked in the case of those who, like George Sand, have a preference for male attire and masculine pursuits. The motive for choosing a man’s name springs from the feeling that it corresponds with their own character much more than from any desire for increased notice from the public. (68)

Weininger claimed that though a woman may be a woman biologically, any outward signs of masculinity, such as her appearance, mannerisms, mental faculty and even the pseudonym of a man, were evidence that she, in fact, held an intermediate placement on Weininger’s spectrum in terms of her gender. Though apparent masculinity did not guarantee a woman’s homosexuality, Weininger suggested that, since all humans were and are inherently bisexual, the capacity remained for that woman to express same-sex desire, although she might consider herself strictly heterosexual. For Wharton, a woman
who preferred the company of men to women and who from childhood felt “different” from others of her sex, Weininger’s theories likely appealed to her doubts about her own psychology and relationships with queer men. Rather than feel ashamed or “abnormal,” Wharton now saw herself as psychologically advanced, since she felt she possessed the mental faculty of a man and could now assume a more masculine role in her dealings with effeminate men. Certainly, Wharton’s closest male friends acknowledged her complex sense of gender and, at least one (Percy Lubbock), wrote about her masculinity in his published recollections.

**The Two Georges**

Wharton’s most trusted friends, particularly in their reminiscences of her, made much of her interest in and admiration of the two Georges—George Sand and George Eliot—whose gender-bending and masculine agency Wharton, to a certain degree, replicated. It is no surprise, then, Nohant, Sand’s estate, became an almost sacred place to Wharton, significantly a place she brought the men who mattered most to her. When Wharton, with Teddy in tow, first visited the former estate of Baronne Aurore Dudevant during her sojourn in France in May, 1906 (shortly after her meeting with the earliest “partial gathering” of the Inner Circle at Qu’acre), she was in awe of the home of a writer and woman she so greatly admired. R.W.B. Lewis recounts that Wharton was disappointed by the sober aspect of the estate, which suggested a sort of taming of its former mistress. “Perhaps, she fancied, it was the very house which, in its sobriety and conformity, had exerted ‘an unperceived but persistent influence’ over the writer’s restless nature and brought her at last to acknowledge the strength of household pieties,” Lewis writes. “There was a lingering sadness in Edith’s meditation, as though somehow
she regretted the toning down of George Sand’s personality and the gradual conforming of her way of life” (170). The aspects of Sand’s “personality” and “way of life,” as Lewis describes them, related to her “mannishness” that Weininger details in his account of the author. If Wharton felt disappointed by Sand’s eventual “toning down” and “gradual conformity,” she reveals her own efforts to flout social convention and, more importantly, the pressures of an oppressively heteronormative patriarchal society that would not tolerate queerness. James, for one, absolutely adored Madame Sand. In fact, James felt so bereft by Wharton’s visiting Nohant without him that he recorded, in his voice of comic exaggeration, “They’re on their way to Nohant, d—n them!” (169) Yet, Wharton later appeased James, who affectionately called Sand “the mighty and marvelous George,” by arranging a trip especially for him, which led to her second visit to the estate, during the month of March, 1907.

When Wharton’s returned to Nohant with James at her side, the visit symbolized an important event in her ongoing exploration of her interiorized artistic and mental selves, as a writer and an intellectual who, like Sand, challenged socially prescribed, and traditional, gender constructs. For Wharton, Sand represented a woman writer who not only allowed herself the freedom to assume the powerful role of a man both in society and in the literary world, but who felt liberated enough to act as a man in her love life as well, as both the sexual initiator and dominant partner in her affairs. Prior to her return to Nohant, Wharton had studied Sand’s life extensively and brought several books with her, to enhance her tour of the writer’s former home. Shari Benstock reveals that Wharton prepared herself considerably for this second visit to Nohant: “Nohant was a voyage of self-discovery for Edith, and she came armed with several volumes of Sand’s
autobiography, *Histoire de ma vie*, which served as her map to the inner landscape and secret suffering of Sand's life" (161). In addition to her historical guides, Wharton also had the company of James, who understood the importance of Sand to Wharton. In fact, their visit to the estate became the setting for a famous exchange that has become a legendary anecdote in the mythology of the friendship between Wharton and James. An amused Lewis writes: "They [Wharton and James] wandered out into the garden and looked up at the windows, speculating as to which visitor might have peered out from each of them. James, pondering, suddenly murmured: ‘And in which of those rooms, I wonder, did George herself sleep?’ Then, with a twinkle, he turned to Edith and added: ‘Though in which, indeed, my dear, did she not?’” (178) Witty jokes aside, perhaps Weininger’s sketch of Sand added to Wharton’s interest in the author. Though Wharton admired Sand, her feelings remained conflicted in regard to Sand’s eventual “taming” and assimilation into the traditional role prescribed for women as mothers and mistresses of the domestic realm.

George Sand, within a queer historical and cultural context, became a figure, an icon, which challenged both strict gender constructs and traditional sexual behavior within late nineteenth-century Europe. According to Camille Paglia, in her eyebrow-raising work *Sexual Personae*, Balzac based his famous Félicité des Touches, whom he called “the illustrious hermaphrodite,” on Sand, due to her “masculine genius” (406). The character’s pen name “Camille Maupin” pays homage to Latouche and Théophile Gautier, whose novel *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835) caused tongues to wag all over France. In 1929, the French literary critic René Jasinski, writes Paglia, claimed that Maupin’s “eye, hair, figure and ‘virile spirit’ were based on those of George Sand, by
Gautier when he composed his sensational novel. In his discussion of homosexuality in late-nineteenth century Europe, Graham Robb contends, “In the ‘construction’ of homosexuality, entertaining novels like Balzac’s Illusions perdues or Gautier’s Mademoiselle de Maupin were surely far more influential than obscure, turgid texts written by academic doctors” (46). Robb continues his description of the novel and its significance, “Gautier’s Mademoiselle de Maupin, double amour was published in 1835-6 when Gautier was twenty-four. The first volume (1835) ended with one of the first descriptions of a gay man coming out to himself and to a friend” (198). Since the character d’Albert does not learn until the second volume that the object of his affection is indeed a woman, the suspense of his potential homosexuality creates a dramatic scene between the two halves of the novel. When d’Albert confesses to Silvio his same-sex desire, he draws upon the ancient tradition of pederasty as a lofty paradigm of a higher love:

Those curious varieties of love which abound in the elegies of the ancient poets, which took us so much aback and which we could not fathom, are probable, therefore, and possible. When we translated them, we used to substitute the names of women for those which were in the actual text. Juventius was given a feminine ending and became Juventia, Alexis was changed into Ianthe. The pretty boys became pretty girls, and thus that we edited the outrageous seraglios of Catullus, Tibullus, Martial, and the gentle Virgil. It was a very well-intentioned proceeding, but it merely went to show how imperfectly we understood the spirit of the ancients. (166)

Gautier demonstrates how ancient texts were wrongly revised and edited by uninitiated school boys to conform to modern heteronormative beliefs. By substituting feminine names for masculine ones, d’Albert admits that he was complicit in this act of rewriting the past, in the bleaching out of same-sex male love from ancient works by authors like Catullus, Tibullus, Martial and Virgil. Now understanding same-sex masculine desire,
d’Albert comprehends the “spirit of the ancients” and the “curious varieties of love which abound” in their “elegies.” In fact, d’Albert goes so far as to say, “I am a man of the Homeric period; the world in which I live is not mine, and I am a stranger to the society which surrounds me” (166). Such a comment is not so unlike Wharton’s musings in A Backward Glance, when she confesses that, as a child, “the doings of children were always intrinsically less interesting to me than those of grown-ups, and I felt more at home with the gods and goddesses of Olympus.” Furthermore, she contends that “the domestic dramas of the Olympians roused all of my creative energy,” demonstrating a deep connection to Greek mythology—copious evidence of which can be drawn from the innumerable references to ancient myth in her fiction and nonfiction literary work. When Wharton wrote of her “mood for the Hellenic,” she would have been aware of Gautier’s novel and its connection (even if indirect) to George Sand, especially by the time that she visited Nohant with James.

Gregory Woods, in his work A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition, responds to the valorization of same-sex desire, in Gautier’s novel, when d’Albert alludes to a masculine literary tradition that dated back to ancient Greece and Rome: “This understanding of the systematic eighteenth- and nineteenth-century heterosexualisation, and indeed bourgeoisification, of the literature of classical pederasty shows that d’Albert is quick to think of himself within a much wider context than the limits of his own sexual desire.” Counting Gautier’s novel as an important work in the “male tradition” of “gay literature,” Woods shows how Gautier, whom Byrne R.S. Fone likewise names as one of the “major literary figures of the time” to treat “homosexual subjects,” during the nineteenth century, in his A Road to Stonewall, became an important writer for many
queer men, especially during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Gautier’s work presents a man’s struggle to understand his feelings of same-sex desire, which in a heteronormative society were considered “deviant” and “abnormal.” As Woods puts it, “So this is how a Frenchman came out to himself (and to his closest friend) in 1835” (143). That Gautier’s most controversial character—Maupin herself—was partly based on George Sand, is all the more intriguing, given Wharton’s fascination with Sand and the fact that Wharton had more than one copy of *Mademoiselle de Maupin* in her library.

Wharton owned two copies of Gautier’s *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (one published in 1885, the other published in 1891 and only the first volume, notably), in addition to several volumes of Gautier’s collective works, which still reside in her library collection. In his introduction to the recently reclaimed and printed novel *The Hermaphrodite*62, by Julia Ward Howe, Gary Williams explains that Gautier, according to numerous critics, had written his novel, in great part, due to “widespread public interest in an ambiguous relationship between George Sand and an actress, Marie Dorval” (xvi). Furthermore, Williams provides this assessment of Gautier’s novel and its importance to writers like Howe, who sought to challenge traditional modes of gender and sexual desire: “From the vantage point of 170 years later, *Mademoiselle de Maupin* is among the nineteenth century’s most influential works of fiction, partly because of the author’s joyfully impudent defense of art for art’s sake in the preface. Swinburne loved the novel, as did Baudelaire, Huysmans, and above all Oscar Wilde” (xxviii–ix). Apparently, James admired Gautier’s work as well and knew of his connection to Sand. According to Shari Benstock, part of what motivated James’ strong desire to see Nohant were those accounts

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62 The 350 page manuscript, according to Williams, was written by Howe between 1846-7 and found at the Harvard Houghton Library, only to be printed by the University of Nebraska Press, in 2004.
he had heard in his youth, from "Flaubert, Gautier, and Maupassant," of the journey to Sand's estate by "train and diligence" (160). Though from his essay on Gautier from the 1873, in the North American Review, James seemed to disapprove of Mademoiselle de Maupin, calling the work the "painful exhibition of the prurience of the human mind" (5), he did consider Gautier "the most eloquent of our modern Athenians" (13) and extolled the virtues of his poetry. James of the 1870s, of course, was not the same James, the Master, forty years later. The younger James once publicly criticized Whitman but experienced a change of heart in his later years. Perhaps he felt differently about Mademoiselle de Maupin near his end. If anything, the awareness of Gautier's representation of Sand, as a gender-bending lover of both man and woman, in his novel, would have been significant to both James and Wharton, as they had both read the novel and greatly admired Sand. Since Gautier's novel would become an important text in a homosexual male literary tradition, Gautier's depiction of Sand must have helped increase her popularity among those who already admired her daring challenge of sexual convention and gender during her earlier years.

John P. Anders, in his work Willa Cather's Sexual Aesthetics and the Male Homosexual Literary Tradition, claims that Gautier's popular, and rather sensational, novel was a representative text from a movement of writing, in which "Nineteenth-century French literary aesthetes expressed a hostility to middle-class morality and frequently used sexual nonconformity to voice their cry of 'épater le bourgeois'" (40). Anders lists the "most influential literary texts depicting unorthodox sexuality" from that period as "Théophile Gautier's Mademoiselle de Maupin (1835), 'the bible of aesthetic-decadent literature, and whose title character became a prototype of the lesbian in
literature for decades afterward' (Faderman 264), Alphonse Daudet's *Sapho* (1884) . . . and Gustave Flaubert's luridly sensual *Salammbo* (1862)” (41). Wharton also had a copy of Daudet’s *Sapho*, though the latter was a duodecimo volume, printed in 1925, produced by a Parisian publishing house. As for Flaubert’s *Salammbo*, Wharton mentions the book in her essay “The Great American Novel”—first printed in the *Yale Review*, in 1927—as an example of the “great French” novel, which was “considered typical of the national genius that went into its making” (151). Thus, we know that Wharton read Flaubert’s novel, in addition to those by Gautier and Daudet, rounding out the mini-reading list that Anders provides as the “most influential literary texts” that challenged heteronormative sexual convention during the nineteenth century. Given Wharton’s interest in these French novels, and her interest in Sand, the pieces of a particular puzzle start to come together to reveal a different aspect of Wharton. Wharton’s identification with George Sand hints at an acknowledged sense of difference and otherness, despite what her outward appearance might lead others to believe about her.

Shari Benstock points out the similarities between Wharton and Sand, she explains what led to the former’s attachment to the latter, but a particular clue Wharton left, and which continues to provide insight into her own peculiar understanding of Sand, remains unsolved by Wharton’s biographer. In an entry made in her Commonplace Book, from around the time of her return to Paris, after her trip with James, Wharton recorded a quote by George Facquet—a French social historian—which gives a description of Sand. Benstock discusses this quote: “Her intelligence, Facquet wrote, showed ‘a love of ideas without the capacity to fully understand them. She is a distinguished woman who would have had the instincts of a thinker without the force to
be one.’ Beneath this quote, Wharton wrote, ‘applicable to any ‘intellectual’ woman’’
(163). Wharton’s footnote to the Facquet quote seems problematic for Benstock. “The
meaning of her footnote to Facquet is not entirely self-evident,” confesses Benstock.
“Was she saying that his complaint against Sand was one often used against ‘intellectual’
women?” (163) Like many other interpreters of Wharton’s history, Benstock tries to
make sense of Wharton’s apparent misogyny, which undermines any role as a
representative figure for the advancement of women, from this period. If Wharton’s
footnote truly reveals that she accepted and agreed with Facquet’s comments on female
intellectualism, then it would be very difficult to consider Wharton a turn-of-the-century
feminist—and we definitely know she was not. However, critics, historians, and the
publishers of anthologies prefer the image of Wharton as a triumphant pioneer in the
emancipation of women, which is one of the reasons why much is often made of
Wharton’s being the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize. Wharton openly and
privately disavowed any association with the feminist movement at large. In truth, when
Benstock queries, “Was she saying that his complaint against Sand was one often used
against ‘intellectual’ women,” what the biographer is really asking is, “Did Wharton
really ‘buy into’ Facquet’s statement about the limitations of the female mind?” Yes, she
did! Wharton did not see herself as an “intellectual woman” and, in fact, believed that
women’s minds were inferior to those of men—which is why she never tried to surround
herself with “intellectual women.” Often, in her novels (e.g. Mrs. Pulsifer in Hudson
River Bracketed), Wharton pokes fun at false “bluestocking” types in order to show how
silly and ignorant they really are. Publicly, Wharton did not want to associate with any
sort of political movement for the advancement of woman’s rights. Deborah Lindsay
Williams’ study of Wharton’s and Cather’s friendship with the feminist playwright, Zonal Gale, points out this conundrum. Despite the fact that she and Sand were similar in many ways, Wharton felt that she was different, even superior to Sand—in that she, unlike Sand, did not succumb to the social role traditionally ascribed to women, mother and homemaker. In her mind, Wharton retained her independence by never acquiescing to a more feminine subject position, both intellectually and professionally. Instead, she chose to be a participant within an exclusive circle of intellectual queer men, among whom she was treated as an equal, with whom she could reveal her interiorized masculine self. Rather than to become a disagreeable, “intellectual woman,” Wharton saw preferred to become a “self-made man.” Tellingly, members of Wharton’s close-knit (quite literally in regard to Howard Sturgis) “inner group” likewise enjoyed the two Georges and made much of them in their conversations, even though they may have judged them as having “sold out” or conformed to heteronormative expectation or traditional constructs, in the end.

For both Wharton and James, George Sand provided a common interest of shared enthusiasm, as a queer figure who challenged traditional gender roles by her cross-dressing, cigar smoking and aggressiveness in sexual affairs with submissive men. Lyall H. Powers, in his edited volume of letters exchanged between James and Wharton, claims that when the two friends toured Nohant together, they relived Sand’s lively adventures vicariously, with a heightened interest in “the wonderful naughtiness of Sand and her amours” (14). With each other, through the years, James and Wharton volleyed back and

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63 See Williams’ *Not in Sisterhood: Edith Wharton, Willa Cather, Zona Gale and the Politics of Female Authorship*, where she claims that “Wharton’s and Cather’s public refusal of sisterhood—and any other form of affiliative politics—is central to their creation of personal authorial personae, images that emerged in response to the increasing demand for celebrity as a way to sell books” (6).
forth the details from the latest studies of Sand and juicy new gossip about her life, both in their correspondence and in their conversations when they visited each other. Powers continues: "James and Wharton kept a sharp eye out for documentation of George Sand's personal career and eagerly informed each other of the publication of biographical volumes, collections of letters, gossip that enlightened them further on the piggery life focused at Nohant" (14). James' interest in Sand lasted for many years, before he finally visited her home in Nohant. During the early correspondence between James and Fullerton, the latter complimented the former on an essay he had written for the Yellow Book that focused on the relationship between Sand and de Musset. In a longer critical piece, "George Sand," James explained how the writer's unconventional and gender-bending masculinity allowed her to achieve greatness:

She was more masculine than any man she might have married; and what powerfully masculine person—even leaving genius apart—is content at five-and-twenty with submissiveness and renunciation? 'It was mere accident that George Sand was a woman,' a person who had known her well said to the writer of these pages; and though the statement needs an ultimate corrective, it represents a great deal of truth. What was feminine in her was the quality of her genius; the quantity of it—its force, and mass, and energy—was masculine, and masculine were her temperament and character. All this masculinity needed to set itself free; which it proceeded to do according to its temporary light. (8)

Calling Sand "more masculine than any man she might have married," James emphasizes the positive characteristics she exhibited that were overtly masculine, demonstrating that he had thought a good deal about the ways that Sand challenged traditional constructs of gender. By repeating and publishing the quip he heard—"It was mere accident that George Sand was a woman"—James lends credence to the idea that Sand really possessed a masculine interior self that remained at odds with her biological sex. As a result of this conflict between mind and body, Sand's external appearance began to
reflect what existed within. In other words, Sand’s cross-dressing, manly mannerisms and active role as a dominant influence over others provided evidence of her queerness, and her refusal to comply with traditional standards of heteronormative behavior and the gender assigned to her by her biological sex. In his recognition of Sand’s queerness, James perhaps found a figure whose complicated gender identification he felt he could understand only too well.

When Wharton’s relationship with Fullerton started to deepen, during the spring of 1908, she decided to visit the home of another important French woman author, whom she admired. Writing to James about her impending trip to the former abode of Hortense Allart, Wharton sparked a reaction that reveals a good deal about the way James envisioned Wharton’s relationship with Fullerton. Lyall H. Powers explains that in February, 1908, Wharton shifted her attention to Allart, “another writer and a woman of even more liberated manners” than Sand, when she visited the author’s home in Herblay with her love interest, Morton Fullerton, in tow. Describing Allart as “George Sand without hypocrisy,” Wharton wrote to James of her trip to the French home, and James responded with mixed emotions of elation and envy: “I ache to have been—or not to have been—at Herblay with you & Fullerton—fancy there being a second & intenser Nohant!”

(14) How interesting it is that only months before his jaunt to France, in April 1908, James, in his letter, describes Hortense Allart’s home as a “second & intenser Nohant”64—a play on words that acknowledged the heightened sexual chemistry that was brewing between Wharton and Fullerton during their courtship. James’ comical reference to Wharton’s motor-car, which spirited them both away on adventurous drives

64 The nickname “Hortense” that James gave to Wharton’s motor-car was derived from this reference to Hortense Allart. After Wharton’s letter about her visit to Allart’s home in Herblay, James started to call the car “Hortense” as a joke and the name took.

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and travels through various landscapes, as “Hortense,” explains how the Master saw Wharton as a very strong and, at times, impetuous woman. Clearly, the figure of George Sand signified strength, complicated notions of gender, adventure in romantic liaisons, masculine authorship, and, ultimately, a sense of queerness, to Wharton and members of her inner group.

Fullerton described Wharton as a lover, after her death, to her friend Elisina Royall Tyler and likened Wharton to Sand in regard to her sexual freedom, revealing his former lover’s understanding of her complex sense of gender. Eager to dispel the popular image of Wharton as a prude, Fullerton pressed Tyler, to whom he entrusted Wharton’s love letters: “The only counsel I can vouchsafe is to beg you to seize the event, however delicate the problem, to destroy the myth of your heroine’s frigidity” (Mainwaring 274). He continued: “She was not only a great lady, but also a great woman—she boxed the compass of all shades of temperament of which womankind is capable. In love she had the courage of George Sand. She was fearless, reckless even, in her frank response to her companion” (274-5). Fullerton describes Wharton as “fearless,” “reckless” and “frank” in her sexual responses as a lover, with the “courage of George Sand.” Though he accentuates Wharton’s image as a “great lady,” meaning the public, hyper-feminine, exterior self that Wharton perfected, he also stresses that she was a “great woman,” distinguishing the “lady” from the “woman” as two different Edith Whartons. By comparing her to George Sand, he knew that Tyler would pick up on the masculine associations connected with the French writer. Fullerton added proof of Wharton’s surprising sexual freedom in the form of a poem, written at the Charing Cross Hotel, where they consummated their affair—a poem now known as Wharton’s Whitmanesque
“Terminus.” Openly dismissing the “myth” of the public Wharton as “frigid,” Fullerton exposes a private Wharton, disrupting the popularized view of the author, both in contemporary society and in literary history. Where others had come to see Wharton as a sort of “grand dame,” Fullerton revealed that she did not shrink away from sex, nor was she the weak and submissive woman in their affair. Wharton rather expertly participated in sex acts and was an eager and enthusiastic lover. The evidence of this more sexual, private Wharton exists in the pornographic fragment, “Beatrice Palmato,” within which Wharton vividly describes such sex acts as fellatio, cunnilingus, and a “hand-job.” Not many people might expect the “grand dame” to even know of such sexual activities, let alone describe them with such telling accuracy that one had little doubt about the writer’s first-hand knowledge.

While Wharton certainly admired George Sand, we know that she harbored a great affection for another nineteenth century writer by the name of George as well, George Eliot. Weininger also discussed Eliot, in Sex and Character, as having the outward appearance of an intermediate sexual form, due to her plain and even “mannish” features. Though Eliot carried on a well-known affair with George Lewes, cohabitating with an already married man, a healthy dose of moralizing enters her novels, which contradicts the seeming adventurousness Eliot displayed in her life. Wharton, for one, found such banal moralizing disappointing. In fact, Wharton, in her review essay on Leslie Stephen’s book on Eliot, from 1902, discussed Eliot’s self-imposed exile from the outside world as limiting her perspective on true human experience:

Her growing preoccupation with moral problems coincided with an almost complete withdrawal from ordinary contact with life. She retired from the

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65 An in-depth examination of this poem appears later in the study, in Chapter Eight, connected to Wharton’s use of Whitmanian verse in order to express her desire for Fullerton, beginning with page 365.
world a sensitive, passionate, receptive, responsive woman; she returned to it a literary celebrity; and in the interval ossification had set in. Her normal relations with the world ceased when she left England with Lewes. All that one reads of her carefully sheltered existence after she had become famous shows how completely she had shut herself off from her natural sources of inspiration. (77)

When Eliot removed herself from the social realm and maintained a secluded life, she lost what Wharton felt was most important in a good “novelist of manners”—her sense of perspective. The use of the word “ossification” is important in this passage, signaling Wharton’s disapproval of “becoming rigidly fixed in conventional behavior or thought”—a characteristic she attributed to Eliot. The fact that Wharton faults Eliot for her self-imposed isolation from life reveals an important aspect of Wharton’s personality and her attitude towards writing. Wharton believed that “novelists of manners” had to participate in the social scenes they painted. In order to realistically depict human relationships, the writer had to be privy to the “natural sources of inspiration.” Though Wharton greatly admired Eliot, she felt that the adventurousness and boldness present in her earlier works disappears from her later ones. Despite Wharton’s criticism of Eliot, she greatly admired her, as Percy Lubbock well details in his biographical account of Wharton.

Lubbock claims that Wharton understood Eliot well and that part of what she appreciated in Eliot was her ability to create a powerful sensuality in her novels. “I never met anybody who understood George Eliot better or admired her more than Edith, and now that she is no longer with us I mostly keep the subject to myself,” Lubbock recalls. “I remember her reading to me, in The Mill on the Floss, the two passages on the beauty of Maggie’s arm, adding, ‘To think that there are fools who pretend that there is no physical life, no sensuousness in George Eliot!’” (102). For one who criticized Eliot so
openly, Wharton privately appreciated the subtlety of Eliot’s treatment of sexual desire in her writing. Yet, between Wharton and James there was an understanding that Eliot was almost synonymous with moralizing, as demonstrated in James’ letter to Wharton, written on November 24th, 1907, when he gave Wharton his opinion of *The Fruit of the Tree*: “The element of good writing in it is enormous—I perpetually catch you at writing admirably (though I do think here somehow, of George Eliotizing a little more frankly than ever yet; I mean a little more directly and avowedly. However, I don’t ‘mind’ that—I like it; and you do things which are not in dear old Mary Ann’s chords at all)” (476).

James’ double entendre using Eliot’s real name “Mary Ann” was a play on the term “Mary Ann” for a queer man, a term which Graham Robb described and Ogden Codman Jr. employed when writing about Gaillard Lapsley. In and of itself, this usage of Eliot’s name as signifying queerness may seem insignificant, but when paired with a later passage from another of James’ letters to Wharton, the question of intent certainly arises.

In December 1912, James wrote to Wharton, again in response to a recent publication (her novel *The Reef*), which seemed to be the novel James liked best. His letter, written on the 9th, shows James complimenting Wharton by claiming that she had surpassed the skill of Eliot: “There used to be little notes in you that were like fine benevolent fingermarks of the good George Eliot—the echo of much reading of that excellent woman, here and there, that is, sounding through. But now you are like a lost and recovered ‘ancient’ whom she might have got a reading of (especially were he a Greek)” (645). James, therefore, reverses the roles of Wharton and Eliot to suggest that the latter might have imitated the former, were her work to have been printed first. Yet, James likens Wharton to a “lost and recovered ‘ancient’” and then uses the curious phrase,

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66 Eliot’s real name was Mary Ann Evans.
“especially were he a Greek,” in parentheses, to describe the kind of writer Wharton would have been in such a case. By assigning Wharton a subject position that is not only male, but Greek—even if in a hypothetical supposition—James pays Wharton a compliment of the highest kind.

If the two Georges both symbolized, for Wharton, historical literary figures who challenged sexual convention and traditional gender constructs, then she also understood their significance as queer writers. Certainly, Willa Cather—who has often been examined along with Wharton, her contemporary—acknowledged, in her published work, their difference and admired their otherness, from her perspective as a writer who was greatly interested in a homosexual male literary tradition. In his study Willa Cather’s Sexual Aesthetics and the Male Homosexual Literary Tradition, John P. Anders claims, “Early in her career Cather endorsed masculine values to the extent of ridiculing and distrusting female writers” (28) and he reprints a passage from Cather’s work, The Kingdom of Art, which provides a fascinating observation on the “great Georges.” “I have not much faith in women in fiction” Cather writes. “They have sort of a sex consciousness that is abominable. They are so limited to one string and they lie so about that. They are so few, the ones who really did anything worthwhile; there were the great Georges, George Eliot and George Sand, and they were anything but women” (qtd in Anders 28). Calling George Eliot and George Sand “anything but women,” Cather shows how their refusal to adhere to strict social codes of behavior marked them as something “other” than women. Shari Benstock writes that James also compared the two Georges, calling Eliot the “only English novelist ‘to have powers of thought commensurate with [Sand’s] powers of imagination’” (162). The importance of the two Georges in
Wharton’s life and their significance as deeply complex individuals who challenged traditional notions of sexual identity, provides clues to Wharton’s own sense of self, and her closest friends would liken her to the two Georges.

When James compared Wharton to Eliot, he was not alone, as Charles Scribner predicted that she would be “the George Eliot of her time.” Fullerton compared Wharton to Sand. Both men recognized Wharton’s complex understanding of her own gender and sexuality as it related to a masculine sense of queerness. When James places Eliot within a tradition of reading ancient Greek male writers (homosexual male literary tradition) and then suggests that Wharton could have been such a writer Eliot might have read, had she been born in the Hellenic period, he alludes to her recent treatment of same-sex desire between men, in her novel The Reef—a novel which many critics consider the catharsis as the end of Wharton’s affair with Fullerton. In a sense, James validates Wharton’s initiation into the queer community by teasing her with allusions and playful double entendres that demonstrated that he understands her complicated sense of identity.

Likewise, when Fullerton compares Wharton to George Sand, during his conversation with Elisina Tyler, he intimates his deeper understanding of Wharton’s sexuality and her sense of gender. As masculine women who sexually desired men, the two Georges, despite their unusual gender-bending, were not directly linked to lesbianism, unlike Natalie Barney and Gertrude Stein, whom Wharton disliked greatly and avoided during her later years in Paris. For Eliot and Sand, their queerness did not specifically relate to same-sex desire between women (though Sand developed an undefined relationship with the captivating Dorval). Rather, their queerness related to a defiance of stringent moral codes and sexual mores, as well as a flouting of polarized gender constructs.
The Facilitator-Voyeur

When James excused himself and decided to wander off into the ambulatory at the cathedral of St. Etienne, he gave Wharton and Fullerton a moment alone, having probably picked up on the sexual tension that had been brewing all day. When Fullerton stole the opportunity to ask Wharton furtively, “Dear, are you happy?,” his question betrayed the level of intimacy between them, during the weeks that preceded James’ visit. While James must have felt awkward, his presence provided Wharton with the oddest of effects. Instead of feeling inhibited under the watchful and knowing eyes of her dearest friend Henry (who must have felt a sense of déjà vu, as his current role seemed to echo that of his one in Fullerton’s affair with Margaret Brooke), Wharton interestingly was emboldened by having James around. Though she arranged for time alone with Fullerton during James’ visit, Wharton clearly felt more at ease with Fullerton and took more confident strides in their relationship when James was there. Now, what exactly caused that newfound sense of daring and adventure? Possibly her knowledge of James’ desire for Fullerton gave Wharton a deeper connection with James. She was able to pursue a sexual relationship with Fullerton, where James could not—because of his own feelings of impotence, however motivated. Wharton must have felt closer to James in sharing the same desire for Fullerton, or James’ desire for Fullerton heightened and stimulated her own, or she assumed the sort of role in her affair with Fullerton that she believed James would have held. Clearly, at the heart of this ménage à trois, Wharton’s desire for Fullerton was fueled by James. During the precarious beginning of her relationship with Fullerton, Wharton was only able to boldly move forward when James was nearby. Where she was once alarmed by Fullerton’s sexual advances (as she confessed in her
Love Diary that she felt “hurt” and “disillusioned” by his “gesture,” widely read by Wharton’s biographers to mean that he had overstepped the line of decency by propositioning her), Wharton drastically changed her tune, only one day after their excursion to the cathedral with James, writing, “I suddenly said to myself: ‘I will go with him once before we separate’” (676), imagining running off to an “inn in the country” for “twenty-four hours” so that they might “be still together” in the morning. Wharton felt offended and almost sick when Fullerton first made sexual advances, but, once James arrived, the fears dissipated and she was ready to plunge head-first into a full-blown, sexual affair. In the preceding entry from the same day, May 3rd, 1908, Wharton noted that she felt at her “ease” with James around, rather than the “shy & awkward” person she felt she was when alone with Fullerton. When Henry James entered into the sexual dynamic between Wharton and Fullerton, Wharton boldly took great leaps forward in her affair with the younger journalist, and they consummated their relationship, spurred on by James’ presence.

Although James was intrigued by Wharton’s blooming romance, he was disappointed that he never could get a minute alone with Fullerton, who had been the bait that lured him to France. During his final visit to France, James expected more time alone together with Fullerton, whom he so rarely had the opportunity to see. According to Miranda Seymour, when James repeatedly found himself forced into the position of a “third wheel” by Wharton, he became annoyed and slightly depressed. Seymour argues: “It was a brief visit and, for James, a less comfortable one than he allowed his hostess to guess. She was transparently besotted. She evidently had learned nothing as yet about
Katherine Fullerton\textsuperscript{67} or her lover’s chequered past. Glumly, he resigned himself to being packed off to parties alone so that Edith could steal a precious two hours with Fullerton” (246). Seymour’s allusion to James’ attendance at “parties alone,” during the days that followed the trip to Beauvais, must have included the night when Wharton arranged for James to show up at an evening party alone, while she and Fullerton stayed behind together. Wharton later reminisced with Fullerton, “We were so happy together” (Lewis 220), seeming to forget all about the Master. Soon, James would leave France, never to return again, on May 9\textsuperscript{th}, escaping what he had termed his “gorgeous bondage” in “golden chains” (220). Disappointed and feeling ineffectual, James was only too happy and too ready to head home to England, to his beloved home in Rye.

Both R.W.B. Lewis and Shari Benstock contend that Wharton wanted to fully consummate her relationship with Fullerton, shortly after James’ departure from France, and that she had developed enough courage to become Fullerton’s lover. Lewis writes that only four days after James left their company Wharton and Fullerton were “actively lovers,” though Wharton had some difficulty adjusting to being the sort of woman who would have an adulterous affair. Worries of being watched plagued her, as she confessed to Fullerton, on May 13\textsuperscript{th}, “Something gave me the impression the other day that we are watched in this house . . . commented on. Ah, how a great love needs to be a happy and too ready to head home to England, to his beloved home in Rye.

\textsuperscript{67} Katherine Fullerton, of course, was Morton’s Fullerton’s first cousin, who had been raised by his parents as a quasi-sibling. Around the same time that Wharton started her relationship with Fullerton, a romance had also been blooming between him and his cousin, with Katherine writing him love letters, pursuing a sexually charged relationship with him despite the incestuous connotations of their connection. In fact, during Fullerton’s first visit to The Mount, he squeezed in a visit to Bryn Mawr to deliver a lecture on Henry James and to see his cousin, in October, 1907. According to Marion Mainwaring, the chronology is striking: on October 21\textsuperscript{st}-22\textsuperscript{nd}, Fullerton visits Wharton, after spending time with Katherine; on the 27\textsuperscript{th} or 28\textsuperscript{th}, he sends Wharton the letter that inspired her to start her “secret journal”; by October 30\textsuperscript{th} or 31\textsuperscript{st}, he became engaged to his cousin (53). Though the engagement with his cousin was brief, Fullerton’s simultaneous encouragement of both women (Katherine Fullerton and Wharton) as lovers reveals much about his complex and sexually duplicitous nature.
open love! How degraded I feel by other people’s degrading thoughts” (Lewis 220). Wharton exhibits again the fear she experienced before James arrived in France when Fullerton made a sexual advance in private, offending her sensibilities. Now, having taken the plunge into a fully sexual affair with Fullerton, and without the reassurance and comfort of James to rally her spirits, Wharton began to feel again that self-doubt, the shyness and awkwardness that were all too familiar. Benstock disagrees with Lewis’ dating of the beginning of Wharton’s sexual relationship with Fullerton and claims that, though Wharton had wanted to take things further with her new romantic partner, problems with timing and a suitable place prevented them from consummating their affair: “But it was already too late. The return to America was only three weeks distant. She tried to find a suitable locale and fix a date for the tryst, but Fullerton suddenly found himself too busy to leave Paris. She had predicted that something like this would occur, the result delays and scruples: ‘Why didn’t I speak my heart out at once?’” (184) Thus, there exists between Lewis’ account and that of Benstock a major difference concerning the consummation of the sexual affair between Wharton and Fullerton.

Cynthia Griffin Wolff, in her study of Wharton A Feast of Words: The Triumph of Edith Wharton, asserts that the time between 1907 and 1908 marked a dramatic shift in Wharton’s personality—during the period of her affair with Morton Fullerton. Wolff points out that, during this time, James started to coin several nicknames for “dear Edith” that revealed anything but a meek and frightened woman. “This was the period during which Henry James began to coin those many epithets for her—‘The Princess Lointaine, the whirling princess, the great and glorious pendulum, the gyrator, the devil-dancer, the golden eagle, the Fire Bird, the Shining One, the angel of desolation or of devastation, the
"historic ravager,"” writes Wolff. “These are not names that James would give to a
mousy, frightened woman” (145). It is significant that James did not see Wharton as
timid, shy or awkward, but as a force to be reckoned with, a dynamic and powerful
presence, dominant among those around her. Wolff seems to blur the line, though, when
locating the point in time when Wharton first became Fullerton’s actual lover, suspecting,
“Some time in the early spring, they became lovers” and she then sharpens her focus by
writing, “Some time in early April Edith and Morton became lovers,” a claim she bases
on the passage from Wharton’s Love Diary, which reads “I have known ‘what happy
women feel,’” from April 20th. Wolff seems convinced that Wharton’s relationship with
Fullerton animated the great changes that were taking place in her personality. Rather
than remaining the dutiful wife of Teddy Wharton, Edith sought to live life for herself
and no longer stay a woman paralyzed by fear (as she had felt in her adolescent years and
which culminated in her nervous breakdown, after her wedding to Teddy). Giving only
brief attention to the distinct timeline of Wharton’s affair with Fullerton, it is difficult to
accept Wolff’s chronology, as she does not map out all the events that occurred during
that initial phase of their affair with any sort of specificity. In a fascinating turn, Eleanor
Dwight, in her study of Wharton’s life, does not arrive at the same conclusion as
Wharton’s other biographers—Wolff, Lewis or Benstock—when she dates the beginning
of Wharton’s sex life with Fullerton to early spring, “Sometime in February or March
1908, Edith Wharton and Morton Fullerton became lovers” (145). Why is the timing of
the consummation of Wharton’s affair with Fullerton so important? By carefully piecing
together the “story” of Wharton’s romance with Fullerton, it becomes very apparent that
James played a key role in enabling Wharton to experience sexual maturation and a
complex sense of desire. In other words, if we can try to accurately arrange the events that led to Wharton’s sexual awakening with Fullerton, we can begin to understand the larger contexts—especially in regard to pederasty, a queer male community, and homosexual male literary tradition—that would have lasting effects on her own conception of her identity, as well as on her fiction produced during and after her affair.

When James encouraged Wharton, in his letters, to carry on in her desire for Fullerton, he provided the sort of validation she needed and gave her the courage to move forward, rather than remain a victim of her own sexual fears. If James were removed from the equation of the Wharton/Fullerton/James triangle, Wharton might never have consummated the affair with Fullerton. Curiously, James was the “facilitator-voyeur” (as Benstock describes it, in the case of Margaret Brooke) and found pleasure commingled with frustration, as he lived vicariously through Wharton’s experiences. Wharton could not only act upon her feelings of desire for Fullerton, but, indirectly, her desire for James. In a sense, she was both a surrogate and an intermediary for James in her relationship with Fullerton, which she hoped would allow her a sense of agency—in a dominant position of being the mentor, the *erastes,* to Fullerton’s *eronemos.* Fullerton, who flirted with both Wharton and James, clearly was motivated by his own sense of gain from getting the most out of the two relationships. Due to his own sense of sexual paralysis beyond the pats and embraces he proffered to younger men, James sought satisfaction or a dulling of that desire for Fullerton by identifying with Wharton. By being invited into Wharton’s confidence and being given details about her relationship with Fullerton, James could imagine that he was with Fullerton, that her affair was his own. Thus, a complex desire flowed through all three participants in the affair—a desire that changed
and flowed from one individual to another, in a constant state of flux, working toward a climax.

During the month of May, 1908, Wharton struggled to define herself within a relationship with Fullerton, bringing together both their intellectual and sexual identities. She started to reveal her private self to Fullerton and, for the first time, felt not so alone. Yet, fear and uncertainty dogged Wharton’s steps in their affair, and a consistent self-doubt appears in her letters to Fullerton: “You knew sometimes I draw back from your least touch. I am so afraid—so afraid—of seeming to expect more than you can give, & of thus making my love for you less helpful to you, less than what I wish it to be” (144). Wanting to be the helpful mentor, Wharton felt sometimes she demanded too much from Fullerton and worried that her neediness would push him away. Rather than the dominant force she was with James, Wharton was insecure in her new, more submissive role with Fullerton, a part she at times considered false. “I shouldn’t say this if you hadn’t already shown me that you understood,” confided Wharton. “I don’t want to have any plan of conduct with you—to behave in this way or that—but just to be natural, to be completely myself. And the completest expression of that self is the desire to help you, to give you a chance to develop what is in you, & to live the best life you can. Nothing else counts for me now” (144). Wharton longs to mentor Fullerton and help him advance professionally, and Fullerton certainly found a useful ally in Wharton. While Wharton’s interior world was shifting dramatically, Fullerton appears to feel little any such life-altering epiphany during their affair. Time and again, Wharton tried to explain the sort of confusion that was erupting in her life: “It is a wonderful world that you have created for me, Morton dear, but how I am to adjust it to the other world is difficult to conceive”
Given the emotional upheaval and her apparent need for reassurance, Wharton acted like a new and insecure lover. Her behavior and anxiety betray her sexual inexperience; she knew that, having boldly taken the step forward in becoming Fullerton's lover, she was heading into territory she could not control.

Following Lewis' timeline and accepting that, shortly after James left France in May, Wharton and Fullerton developed a sexual intimacy, certain clues in Wharton's Love Diary start to make sense. On May 21st, not even two weeks after James left Wharton and Fullerton for England, Wharton wrote, "I have drunk of the wine of life at last, I have known the thing best worth knowing, I have been warmed through and through never to grow quite cold again" (680). Wharton's use of the image of wine recalls her earlier entry on February 21st, when she voiced her fears after Fullerton's sexual advance: "It was as if there stood between us at that moment the frailest of glass cups, filled with a rare colourless (strikethrough the word "liquid") wine—& with a gesture you broke the glass & spilled the drops" (671). In the entry from May 21st, the wine was no longer forbidden, but a draught that both she and Fullerton had savored. Her language conveys satiation, and she emphatically uses the words, "at last." Years later, when Wharton wrote her autobiography *A Backward Glance*, the metaphor of the rare and valuable wine appeared again68, when an aged Wharton looked back on her life through a nostalgic set of lenses. Instead of having the cup break and spill the invaluable wine it held, Wharton, on her entry of May 21st, wrote that she had "drunk of the wine of life at last" and—like the biblical Eve, or Laura, in Rosetti's *Goblin Market*—once she

68 See *A Backward Glance*: "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. Now I see that one of its uses lay in preserving a few drops of an old vintage too rare to be savoured by a youthful palate; and I should like to atone for my unappreciativeness by trying to revive that faint fragrance."
had tasted of its sweetness, she had felt forever changed. Wharton’s appropriation of the
wine vessel itself also calls upon the popular image of Ganymede (the boy cup-bearer
who becomes the lover of Zeus in Greek mythology) as a symbol of pederastic desire in
the male homosexual literary tradition. Howard Sturgis famously encouraged Wharton’s
affair by upon this image, a “cup of pleasure,” when tells his friend to “Fly your flight—
live your romance—drain the cup of pleasure to the dregs—but when exhaustion sets in,
think of your aff[ectionate] friend” (qtd in Goodman 23) in a letter written in July, 1909,
during the climax of her affair. Given James’ use of this image as well in his novel
_Roderick Hudson_, as representing same-sex desire between an older and a younger man,
Wharton’s use of this symbol reveals how the wine vessel carried specific connotations
of queerness that Fullerton understood.

Both the proximity of James’ visit and the dramatic change in Wharton’s use of
the wine metaphor in her Love Diary support Lewis’ assertion that Wharton and
Fullerton had initiated their sexual intimacy, during the month of May, 1908. Yet,
though they had just become lovers, they had to face separation. Only two days after
writing her entry about having finally “drunk of the wine of life,” Wharton left France for
her home in America. On the 24th, and while at sea, she sadly wrote to Fullerton of the
distance that was growing between them: “And now the sea is between us, & silence, &
the long days, & the inexorable fate that binds me here & you there” (681). Wharton
must have sensed what might happen, for, as Benstock writes, “In the first week after her
departure, he wrote three letters. Then, after a disconcerting lapse, two others followed;

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69 I unpack the relevance of the wine vessel, the cup bearer, and expressions of thirst by members of
Wharton’s inner circle, in Chapter Eight, with a discussion that appears on page 372. I mention the
significance of this imagery, here, as this shows how Wharton, from the outset of her affair with Fullerton,
expressed desire in complex ways, in that she employs references and images only those initiated into the
male homosexual literary tradition could understand.
finally, and inexplicably, there was no word at all. Withdrawing into silence (a technique he used with all his women lovers), he left her confused and desperate” (185). Seemingly sentenced to a life bereft of the passion she had just newly discovered, Wharton’s return to her manic-depressive husband seemed all the more bitter. How would she be able to return to the “other world,” indeed, now that she had discovered true comradeship—something for which she had so desperately longed? Teddy cared little for Wharton’s latest reading material or the cultural events that fascinated her, and, more importantly, he could not understand the importance of the queer, artistic, and literary men in her life.

Facing life with a man who cared so little for her intellectual pursuits, Wharton considered such an existence like living alone. A day after she had arrived home, having traveled by train with Teddy, Wharton writes in her Love Diary about showing Teddy a copy of a book which had caught her attention, Lock’s *Heredity & Variation*. Teddy curtly responded, “Does that sort of thing really amuse you?”—which tended to be his reaction to “everything worthwhile” (682). Frustrated and feeling more alone than ever, Wharton sadly confided, “I heard the key turn in my prison-lock”\(^70\) (682). Reflecting on

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\(^70\) This quote connects to Wharton’s oft-quoted passage from her short piece “The Fullness of Life” (composed in the summer of 1891, early in her marriage, and published in December of 1893) comes to mind, which expresses a wife’s disappointment in her marital union (with a man who could never understand her inner self). The wife in the story explains:

> I have sometimes thought that a woman’s nature is like a great house full of rooms: there is the hall, through which everyone passes in going in and out; the drawingroom, where one receives formal visits; the sitting-room, where the members of the family come and go as they list; but beyond that, far beyond, are other rooms, the handles of whose doors perhaps are never turned; no one knows the way to them, no one knows whither they lead; and in the innermost room, the holy of holies, the soul sits alone and waits for a footstep that never comes.

Wharton’s character tells the Spirit that her husband “never got beyond the family sitting-room,” revealing the superficiality of their marriage—that there existed no communion of souls, no comradeship, between them. When Wharton describes the sound of the “key turn” in the “prison lock,” which blocked access to her “innermost room,” she reinforces this image of her sitting silently and futilely waiting for “a footstep.” James and Fullerton, in fact, possessed the key to Wharton’s interiority, to her innermost self, and their time in France together revealed that knowledge to Wharton. Forced to return and reside with her oblivious husband, Wharton must have felt the painful contrast between these relationships.
over twenty years of marriage to a husband who failed to understand the importance of his wife’s passions, Wharton bravely faced the lonely life that she had created for herself. By retreating into self-imposed solitary confinement when disappointed by others, however, Wharton helped to build her own “prison.” “And yet I must be just. I have stood it all these years, & hardly felt it, because I had created a world of my own, in which I lived without heeding what went on outside. But since I have known what it was to have some one enter into that world & live there with me, the mortal solitude I came back to has become terrible” (682). As Fullerton started to pull away and his letters became fewer, Wharton feared that their relationship was doomed. Fullerton’s letter from June 11th confirmed her worries. “But the letter which reached her on June 11 spoke ominously about the uncertainty of his plans,” writes Lewis. “He definitely could not come to America in the autumn, and he was not all sure where he would be the following year. He had resigned as the regular Paris correspondent of the London Times, and everything was in doubt” (229). Torn between bolting to France and patiently waiting at home to see what might unfold, Wharton entered a frenzied state of anxiety, and her desperation permeated her correspondence to Fullerton, her one “comrade.” Writing on June 6th, 1908, Wharton singled out a particular word from Fullerton’s recent letter that caught her attention: “camaraderie.” She seized on the reference to Whitmanesque comradeship. She wrote, “But what I liked best in your letter (I mean this last one) is the word ‘camaraderie.’ I was never sure that you cared for it, or felt it . . . that you thought I gave it” (148). The French word “camaraderie” simply translated means “comradeship” or “loyalty to or partiality for one’s comrades,” according to the
Wharton perceived Fullerton to be using the term, though, within a homosexual male literary tradition.

The term “comrade” was central to Wharton’s understanding of male connection—both intellectual and sexual—as it related to the ancient Greek practice of pederasty. The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides an etymology of “comrade” that can be traced back to the French word “camerade” and the Spanish word “camarada,” which was originally found in usage as “camerado souldiour”—which was used for “bedfellow,” “chamberfellow,” or “cabinn-mate souldiour.” The earliest form of the word “comrade” appears as “camerade,” in 1591, and originally found definition as “one who shares the same room, a chamber-fellow, ‘chum’; esp. among soldiers, a tent-fellow, fellow-soldier.” Since the institutionalized practice of pederasty, in Hellenic Greece, was inextricably bound up in a military and educational setting, not only were “comrades” fellow soldiers, but they developed a quasi-familial relationship, since the older, more experienced soldier would become a father, mentor, and sexual initiator to the young soldier for whom he was responsible. Shakespeare also refers to this sort of comradeship, in *Henry V*’s “St. Crispin’s Day” speech, in which the phrase “band of brothers” is coined—an epithet commonly used to describe soldiers, in modern day, although, today, the word has become far removed from its root. During the time in which Wharton employed the use of the word “comrade,” the term signified a specific, sexually charged relationship between men, as defined by Walt Whitman in his homoerotic poems—poems Wharton read and admired, even emulated. The word “comrade” represented one who shared same-sex male desire, that of a bedfellow or chamber-fellow, which Whitman would relate to in his experiences during the Civil War as a nurse.
Wharton certainly knew of Whitman’s use of the term comrade in his “Calamus” poems and drew upon this concept in her portrait of him, in her novella *The Spark*, published in 1924, in which the male narrator becomes infatuated with an older man, Hayley Delane, a veteran who served in the Civil War. The narrator tells Delane’s wife, “I think he’s the finest figure in sight. He looks like a great general, a great soldier of fortune—in an old fresco, I mean” (24). The narrator admires Delane’s virility and masculinity, while alluding to an image of a soldier as seen in an “old fresco,” possibly from ancient Greece or Rome. (Since the Greeks in such “old frescoes” often depicted soldiers nude—as men historically entered combat with little to no clothing—the narrator draws attention to Delane’s physical attractiveness, with his cutting the “finest figure in sight.” The sexual charge becomes unmistakable, as Delane’s allure as a “great general” incites desire in the narrator.) Given the practice of pederasty’s roots in military training, not to mention historical figures like Alexander the Great, who modeled themselves after the Greek military heroes who participated in the practice, the narrator’s seemingly obscure reference to the “old fresco” takes on greater meaning. When the narrator’s friendship with Delane begins to deepen, Delane starts to talk about his past service during the Civil War and particularly at Bull Run, where he was seriously injured. The narrator then learns that Delane met a “queer fellow” in the hospital:

“In regarding that old past as dead. It is dead. We’ve got no use for it over here. That’s what that queer fellow in Washington always used to say to me . . .”
“What queer fellow in Washington?”
“Oh, a sort of backwoodsman who was awfully good to me when I was in hospital . . . after Bull Run . . .” (70)

By using the term “queer fellow” twice, and drawing upon the popular self-fashioned image of Whitman as a sort of “backwoodsman,” the narrator suspects that Delane’s
friend was the poet Walt Whitman. In order to confirm his suspicions, the narrator asks more questions about the “queer fellow” during a later conversation with the older veteran. After being asked for the man’s name, Delane answers:

There’s the pity! I must have heard it, but I was foggy with fever most of the time, and can’t remember. Nor what became of him either. One day he didn’t turn up—that’s all I recall. And soon afterward I was off again, and didn’t think of him for years. Then, one day, I had to settle something with myself, and, by George, there he was, telling me the right and wrong of it! Queer—he comes like that, at long intervals; turning points, I suppose. (81)

Here, in the passage, Delane uses the word “queer” to describe the man who haunts his memory and visited him while in the hospital. Though the narrator has an inkling of who the mysterious man might have been, he does not find out his exact identity, until the climax of the story. Given the narrator’s fascination with and detailed accounts of Delane, it becomes clear that he is a young man clearly enamored with the older man, with whom he was “on terms of brotherly equality” (101). The climax of the story occurs when the identity of the “queer fellow” is revealed, through the happy coincidence when Delane having picks up a certain book the narrator has out when Delane comes to call.

When Delane opens a book, he recognizes an image from a steel engraving in its beginning pages: the nameless man who visited him in the hospital. The unmistakable image is Walt Whitman, and the book of poetry, *Leaves of Grass*. Surprised that the “queer fellow” has his portrait in a book, Hayley Delane tries to make sense of who the “chap from Washington” was. Amused, the narrator reads from the volume a poem known as “A Sight in Camp in the Day-Break and Dim,” from Whitman’s *Drum-Taps*, which was integrated into later printings of *Leaves of Grass*. The narrator reads three stanzas to Delane, which is meant to spark recognition in the veteran, the possible
inspiration for the poem. The speaker in the poem stops at different wounded soldiers and sees an old man whom he calls, "my dear comrade." He then discovers a young boy, "And who are you, my child and darling? / Who are you, sweet boy, with cheeks yet blooming?" Finally, the narrator reads the last stanza: "Then, to the third—a face nor child, nor old, very calm, as of beautiful yellow-white ivory; / Young man, I think I know you—I think this face of yours is the face of Christ himself; / Dead and divine, and brother of all, and here again he lies" (105). When Delane makes no sign of recognition, the narrator chooses another two lines, hoping that his listener might understand the profundity of the verse: "Vigil strange I kept one night / When you, my son and my comrade, dropt at my side" (106). When the narrator finishes reading, he is flushed by the "religious emotion," which Whitman’s poetry inspires, having never before been so moved by the verse’s meaning.

Wharton’s reprinting of Whitman’s poetry in her novella and her reimagination of him as a nurse on the battlefields during the Civil War, demonstrated her awareness of the poet’s importance in a homosexual male literary tradition. The “spark” of recognition that the narrator of Wharton’s story is looking for in Hayley Delane is that he was the young man Whitman nursed and who inspired the poem. Clearly, the narrator understands the significance of the word “comrade,” largely taken from the “Calamus” section of Whitman’s Leaves of Grass, and expects Delane to grasp the magnitude of his connection to one of the most influential poetical works of the nineteenth century in America and in England. Delane’s response is disappointing. Wharton writes: “‘Yes; that’s it. Old Walt—that was what all the fellows used to call him. He was a great chap: I’ll never forget him.—I rather wish, though” he added, in his mildest tone of reproach,
‘you hadn’t told me that he wrote all that rubbish’” (109). The focus of Wharton’s novella is the same-sex desire of the narrator for the veteran he admires and the veteran’s inability to see how he had sparked that affection in not only the narrator but the great poet. When Delane fails to “get” the point of Whitman’s poetry or understand the concept of “comradeship,” the narrator finds his connection with Whitman. In fact, the narrator considers his account to be “merely an attempt to depict for you—and in so doing, perhaps make clearer to myself—the aspect and character of a man whom I loved, perplexedly but faithfully, for many years” (41-2). If the narrator locates the center of his own work as being “the aspect and character” of a man he “loved, perplexedly but faithfully, for many years,” then the story itself becomes a tale of unrequited same-sex desire. First, Whitman may have desired Delane, who—like the Christ-like figure in his poem—inspired the poet with his youth and bravery, although remaining ignorant of the older man’s desire. Then, the narrator, as a younger man, also desires Delane—whose seasoned virility and manliness seem irresistible—only to find that the veteran never understood Whitman’s affection and most likely would never understand, or reciprocate, his own feelings.

In To Walt Whitman, America, Kenneth M. Price asserts that Wharton’s relationships with the men who comprised the circle of closest friends were largely responsible for her understanding of and connection to Whitman’s works. Price suggests that Wharton’s interest in Whitman helped her to shape her thinking in regard to challenging traditional sexual mores and constructs of gender:

Wharton allied herself with men such as Sturgis, Lodge, Fullerton, Berry, Santayana, and Henry James whose ambiguous sexuality was especially suggestive for her art, for their lives threw into question established gender roles... Wharton’s connection with this network of men went hand in
hand with her interest in Whitman, a poet widely admired by these individuals, the acknowledged source of much avant-garde thinking about sexual mores, and a rallying point for reformers of literature. There was at this time a growing sense of homosexual consciousness to which Whitman contributed significantly. These men appealed to Wharton because they seemed to offer freedom from conventional limitations and perspectives. 

The “growing sense of homosexual consciousness to which Whitman contributed significantly” related to the concept of comradeship and its connection to a history of queer men, dating back to ancient Greece—a concept that Wharton recognized and drew upon, not only in her personal writings but in her fiction as well. “Her intensified interest in Whitman emerged out of the same longings—for greater freedom and for sexual, emotional, and spiritual development—that marked her midlife affair (lasting from 1908 until probably 1911) with William Morton Fullerton,” writes Price (38). Though Price credits Fullerton, along with a cluster of her male friends, for Wharton’s interest in Whitman, he curiously glosses over the significance of Whitman within Wharton’s friendship with James, making only a brief mention that Wharton and James both considered Whitman “the greatest of American poets.” Wharton’s appreciation of Whitman and his poetic treatment of pederastic comradeship largely contributed to her growing understanding of a new identity—an identity bound up in masculine gender traits, male bonding and same-sex male desire.

Though Price provides an interesting essay on Wharton’s active use of Whitmanian comradeship in her dealings with Fullerton, and gives pertinent, though very limited, critiques of a selected few of her literary pieces, he regards Wharton as a tragic figure who strove for a kind of relationship that could never have been attained, due to her physical sex. Price seems to believe that Wharton accepted that her biological sex
prevented her from participating in the “comradeship” she so admired in Whitman’s poetry. He claims that the “homosexual Whitman” of Fullerton remained very different from the Whitman Wharton understood, and that this division, based on sexuality, doomed her affair with Fullerton, since she could not help her biological status. He even goes so far as to assert, “She ultimately came to realize that the homosexual Whitman, an empowering and energizing conception for many people, was likely to deprive her of lasting physical communion with any individual from the group of men that consistently took her seriously as an intellectual” (55). He concludes his chapter on Wharton, by writing, “The difficulties of dealing with a liminal figure such as Fullerton and his bisexual drives—problematic for both women who love men and for men who love men—led Wharton to an idiosyncratic yet powerful conclusion as her liberating Whitman gradually metamorphosed into an exclusionary Whitman” (55). Here, Price concedes that Wharton ultimately became frustrated by her biological sex, which he seems to assume correlated to her sense of gender and its effect on her identity. In other words, since Wharton was born female, she was raised to be feminine and womanly, which led to her eventual acceptance and compliance with the gender construct ascribed to women from the late nineteenth century. Yet, we know that this was not the case.
CHAPTER VIII

CONTINUATION

A Shared Comradeship

Since Edith Wharton experienced tremendous anxiety over sexuality, due to her upbringing and her vexed relationship with her mother, Wharton needed Henry James to advise and encourage her during her affair with Fullerton. With James’ assistance and with the Whitmanesque term “comrade” as the name for an interiorized, queer masculine self, Wharton learned how to voice aspects of her sexuality that she had never before acknowledged. As “secret sharers,” Wharton and James bonded due their complicity in arranging Fullerton’s rescue from being blackmailed, with the confidence of knowing dark secrets about their beloved nobody else knew, sympathizing with one another, privately, with a shared desire for the younger man. In this chapter, I show how Wharton’s writing of her Whitmanesque poem “Terminus” represented a moment of recognition and self-exploration, in that she drew upon the homosexual male literary tradition to reveal to Fullerton her own sense of queerness.

When Wharton opened up to Fullerton, she finally felt she was no longer alone, that she had found someone who could accept her peculiarities and recognize her otherness. In the letters that followed in June, Wharton repeatedly uses the word “camaraderie”—which eventually led to the explicit application of “comrade” to Fullerton—to describe the intellectual and sexual connection she experienced during their affair. On June 8th, she wrote, “Do you want to know some of the things I like you for?
(you’ve never told me!)—Well—one is that kind of time-keeping, comparing mind you have—that led you, for instance, in your last letter, to speak of ‘the camaraderie we invented, or, it being predestined, we discovered’” (151). By the 19th, when Wharton started to worry that Fullerton’s interest in her was starting to wane, she pleaded, “I don’t ask you to say anything that might be painful to you. Simply write: ‘Chère camarade, I am well—things are well with me’; & I will understand, & accept—& think of you as you would like a friend to think” (154). Wharton continued to wait for Fullerton’s reassurance and consoled herself with reading Nietzsche—specifically his *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, or *Beyond Good and Evil*—which she described to her friend Sally Norton, as a “diversion between times,” which contained “dashes of Meredith & even Whitman” (159). Again and again, Wharton returned to Whitman, in her correspondence and in her personal life, reflecting the identity she was fashioning for herself, a comrade among the queer men who could best understand her sense of difference. Lewis claims that “Walt Whitman was, of course, the lyric poet [Wharton] esteemed above all others, ranking him more highly than Keats and Shelley” and that Whitman was particularly “effective” in the fall of 1908, when she turned to writing poetry as a form of distraction or way of working through her unresolved and unraveling feelings for Fullerton. By the end of the summer, after she had written another cathartic letter to Fullerton, Wharton busied herself with travel and writing, in hopes that Fullerton would no longer fill her thoughts. She wrote him a final missive to help her find possible closure.

In late August, when Wharton applied to Fullerton for reassurance and for an explanation of his behavior, she still could not understand what had happened to make him so aloof, or what had prevented him from returning the feelings she had poured out
onto the pages of numerous letters. The poignant honesty of Wharton’s plea remains as powerful as it was when first written:

I could take my life up again courageously if only I understood; for whatever those months were to you, to me they were a great gift, a wonderful enrichment; & still I rejoice & give thanks for them! You woke me from a long lethargy, a dull acquiescence in conventional restrictions, a needless self-effacement. If I was awkward & inarticulate it was because, literally, one side of me was asleep. (161)

The awakening that Wharton describes—which roused her from the “long lethargy,” “conventional restrictions” and “needless self-effacement”—combined an intellectual stirring with a sexual one. Feeling that their connection went deeper than a common tryst, Wharton tried to make sense of Fullerton’s sudden lack of interest—she, who could understand him better than anyone else. She felt certain that they were the “same,” that they shared a similar complexity in sexuality and intellect, a complicated identity few could comprehend. She posed the question, “How can it be that the sympathy between two people like ourselves, so many-sided, so steeped in imagination, should end from one day to another like a mere ‘passade’—end by passing, within a few weeks, utterly out of your memory?” (162) Truly puzzled by Fullerton’s cold silence, Wharton concluded her letter from August 26th, by writing, “Is it really to my dear friend—to Henry’s friend—to ‘dearest Morton’—that I have written this?” Wharton tellingly refers to Fullerton as “Henry’s friend,” using italics to emphasize the epithet she ascribed to her fickle lover, and specifically uses James’ familiar and unmistakably characteristic address of “dearest Morton” as a barb, reminding Fullerton of his obligation to their mutual friend, who indirectly encouraged their affair. Jogging his memory, Wharton reminds Fullerton of his longtime relationship with James as another further reason for staying in touch, knowing
that Fullerton could not afford to lose James, his group of friends, and her—all useful allies in the literary world.

According to Shari Benstock, in late September, Wharton sent James "two distressing letters," which are no longer extant but must have conveyed her recent troubles with Fullerton. Apparently, James had not heard from Fullerton either, although he suspected that a menacing situation—that of unresolved blackmail—had kept him preoccupied that summer:

James had had no news from his young friend in three months, "and there are kinds of news I can’t ask for." He hinted darkly, however, that "a great trouble, an infinite worry or a situation of the last anxiety or uncertainty are conceivable—though I don’t see that such things, I admit, can explain all." This reply was disingenuous. James had known for nearly a year that a woman in Paris had been trying for some time to get money out of Fullerton, but it was not for him to reveal the situation to Edith. How much she revealed of her relations with Fullerton, or how much James had deduced from his Paris trip, we do not know. (192)

In her interpretation of the events and correspondence of September 1908, Benstock suggests that James remained possibly ignorant of Wharton’s affair with Fullerton, believing that he had most likely turned a blind eye to their association in France, or that he never picked up on the sexual tension that permeated Wharton’s more desperate letters about their handsome friend. Yet, we know that James proffered Wharton a bit of advice that has become a part of Wharton/James lore, when he urged her not to “conclude,” but rather to “sit tight & go through the movements of life,” while she waited to hear again from Fullerton. Despite the fact that he knew Fullerton was being blackmailed for his past same-sex sexual relationships, James, when faced with advising Wharton, chose to encourage her to continue hoping, rather than bring an end to the affair. Considering his own interest in Fullerton, which often caused him to “gnash his teeth,” “yearn” and
“ache” for attention, James might have warned Wharton to stay clear of Fullerton or to resign herself to the fact that he had lost interest in her, but instead James rallied Wharton’s confidence in Fullerton. Though Benstock is convinced that Wharton kept her affair with Fullerton hidden from James, James was a man adept at surmising the psychological underpinnings of relationships and a keen observer of human interaction. He could not have believed that Wharton and Fullerton were “just friends,” considering all of the signals that were evident between the two, during his visit in France. Wharton also dropped clues in her letters to James, betraying her fascination with Fullerton, which prompted James’ earlier warning about Fullerton’s short attention span when it came to intimate connections.

Frank Kaplan suggests that in the beginning part of the fall of 1908, Wharton admitted to James that she was having an affair with Fullerton, taking the guesswork out of the Wharton/Fullerton/James triangle. “By early autumn 1908, she had confided to James about the affair,” asserts Kaplan. “He was fascinated, engaged, supportive of both of them” (512). Rather than becoming judgmental or moralistic, James received Wharton’s confession with a warm openness that deepened their friendship. They both knew what it was like to love Fullerton and to wait patiently for any letter or sign that demonstrated they were still in his thoughts. Both then could share the secret of the affair, and James could then live vicariously through Wharton, offering her advice of what he would do, were he in her place. James could finally realize his role as the facilitator-voyeur, a participant and encourager of a sexual relationship that awakened Wharton to a new understanding of “comradeship.” His letter from October 13th
provided Wharton with complete instructions on how to handle her most recent setback in the relationship with Fullerton, though at first he was reluctant to advise:

I am deeply distressed at the situation you describe & as to which my power to suggest or enlighten now quite miserably fails me. I move in darkness; I rack my brain; I gnash my teeth; I don’t pretend to understand or to imagine. And yet incredibly to you doubtless—I am still moved to say ‘Don’t conclude!’ Some light will still absolutely come to you—I believe—though I can’t pretend to say what it conceivably may be. Anything is more credible—conceivable—than a mere inhuman plan. A great trouble, an infinite worry or a situation of the last anxiety or uncertainty are conceivable—though I don’t see that such things, I admit, can explain all. (101)

James employs his characteristic camp language of exaggerated emotion to describe his reaction to Wharton’s news. He refers to over-the-top, theatrical displays of despair—as signified in his “moving in darkness” and “gnashing of teeth”—before shifting into his paternal voice as counselor and advisor. James provides Wharton with a glimmer of hope, intimating that a pressing situation had kept Fullerton very busy, though he remains vague on the point of what that “worry” or “situation” might be. Clearly not ready to reveal that her lover was being blackmailed, James dances around the subject, shifting the focus to Wharton and how she should patiently wait for Fullerton. He also provides insight into how to accomplish such a feat, without giving way to feelings of hopelessness:

Only sit tight yourself & go through the movements of life. That keeps up our connection with life—I mean of the immediate & apparent life; behind which, all the while, the deeper & darker and the unapparent, in which things really happen to us, learns, under that hygiene, to stay in its place. Let it get out of its place & it swamps the scene; besides which its place, God knows, is enough for it! Live it all through, every inch of it—out of it something valuable will come. (101)

James is describing a sort of dual existence—the “apparent life” and the “unapparent life”—two identities, one presented to a public audience, and one hidden and private. By
compartmentalizing one’s feelings of disappointment and loss, James suggests that Wharton would be able to “go through the movements of life”—in other words, she might be able to tame the beast of desire that resided within her. His “carpe diem” approach to Wharton’s affair is intriguing, as he urges her on, commanding: “Live it all through, every inch of it—out of it something valuable will come” (101). Perhaps, James understood that this affair would provide Wharton with a key for understanding the fraternal bonds that existed in the Inner Circle, that her eyes would be opened to a deeper understanding of Whitmanian comradeship and sexual liberation, that she might gain a new knowledge that would inform her art. Clearly, he believed that Wharton would yield prized fruit from the relationship with Fullerton and that “something valuable” would result from the affair. Wharton paid attention to the advice and resigned herself to a period of activity and travel that would keep her mind off of Fullerton and on her closest friends in England.

During the month of November, Wharton turned to her close friends, who gathered in England, for support and entertainment, and, as a result, those friendships deepened into what Wharton later described as “comradeships.” Beginning on the 8th, Wharton embarked on a six week visit that coaxed her out of the malaise in which she had found herself all summer. In addition to the whirlwind of social events that kept her continuously busy, she met two new men who would become important members of the Qu’acre set, John Hugh Smith and Robert Norton. “Old friends gathered round, new acquaintances invited her into their drawing rooms, and for the next six weeks, she was caught up in the most exuberant, crowded social season she was ever to know in London,” writes Benstock. “Her ‘inner circle’ gathered around—Henry James, Howard
Sturgis, and Gaillard Lapsley on hand to accompany her to lunch and tea, theatre and art galleries” (193). With her dearest friends by her side, boosting her spirits and providing the necessary moral support she required—Howard Sturgis, for one, had been specifically instructed by James to “be kind to her” (Lewis 239)—Wharton took her mind off of the problematic romance with Fullerton and shifted her attention to the community and culture that welcomed her. Pointedly, Lapsley came down from Cambridge; James was already there and decided to stay on, and Sturgis managed to pull himself away from Queen’s Acre, in Windsor, long enough for a visit in London with “dear Edith.” Though she emphasizes the time spent with these friends, in *A Backward Glance*, Benstock claims that Wharton was really very much taken up with the London social scene and the “country house social circuit” (194). Wharton was introduced to a bevy of important figures in English society—including George Meredith, Thomas Hardy, Philip Burne-Jones, John Galsworthy, James Barrie and H.G. Wells. At the home of Lady Essex in Mayfair, Wharton met up with Edmund Gosse—a good friend of James who, as discussed in an earlier chapter, provided the Master with a privately printed copy of Symond’s sexological text, *A Problem in Modern Ethics*. Wharton also met the writer and cartoonist Max Beerbohm, whom Linda Dowling calls a “cultural invert”—a term she defines as a man who remains “uninterested in masculine love as a sexual outlet yet drawn to the ethos of its subculture” (133). Given both Gosse and Beerbohm’s ties to queer male culture, one can see how Wharton continued to propagate relationships within a specific social milieu that included not only her close friends but satellite figures who identified themselves as queer.
When Wharton visited Stanway, “a Renaissance house in the Cotswolds,” for a party held in her honor, she found among the guests two men who were destined to be dear friends. Robert Norton, who had attended Eton and Cambridge, like Sturgis and Lubbock, had retired from a career in business and was pursuing his interest in art as a watercolorist. A forty-year-old, he was ready to travel the world and paint that which he observed. Members of the circle affectionately called him “Norts” or “Beau Norts” (a possible play on “Beaux Arts,” as Norton was a watercolorist) or “Bob.” Susan Goodman dates Wharton’s acquaintance with Norton to 1904 and contends that their friendship did not become close until after the end of the Great War\textsuperscript{71} (24). The type of friendships that Norton maintained with other members of Wharton’s circle, and James’ community of friends, remains shrouded in mystery, since so few details about his personal life can be gleaned from scholarly treatments of figures like James, Wharton, A.C. Benson, E.F. Benson, and Lubbock, to name a few. Lewis writes that Gaillard Lapsley gave the following account of him: “It was life that he chiefly cultivated as a fine art: painting, reading, conversation, European travel, and such gentlemanly exercises as swimming and walking” (244). We know that Norton had developed a strong friendship with E.F. Benson, with whom he shared the lease of Lamb House, after James’ death in 1916. Brian Masters provides the details of the arrangement:

Henry James died in 1916, leaving Lamb House to his nephew, who rented it to an American widow, Mrs. Beevor. She grew tired of the harsh

\textsuperscript{71} Since this study examines the specific period between 1905 and 1910 (the time during which Wharton met James and Fullerton and the affair took place), Wharton’s relationship with Norton does not carry great import here. Yet, it is important to note that Bob Norton became a very close friend, once James had died (1916) and years after Wharton’s affair with Fullerton had ended (1910). The eventual development of their friendship makes sense considering that, in 1920, Wharton also lost Howard Sturgis as a friend, creating a need for new male companions who could understand her otherness and could remember the circle in its heyday. Norton knew the Bensons, lived with and often stayed with them at Lamb House, and provided a connection for Wharton through which she was able to still visit the former home of her longtime friend, the Master, in Rye, England.
winds which could afflict Rye in winter, and offered it to an artist called
Robert Norton, who was a friend of Benson’s. Norton then suggested Fred
and he share the place, which seemed a very congenial idea, so Fred began
to spend weekends in Rye, returning to London by train on Monday
morning, an arrangement which lasted a few months. Norton was then
obliged to go to the United States and suggested Fred might take on the
lease by himself... He declined, and Lamb House was let to a stranger.
(228)

From this passage, we learn that not only had E.F. Benson been good friends with Robert
Norton, but we see that they shared the lease for Lamb House, in Rye. Despite the
brevity of their first occupation of the residence, E.F. Benson later returned to Lamb
House, with his brother A.C. Benson in tow. Strangely enough, a letter from August 15th,
1929, places Wharton at Lamb House, where she spent “a very peaceful week” visiting
Robert Norton. So, the question arises: Did Robert Norton move back into Lamb House
and live with both E.F. and A.C. Benson? If Wharton stayed with the Bensons, while
visiting Norton, then why does she make no mention of them in her letter? In fact, there
is very little writing that links Wharton to either of the Bensons, though there are a few
pieces of writing that demonstrate Wharton certainly knew who they were (such as
Wharton’s copying of A.C. Benson’s poem “Self” into the pages of her Commonplace
Book). The exact nature of Norton’s relationship with E.F. Benson is not essential to this
study, though I find this placement of the watercolorist in James’ former home, with the
Bensons, intriguing. During that 1929 visit to Lamb House, Wharton received the news
that her friend, Geoffrey Scott, had died unexpectedly.

At the party held at Stanway, Wharton introduced Robert Norton to a young man
she had met a few weeks earlier, through Percy Lubbock, at Howard Sturgis’ home in
Windsor—John Hugh Smith. Like so many of the men Wharton knew, Hugh Smith had
received an education at Cambridge. He and Percy Lubbock, in fact, had been classmates
there. Wharton and Hugh saw each other again at Cliveden—the “three-hundred-acre Thames Valley estate of William Waldorf Astor and his wife Nancy Langhome”—in late November, at a time when John Hugh Smith had become smitten with Wharton. Smith had a talent for conversation that appealed to Wharton and she soon took him under her wing. In Benstock’s account, Smith’s not-so-well-hidden crush on the more senior Wharton was flattering, but also embarrassing and she avoided traveling alone with him in her motor-car. Percy Lubbock, with a tinge of envy, remembers:

John, much readier and brave, had established his place with her one evening, when he joined, and so luminously and substantially enriched, the talk at Qu’acre. That was the sort of young Englishman she needed, a most unusual sort; for the ideas that thronged in his brain weren’t imprisoned there, they streamed out in lively order; and he knew so many books, and so much life as well, that in a very short time they were talking at each other as though they couldn’t stop. (68-9)

The intellectual companionship Wharton sought, as Lubbock describes, came from an “unusual sort” of young Englishman, whose conversation flowed from his mind and soon met with a sympathetic partner in Wharton. The more painfully shy Lubbock inadvertently betrays his envy in his description of Wharton and Smith, since Smith had been able to win Wharton over immediately, while Lubbock went without notice in the corner of the room. Lubbock’s use of the words “readier” and “brave” to describe Smith partially explain why Smith was successful where Lubbock was not. Even James offered Smith congratulations, but commented, “You may find her difficult, but you will never find her stupid, and you will never find her mean, which Benstock points out is “an evaluation composed entirely of negative terms” (196). Smith considered Wharton an excellent partner for conversation, but he also had a more intimate connection in mind, according to both Lewis and Benstock—who contend that Smith had fallen in love with.
Wharton. Turning to a letter from Smith, both Lewis and Benstock feel that his attentions were leading toward the romantic:

And now I want to say something that I find rather difficult to express. When I see you again our friendship will have one quality which has not been altogether present here in London. The fact of such an obviously brilliant person such as you being so exceptionally kind to me has at times made me a little self-conscious—even when I was alone with you. And the simplicity I sought was not helped by Howard Sturgis’s and Mr. James’s amused though perfectly kind remarks . . . In Paris we shall be able to go ahead and eliminate this Jacobean element in our relation. (Lewis 246)

Smith refers to the “Jacobean element” in their relationship—the presence of Henry James—preventing the deepening of their relationship, platonic or otherwise. Smith also alludes to the verbal ribbing that Sturgis and James provided with their knowing smiles and curious surveillance of his and Wharton’s conversations. Hoping that their friendship would include “one quality which has not been altogether present” in a London setting, Smith speculated that perhaps moving their relationship to Paris (a place often linked to freedom in terms of sexuality and gender) would allow for the candor that had long been prevented by prying eyes. Interestingly, Smith did not know that Wharton’s affections were invested elsewhere, nor was he aware that the very “Jacobean element” he felt inhibited any chance of a sexual connection, in actuality was the very stimulus for Wharton’s earlier plunge, in a liaison with Morton Fullerton.

Wharton’s new friendships and dizzying social whirl in England, during the fall of 1908, distracted her from the painful silence of her lover. Understandably, her spirits were still low and the men who met at Qu’acre tried to buoy up her disposition and show her that life could still be bearable, even if a certain journalist did not write. Miranda Seymour shows how Howard Sturgis and his partner, William Haynes-Smith, valiantly
accompanied Wharton to Paris, that December, to celebrate Christmas with her, during a period Wharton affectionately termed an “elopement”:

Howard rose to the occasion splendidly. He and the Qu’Acre circle gathered around to comfort their desolate Firebird and when she set off for France in December, Howard laid down his rugs and embroidery and, accompanied by the Babe, went with her, to find that, after all the storm was only of teacup proportions. The threatened move from Paris had not taken place and Fullerton was ready to resume the affair. Edith glowed, and the Babe was an unqualified success—‘ce charmant Enès-Smith’—and Howard was permitted, most thankfully to retire to report the good news. ‘Fly your flight—live your romance—drain the cup of pleasure to the dregs,’ he urged her. (247)

During this period, Howard Sturgis’ friendship moved to the foreground in Wharton’s life. After spending six weeks in England, Wharton had strengthened her relationship with Sturgis, inviting both Sturgis and his companion to stay with her at the Rue de Varenne for the holiday, according to Lewis. In Benstock’s account, on December 19th, Wharton picked up Sturgis and Haynes-Smith in her motor-car and then proceeded toward Rye, to visit James at Lamb House for two days. James, terribly diverted by Hugh Smith’s infatuation with his dear Firebird, arranged for a “motor run” without the presence of his nephew Aleck so that he could hear all of the amusing details of their friend’s conduct from Wharton. When Wharton and her entourage took the ferry from Folkestone to Boulogne, on the 21st, a grateful and relieved James appreciated the reprieve and “collapsed, so he said, in an exhausted heap” (Benstock 196). As Seymour asserts, Wharton did not have to wait long until her lover was ready to resume their affair. Many sources of pressure had kept him occupied all summer, but those troubles had receded and he was once again himself. A grateful Sturgis encouraged Wharton’s romantic development, proffering the rather surprising advice, “Fly your flight—live your romance—drain the cup of pleasure to the dregs—but when exhaustion sets in, think
of your affectionate friend" (qtd in Goodman 23). Sturgis sought to rally his dear Firebird’s spirits, hence the bird imagery\(^2\) with “Fly your flight,” and his rather candid mandate, “live your romance,” betrays his intimate knowledge of Wharton’s liaison with Morton Fullerton. When Sturgis writes, “Drain the cup of pleasure to the dregs,” one is reminded of James’ image of the cupbearer in Roderick Hudson\(^3\). Sturgis, understanding the role that Fullerton fulfilled in the triangulated affair between Wharton, Fullerton and James, knowingly employs an image he knew Wharton often used—that of the vessel, or wine cup—to call upon the mythological Ganymede, the boy-lover of Zeus. In a sense, when Wharton would drink “to the dregs” from the “cup of pleasure” Fullerton offered, she sought to slake the same desire that Rowland Mallet experienced for Roderick Hudson, or which James felt for Fullerton. By taking hold of the symbolic cup, Wharton

\(^2\) Sturgis used bird imagery in his humorous piece, “Studies in Birdlife,” written during the following June, 1909, which portrayed the members of the Qu’acre circle as different species of birds who collected themselves at his home. The work was “full of the kind of cross-references (and nonsense) to which Wharton alludes” (Goodman 33). Goodman continues: “In it, [Sturgis] refers to James, John Hugh Smith, and himself, characterizing Wharton as ‘L’oiseau de feu,’ who ‘can carry off in its talons a ‘fat hen,’ or lamb from the lambhouse or even a small (H)ewe & has been known to drag a heavy old goose of the Quacker species half over England, though these tough birds are notoriously hard to move” (33). Sturgis’ reference to Wharton as the “Firebird,” an allusion to Stravinsky’s ballet—interestingly, Wharton attended the famous production of L’Oiseau de feu, performed by the Ballet Russe, under the direction of Diaghilev, starring Nijinska, with costumes by Leon Bakst, on July 3rd, 1910—which would become a recurring motif for Wharton. Referring to himself as a “heavy old goose of the Quacker species,” Sturgis demonstrated his fine sense of humor, as he did not spare even himself in his ornithological text.

\(^3\) This reference carries added significance when one looks to the A.C. Benson’s diaries and finds the passage from November 8th, 1911, in which Benson records James’ own admission of the image as signifying same-sex male desire. Benson and James had been discussing the latter’s attachment to Hugh Walpole, when the latter revealed very candidly his regrets about not having acted upon his desire before with men:

> Then he spoke of Hugh Walpole—he said he was charming in his zest for experience + his love of intimacies—’I often think’ he went on ‘if I look back on my own starved past, that I wish I had done more, reached out further, claimed more—+ I should be the last to block the way. The only thing is to be there, to wait to sympathise, to help if necessary.’ I reminded him of the statuette in Roderick Hudson. ‘Poor fellow, he is thirsty’—he patted my arm. (Benson 3-4)

Thus, the image of the cup-bearer in James’ novel, here, represented non-satiated same-sex male desire, which becomes evident through Benson’s reference and James’ response. Certainly, Sturgis and Wharton must have been very aware of this image as well—remember Wharton’s famous “I have drunk of the wine of life at last” after she and Fullerton had first consummated their passion. Thirst, vessels and consumption become key images for queer desire here.
could participate in a male tradition that dated back to ancient Greece—hence the allusion to the mythological figure Ganymede—and Sturgis understood fully that which Wharton meant to accomplish in her affair with the bisexual Fullerton.

In that December of 1908, Wharton turned to a key text in the homosexual male literary tradition that Sturgis must have recommended—William Johnson Cory’s *Ionica*. From Wharton’s own admission, we know that Howard Sturgis gave her a very valuable and extremely rare copy of the book of verse, as she later wrote in *A Backward Glance*, “It is to Howard that I owe my precious first edition of *Ionica*”—one of only five hundred privately printed copies, produced in 1858. Clearly, Wharton appreciated her gift, which was perhaps a Christmas gift from Sturgis, for she wrote from Avignon, the day after the holiday, December 26th, to John Hugh Smith, claiming in her postscript, “*Ionica* has become *livre de chevet*” (171). Lewis notes that the French phrase “*livre de chevet*” meant “a book kept by the bedside”—a very telling piece of information. Wharton’s acknowledgement that this book had earned a spot beside her bed revealed a great deal about the way in which she regarded Cory’s writing, especially considering the sort of intimacy associated with one’s bedchamber. Sturgis, by giving Wharton this gift of Cory’s *Ionica*, was admitting Wharton, symbolically, into what she would term the “secret brotherhood”—a fraternity of literary men who upheld the tradition of the ancient Greeks through their appreciation of, and even participation in, the practice of pederasty. Since *Ionica* itself was a recognized text with a specific homosexual male literary tradition, the trope of passing along this symbolic book, from an older man to a younger one, perpetuated a tradition that remained hidden and protected from the eyes of heteronormative society. Sturgis, who had been educated at both Eton and Cambridge,
and who knew A.C. Benson very well, certainly knew what Cory's *Ionica* signified; thus, when he passed the book to Wharton, such an act became symbolic of acceptance, admittance and a tacit acknowledgement of likeness. Sturgis strengthened this connection, when, in 1909, he presented Wharton with an inscribed second volume of Cory's verse, *Ionica II*. Since Smith had been a classmate of Percy Lubbock during their time at Cambridge, it is certainly possible that Wharton suspected that he would have an understanding of what a gift like that meant and would be able to see its significance within the proper contexts.

The New Year brought new hope, as far as Wharton's affair with Fullerton. Due to inclement weather, Wharton had to leave Avignon and abandon the planned trip that she, Sturgis and Haynes-Smith, had embarked on, when they had set forth from Dijon on the 23rd, since a “fierce blizzard” had prevented their progress. Instead, they were able to spend a jovial New Year's Eve at the Café de Paris, after settling things at her residence at 58 Rue de Varenne—in the “Vanderbilt apartment” (Lewis 250). The mirth she had experienced with Sturgis and Haynes-Smith soon found a new source, when her contact with Fullerton resumed, in early January 1909. Shari Benstock explains what occurred:

Sometime in the first week of January 1909, Edith and Fullerton spoke privately of his “hell of a summer.” Finding a moment for such a conversation must have been difficult, as she was busy escorting Howard and the “Babe” to the theater and entertaining them at teas. The story came to her piecemeal over several months, and one must consult Henry James's letters to her and her notes and *petits bleus* to Fullerton to glean the general outline of the narrative: a Parisian named Mme Mirecourt had in her possession some old and compromising letters of Fullerton's; during summer 1908, she had again threatened to make them public (perhaps by sending them to his superior at the *Times*) if he did not pay her money that she claimed he owed her. This was a severely truncated version of the story he had told James in November 1907. (197)
The general understanding among Wharton’s principal biographers is that, even when Fullerton disclosed something of his troubled past to Wharton, she remained ignorant of his same-sex affairs. The “severely truncated version of the story he had told James” apparently omitted details relating to Lord Ronald Gower. Benstock contends that Fullerton “probably revealed no more than absolutely necessary to explain his long silence during the summer” (198) and suggests that James “would have hardly thought that Fullerton would make a clean breast of his past—the homosexual affairs with Lord Ronald Gower and Percy Anderson, the disastrous affair with Margaret Brooke” (197-8).

Lewis appears to have agreed that Wharton had been told only selective information by Fullerton and that she had not received as forthcoming an account of his affairs as he had proffered James. Goodman prefers not to delve so deeply into the question of how much Wharton knew exactly, opting rather to focus on how Wharton and James were drawn together by Fullerton’s need for them both, in this time of crisis. Given Wharton’s perception of there having been some sort of mystery clouding Fullerton’s past—as demonstrated in her letter to Sally Norton, shortly after she first met the attractive journalist—it is difficult to believe that she would have simply accepted as few details as possible about the blackmail and that she would have failed to pick up on the cultural cues that potentially signaled Fullerton’s queerness, within their community (which included James, Blanche, etc.). The traditional portrait of Wharton as Fullerton’s lover has been that she remained extremely ignorant in the affairs of the heart and that she was reluctant to delve further into the mystery. Wharton scholars might be troubled by evidence that conclusively proves that Wharton fully understood Fullerton’s bisexuality and continued to have a sexual relationship with him, knowing that he had engaged in
sexual relations with men like Gower or Anderson. If anything, Wharton was apparently in part drawn to Fullerton by his bisexuality. His romantic entanglements with other men made him all the more sexually exciting, given the taboo of his past. Wharton’s study of Greek pederasty, her love of Whitman and his concept of “comradeship,” and her initiation into a circle of queer men—remember that she had just spent Christmas with Sturgis and his life partner—prepared her for Fullerton’s admission of his queer sexuality. If Fullerton was able to confess his entire situation to James, over a year earlier, it is difficult to believe that he could not share the truth with Wharton, whom he understood to be accepting of same-sex male desire, and knew was great friends with James.

On January 11th, 1909, James wrote to Wharton about the “hell of a summer” their mutually beloved Fullerton had withstood, in the face of blackmail, at the hands of a horrid woman with whom he regretfully continued to consort. James’ letter exposes a particular intimacy that had sprung up between both him and Wharton, now that they shared Fullerton’s confidence and painful secret:

Of course I hadn’t expected you would now tell me anything beyond your simple allusion to Morton’s hell of a summer; & my question for myself has only been as to what may have been going on since I knew everything up to last May or June—but have practically not heard from him since then—any more than you had, for the greater part; & I most intensely wish he could make it possible to get over to me here for three days during these next weeks. The thought of the tune to which he must want a holiday is heart-breaking to me—& a poor enough snippet of one would that be; but it would be something, & I am presently writing to him in that sense, & on, I fear, the bare chance. (106)

In his letter to Wharton, James reveals an “intense wish” that Fullerton would spend three days with him “during these next weeks” and confesses that he had known “everything up to last May or June,” but then claims that, like Wharton, he had not heard much worth
mentioning from Fullerton, over the summer. Intrigued by Fullerton’s having turned to Wharton for help, James loses no time in using their new shared knowledge to seek further intimate details about the elusive Morton from Wharton. After complaining that Fullerton really should spend a holiday with him, James seems to hint to Wharton that she might take up his cause and convince Fullerton to pay him a visit in Rye. His dramatic “the tune to which he must want a holiday is heart-breaking to me,” followed by the “a poor snippet of one would that be,” combined with “but it would be something,” all builds toward James’ admission, “I am presently writing to him in that sense, & on, I fear, the bare chance” (106). Taken together, these phrases carefully dance around James’ still fervent wish for Fullerton’s company. Claiming he only has Fullerton’s best wishes in mind, James is able to disguise, or at least attempt to disguise, his desire for Fullerton as simple concern for his health. Then, James changes his tone and addresses Wharton from a place of intimacy, complete understanding: “Glad as I am that we ‘care’ for him, you & I; for verily I think I do as much as you, & that you do as much as I. We can help him—we even can’t not. And it will immensely pay” (106). James reminds Wharton that she is not alone in her love for Fullerton, when he asserts, “we ‘care’ for him, you & I; for verily I think I do as much as you, & that you do as much as I.” This is a powerful statement, on the part of James, who usually concealed his feelings and desire behind a veil of euphemism and metaphor. His use of punctuation to separate the word “care” from the other words in this passage demonstrates that he did not mean its most casual usage, but that they both in fact “cared” for Fullerton as more than a friend. James, by calling upon this emotional trump card, urges Wharton, “We can help—we even can’t not,” emphasizing the necessity of their assistance in this financial matter and
how Fullerton depended upon it. In helping Fullerton, both James and Wharton could help each other preserve an object of desire from plummeting socially to a place that would forbid their interest. By disentangling Fullerton from the talons of Mme Mirecourt, James and Wharton could support each other’s part in their triangulated affair. Though Wharton heartily agreed with James’ sentiment, her troubles with her mentally ill husband would take priority and Fullerton receded to the background, again, until Teddy left for America in mid-April.

By the second week of May, 1909, James wrote to Wharton and, as usual, asked after Fullerton with flirtatiousness that their deeper association now allowed. From Lamb House, he playfully related to Wharton:

I wrote a few days ago to Morton & shall very soon be writing him again—will you kindly mention to him on the first occasion, with my love? En voilà un [Now there’s one] a little of whose—real & intimate—I should also like! But the things, the things, the things—i.e. the details—I yearn for—! Never mind; I believe I shall see you a bit effectively. (113)

In this missive, James reveals to Wharton once again that Fullerton has been on his mind, that he not only sent “his love,” but that he “yearned” for “the things, the things, the things—i.e. the details” that Wharton only knew. He ached to know the “real & intimate” things that none but a lover could know and he was well-aware that Wharton now had that knowledge. James throws in a tantalizing, “Never mind; I believe I shall see you a bit effectively”—he believed that when they finally did meet up, they could discuss juicy tidbits of Fullerton’s private life together. Certainly, James was not discouraging Wharton’s affair with Fullerton, as one might expect if they both were truly in love with the same man. James, in fact, knew he could only benefit from Wharton’s relationship with Fullerton, given his own physical inability to “cross the Rubicon” and

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engage in sexual acts with the men he so desired. At least through Wharton, James could share her sexual experience with Fullerton as the facilitator-voyeur. He presided, arranged, encouraged, reassured, advised and comforted Wharton through every stage of her affair. James was, in fact, as important to Wharton’s sexual awakening as Fullerton. Fullerton may have been the man to “do the job,” but James provided the seduction and prepared Wharton for her lover. He convinced her to carry on even when she had given up and helped her to ignore some of the problematic issues Fullerton presented. As a result, Wharton’s affair with Fullerton had as much to do with James as it did Fullerton, which is why Wharton admitted James into the intimacy of her relationship with Fullerton and humored James with information long after their sexual relationship had ended. Prodded by James, Wharton plunged again into her relationship with Fullerton with a renewed enthusiasm and understanding, which echoed that of men writing to men in a homosexual male literary tradition.

During that same month of May, 1909, Wharton wrote to Fullerton, expressing a wish to recapture what they had once been—“comrades” who understood each other’s quirks and eccentricities—to renew their intimate connection. She, perhaps nostalgic from the time of year—which reminded her of when they first became lovers—and perhaps motivated by James’ urging, assumed a plaintive and wishful tone, when she wrote that she would like to reestablish the relationship:

Since things are as they are now, I look on you as free to carry your soucis cardiaques [concerns of the heart] where you please; but on condition that you & I become again, in our talk & our gestes, the good comrades we were two years ago. If I thought that you could continue to talk to me & to be with me as you were this afternoon, while you had, at the same time, even transiently, even à fleur d’épiderme [heart throb], the same attitude to
any one else, I should think you had failed in loyalty due to a love like mine, as freely & unconditionally given as mine has been. (180)\textsuperscript{74}

Benstock claims that Wharton started to brace herself for the possibility that Fullerton’s connection to Mme Mirecourt was not severed and, during their few meetings during the spring, she often felt “stupid, disappointing, altogether impossible,” and “inarticulate,” and her frustration led to the simple solution of retreating into platonic friendship. Curiously, whenever Benstock encounters the term “comrade” in Wharton’s letters to Fullerton, she seems to read this term as devoid of any sexual component. True, the words “comrade” and “camaraderie,” in their modern usages can mean uncomplicated friendship, but given the historical context of “comradeship,” as it related to pederasty and Walt Whitman, Wharton chose this particularly charged word in her letter for a reason. Wharton wanted Fullerton to understand that, for her, their mental connection was superior to their sexual relationship, though such an intellectual kinship included a sexual charge. In her Love Diary, as we have seen, Wharton asserted that there existed “thoughts that were closer than a kiss,” expressing her belief that an intellectual union between two equals was more intimate than intercourse. Wharton may have been playing to her own strengths with Fullerton: she could compete with other women who only catered to his physical needs and knew that she outmatched competitors like Katherine Fullerton and Mme Mirecourt when she appealed to Fullerton’s need for intellectual stimulation. At the very least, she had met Katherine Fullerton and knew her competition on that count\textsuperscript{75}. None of those other women read and understood Whitman

\textsuperscript{74} This passage was reprinted in Benstock’s biography and her translations are used in the bracketed text, see page 210.

\textsuperscript{75} Though Benstock asserts that Wharton had no knowledge of Fullerton’s romantic involvement with his sister, it is my belief that the fiction Wharton wrote, such as The Reef, explores specific treatments of quasi-incestuous desire that were connected to Fullerton. If we are to read the novel as a cathartic piece that
the way she did. Who else had read the Greeks and Weininger, or understood the pederastic paradigm? Did these other women have his full confidence and did they accept his bisexuality? If Fullerton recognized the superiority of Wharton’s mind—not an ordinary woman’s mind, mind you, but a masculine mind on a par with the men with whom she associated—then they could transcend the limitations of the body and reach the Platonic ideal.

Wharton understood that Fullerton would always have certain needs she would never satisfy and she accepted this knowledge. She simply wrote to him that he could look “where you please” in “concerns of the heart,” giving him carte blanche to have what sexual dalliances he might, so long as she did not have to see or hear about them. Warning Fullerton, though, that should he continue to make advances toward her or mislead her while he engaged with another lover, then she would consider such behavior a betrayal of the trust they had established, a violation of their comradeship. Wharton also began to write poetry that expressed the complex feelings she was experiencing. While caring for her invalid husband, she was harboring a love for an enigmatic, even dangerous (in terms of possible scandal), sexual partner. Her reading of Nietzsche laid the groundwork for her cognizant challenging of social convention and mores, groundwork that prepared her for the intensely sexual night she would spend with Fullerton at the Charing Cross Hotel, only a month after her revealing letter to her lover.

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allowed Wharton to work through some of her most complex emotions that sprang from her affair with Fullerton, then the sexual connotations of incest must carry some weight when assessing whether or not Wharton actually “knew” about Katherine Fullerton.

Clearly, Camille Chabbert knew of her husband’s sexual past with men, but her acceptance of his past same-sex desire is doubtful, given some of the accounts Mainwaring provides of their relationship. Similarly, if Mme Mirecourt was indeed blackmailing Fullerton with letters that proved that he had affairs with men, then such an act was not one of support or tolerance. Katherine Fullerton’s rather sheltered existence suggests that she would have had little exposure to a male homosexual literary tradition, that she most likely did not possess Wharton’s worldliness (a cosmopolitan upbringing), artistic connections, or have an initiation into Fullerton’s queer male subculture (which included Wilde and Verlaine).
The passionate night they spent in the “grimy railroad hotel” (Benstock 212) inspired Wharton’s most Whitmanesque piece of writing that she would produce—a memorable poem aptly named “Terminus.”

Terminus

Walt Whitman provides the key to understanding Wharton’s sexual awakening and initiation into queer male culture—particularly through her relationship with numerous queer men who read and admired the American poet. In her own words, Wharton connects her shared appreciation of Whitman with James as the climactic draw between the two friends. When they learned of each other’s passionate enthusiasm for Whitman, their friendship became intensely intimate. We also know that Wharton later imagined Whitman in one of her novellas of Old New York, The Spark, which presented a portrait of the poet curiously and directly linked to same-sex male sexuality. Like a recurring motif, Whitman crops up, again and again, in Wharton’s personal writings, her published works and even in her complex understanding of her own sexuality. When Wharton modeled her sexually frank poetic work “Terminus” after the Whitman’s own verse, the reason for such imitation becomes immediately clear.

Benstock points out that when James arrived in London to meet Wharton and Fullerton, the three had not been together since their stay in France, which concluded in May 1908. Was it coincidence or fate that reunited the three in London, on June 4th, 1909, or did their meeting carry some greater significance? As we have seen from James’ letter to Wharton, from that previous January, both James and Wharton possessed a deep-rooted passion for Fullerton that bound the friends together. They both desired the younger man. Yet, why, of all days that they could have possibly met for a visit,
would Wharton arrange to meet with James for a dinner with Fullerton there, knowing that she would sleep with Fullerton later that night? Of course, we know that Wharton confided in James about her affair with Fullerton, but to be able to confidently dine with both her lover (Fullerton) and her close friend who desired her lover (James), Wharton was proving very bold in her personal affairs. Or did James’ presence enable her to shed the shyness that became such a stumbling block in her relationship with Fullerton, as he had before? In 1908, in France, she had been clinging to sexual frigidity when it came to her affair, but, when James entered the picture as the facilitator-voyeur, he provided Wharton with the confidence to move forward in the relationship, for many reasons. Now, once again, Wharton looked to James for that support and direction, as they met in London.

When Wharton arrived in London from Paris, Fullerton had already arranged for their lodging that night at the Charing Cross Hotel, in Apartment 92—a room that suited his budget and would provide a more than convenient location, as he needed to leave for Southampton by train, the following morning. Benstock and Lewis give slightly different interpretations of the visit that ensued between the three. The former writes:

Henry James roused himself from his own troubles to some to town, and he dined with Edith and Morton. Where they dined and what they discussed are lost to history, as are James’s conclusions (if any) about his friend’s relationship. He had not seen Fullerton since they parted in Paris in May 1908 and had heard virtually nothing from him in the intervening year. He knew only by hints and rumors of Edith’s present domestic problems. (213)

Benstock remains cryptic about how much James knew about Wharton’s affair with Fullerton, suggesting that he did not divine much about their relationship and could only speculate based on “hints and rumors.” This seems a strange account for such an
exceedingly insightful observer of human behavior as James—a writer whose characters spend many a novel watching and deciphering interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, why would James have to rely on "hints and rumors" when he had been the one to advise Wharton, rather famously, "Do not conclude," and had built up her confidence when she was wallowing in despair over Fullerton's neglect. James had been there in France at the very turning point, when Wharton and Fullerton first became lovers. Would he now simply forget about what he had seen? Could such an incredibly perceptive writer have been so utterly obtuse in real life? Most historians and critical writers want to avoid the pitfall of assuming too much, but there is plenty of evidence to show that James was not naïve, that he was not under any illusion when it came to Wharton's relationship with Fullerton. If anything, he was the Master, the facilitator-voyeur who participated in and enjoyed, almost parasitically, the sexual liaison that ensued.

In contrast to Benstock's account, R.W.B. Lewis suggests that James indeed did share an intimate knowledge of what happened at the Charing Cross Hotel, since he had dined with the couple there the night of their tryst. Within his discussion of Wharton and Fullerton, Lewis contends, "The following day they [Wharton and Fullerton] went up to London and took Suite 92 at the Charing Cross Hotel—two bedrooms and a sitting room. James joined them there for dinner" (258). Lewis then elaborates by setting the convivial scene vividly: "It was a vivacious evening with a certain fin de siècle atmosphere: champagne, dim red lamps, laughter and lively talk, and in the late hours after James had

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77 As mentioned earlier, in a private letter written on October 13th, 1908, James wrote this command to Wharton, when she considered giving up on Fullerton. When the Fullerton's interest in Wharton started to flag and Wharton began to despair, James wrote: "I am deeply distressed at the situation you describe & as to which my power to suggest or enlighten now quite miserably fails me. I move in darkness; I rack my brain; I gnash my teeth; I don't pretend to understand or to imagine. And yet incredibly to you doubtless—I am still moved to say 'Don't conclude!' Some light will still absolutely come to you—I believe—though I can't pretend to say what it conceivably may be" (Bell 101).
gone back to his club, very considerable passion” (258). Here, we have a very different take on the same story. While Benstock remains vague about James’ role in Wharton’s affair with Fullerton, Lewis, in contrast, gives a specific account. He asserts that James “joined them there,” at the hotel suite that Wharton and Fullerton planned to share and left them that night only after sharing a rather hedonistic evening of pleasure—of “champagne, dim red lamps,” and “laughter and lively talk.” We also know, from Lewis’ version, that James reappeared in the morning to accompany Fullerton to Waterloo Station, for the boat train to Southampton. “As he was leaving the suite,” Lewis claims, “Fullerton looked back to see Edith, propped up in bed with a writing board across her knees, scribbling the first words of a poem” (259). On the morning after Wharton’s passionate night with Fullerton, James escorted the energized journalist to the train station, during the very time when Wharton sat in bed, working on her most Whitmanesque example of verse. From such a framing of events, how could we possibly believe that James failed to notice the spring in Fullerton’s step that morning, or the obvious absence of Wharton, who remained within their suite? Remember, James was a man who clearly loved a ribald joke and often employed double entendres of a sexual nature in his private correspondence with close friends.

In his biography of James, Fred Kaplan supports the view that James understood what was going on between Wharton and Fullerton and that he sought a kind of vicarious experience through his coaching of Wharton in the affair. According to his account, James participated in their liaison, to the extent that he could, meaning that James remained a voyeur watching the flirtation ensue and imagining that it was he in Fullerton’s arms, with Wharton as a surrogate:
At Charing Cross Hotel, where they had taken a suite, James joined them for a long dinner of flowing champagne and exuberant conversation. The three of them dined, so to speak, in the anteroom of the lover’s passion. Late in the evening, soon after James said good-night, Wharton and Fullerton went upstairs to their suite to spend a passionate night together. As James left, he knew that he had come as close as he ever would to holding Fullerton in his arms. (513)

Kaplan’s view of events creates a sense of poignancy, a sad resignation, on the part of James, concerning his feelings for Fullerton. In Kaplan’s overview of that night, James does not remain ignorant of the palpable sexual chemistry that brewed in the room in which the trio decadently dined and drank champagne. Rather, the Master is all too aware, painfully so, with a knowledge that Wharton was about to experience sexual pleasure with Fullerton that he could only imagine. Perhaps the “real & intimate details” he often sought from Wharton about Fullerton involved personal and private information of their affair, of his passion as a lover.

Wharton’s poem “Terminus” provides a penetrating view into her relationship with Fullerton, and, of course, it was no matter of chance that she chose to model the poem on works she had read by Whitman. Kenneth M. Price explains, “The opening line of ‘Terminus’ sets the mood of a work Whitmanesque in form and texture: ‘Wonderful was the long secret night you gave me, my Lover’” (40). In her piece, Wharton relishes the shabby appearance of the hotel’s furnishings—the “faint red lamp,” the “dull impersonal furniture,” “the low wide bed, as rutted and worn as a high road” with “soot-sodden chintz”—which made the room itself seem “passive and featureless,” except for the sexual ardor within its walls. Reminiscent of Whitman’s “Once I Pass’d Through a Populous City,” from his collection Leaves of Grass, Wharton’s own verse draws upon a similar image: an urban place remembered only for the passion expressed there.
Whitman writes: “Once I pass’d through a populous city, imprinting my brain, for future use, with its shows, architecture, customs and traditions / Yet, now, of all that city, I remember only a woman I casually met there, who detain’d me for love of me.” He continues: “Day by day and night by night we were together,—All else has long been forgotten by me; / I remember, I say, only that woman who passionately clung to me.” In a strikingly similar vein, Wharton composed lines that focus on a passion that lovers enjoy in an old, worn bed, which has been used by a faceless many for the same purpose. The bed carries particular import, considering that Wharton’s first major publication focused on interior design. By drawing the reader’s eye to the “old, worn bed” as the focal point for the room, Wharton uses a powerful image to symbolize a communal sexual experience. The raw aspect of sexual passion Wharton experienced during her night with Fullerton is conveyed through the use of two powerful symbols within her work: the bed and the train. Wharton writes:

> The bed with its soot-sodden chintz, the grime of its brasses,  
> That has born the weight of fagged bodies, dust-stained, averted in sleep,  
> The hurried, the restless, the aimless—perchance it has also thrilled  
> With the pressure of bodies ecstatic, bodies like ours,  
> Seeking each other’s souls in the depths of unfathomed caresses,  
> And through the long windings of passion emerging again to the stars . . .

Wharton relishes the worn shabbiness of the room and its furniture, which connects her and her lover to the countless number of people who have previously slept there. The forbidden aspect of sexuality becomes more poignant in the foreign element of the working class, represented by dirt, grime, filth and the unclean. By emphasizing the “soot-sodden chintz”—with chintz traditionally being thought a shoddy, second-rate fabric—the “grime” that besmirches the “brasses” of the bed, which held imagined “dust-
stained" bodies, Wharton reveals how she longed to connect to the more uninhibited classes of Whitman’s sexuality, those who “cruised” the cities for chance encounters with nameless lovers. Also, from Wharton’s body of work, one knows that she paid great attention to selecting the pieces and fabrics that appeared in her writing, so, when she purposely details the besmirched interior space of the hotel room, she roots sexuality in the earthiness of sweat and dirt. When she refers to the “bodies ecstatic,” she knowingly draws upon Whitman’s famous title “I Sing the Body Electric,” from *Leaves of Grass*, in an attempt to connect with other people, whose “bodies like ours” search “each other’s souls in the depths of unfathomed caresses.” By imaging herself as one of many individuals who had engaged in sexual activity in that hotel bed, Wharton exposes a sort of openness to her own sexuality—which stemmed from her reading of Whitman. The influence of Whitman’s connection to nature and to the working class, as best demonstrated by the image of the author in the frontispiece to his volume of poetry—unshaven, with open shirt and worn hat—certainly affected Wharton’s description of the décor within Suite 92 of the Charing Cross Hotel. Interestingly, the image of the working class within an urban setting takes on characteristics typically associated with a romantic treatment of the natural environment, as a place where one can transcend one’s own experience in order to connect with something greater than oneself.

As Gregory Woods contends, in *A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition*, the city became as important to Whitman and his “dream of democratic comradeship” as “his fantasies about the open prairie, or the Rocky Mountains, or the Great Lakes,” in terms of a sexual space. In his discussion of Whitman’s depiction of the urban landscape,
Woods turns to “Once I Pass’d though a Populous City,” revealing that the poem had been written originally with a male subject in mind. Woods writes:

Like other writers of the same period, Whitman makes some effort to demonstrate that the urban industrial revolution cannot obliterate the virility of the pioneering spirit. Much depends on his portrayals of urban manhood. The city has to be as amenable a location, when it comes to love, as the prairie or open road. The relation between the urban crowd and the pair of individuals is central to both versions of “Once I Pass’d through a Populous City,” the straight and the gay. This is the poem which commemorates Whitman’s 1848 trip to New Orleans, where he appears to have had a brief affair with, in the version most often published, “a woman who passionately clung to me,” or in the original version, another man. (156)

Though Wharton may not have known that Whitman had written his poem for a male lover, she draws upon his particular view of urban sexuality and his poetic style in order to acknowledge the sexual liberation that her night with Fullerton initiated. In her most sexually frank poetic work, Wharton chose to imitate Whitman, since she understood how idealized comradeship appealed to Fullerton and she wanted to be a participant within that male paradigm. From her representation of Whitman she would later create in *The Spark*, we know that she connected Whitman to same-sex male sexuality, specifically to the pederastic tradition, and from her letter to Fullerton, written on April 27th, 1911, she signaled her understanding of Whitman’s queer sexuality. She subtly hinted at this knowledge when she discussed a book Walter Berry had sent her—Bazalgette’s *Walt Whitman: l’homme et son oeuvre*, published in 1908. Calling the volume “incredibly well done,” Wharton revealed to Fullerton, “I am going to get his Life of Whitman at

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According to Byrne R. S. Fone, the original text of Whitman’s poem was not discovered until 1920, which would suggest that Wharton would not have known that Whitman’s original subject was a man, but it is interesting to think about the implications of the poem’s first composition and Wharton’s later imitation of it. Certainly, the concept of nameless strangers meeting for sexual encounters in the city existed and continues to exist as a popular trope within queer male literature and erotica. Bath houses, train stations, seedy alleys, particular pubs or clubs, cheap hotels, etc, within a homosexual male literary tradition take on a sense of celebratory commonness that exuberantly relishes passionate sexuality, rooted in Whitman’s conceptualization.
once, for a man who can so translate him is sure to have interesting things to say of him” (238). This phrase, “interesting things to say,” related to the homosexual male literary tradition that both she and Fullerton knew intimately, for only one who could “so translate” Whitman could possess the knowledge of the passion which inspired his poetry. Thus, I find it interesting that when Wharton decided to pen her lost revealing poem, about her night of passion with Fullerton, she chose to imitate the style and poetic content of Whitman’s work, a writer notoriously recognized in and of himself as a queer figure.

Keeping in mind that Graham Robb identifies Whitman himself as an important queer reference during the mid to late nineteenth century in both America and Great Britain, one must acknowledge Wharton’s use of Whitman and his treatment of sex in an urban setting as exposing her connection between her own sexual experience with that of a queer male subject position. “From the 1860s, in Britain and America, Walt Whitman was probably the commonest key to further intimacy, the ‘password primeval’ that could be ‘flashed out’ ‘to such as alone could understand,’” contends Robb. “Eventually, books on homosexual love—William Johnson’s versions of Greek and Latin in _Ionica_ (1858, Carpenter’s _Ioläus: An Anthology of Friendship_ (1902)—could be given as presents and tokens” (144). When Wharton exposes her own understanding of Whitman and what he represented, in her poem dedicated to Fullerton, she silently petitions her lover for the status of “comrade.” In a voice similar to the one that described the “life-long love of comrades” and the “inseparable cities with their arms about each other’s necks,” Wharton employs a Whitmanesque style, in “Terminus,” to show Fullerton how well she understood what that comradeship meant:
Yes, all this through the room, the passive and featureless room
Must have flowed with the rise and fall of the human unceasing current,
And lying there hushed in your arms, as the waves of rapture receded,
And far down the margin of being we heard the low beat of the soul,
I was glad as I thought of those others, the nameless the many,
Who perhaps thus had lain and loved for an hour on the brink of the world,
Secret and fast in the heart of the whirlwind of travel,
The shaking and shrieking of trains, the night-long shudder of traffic;
Thus, like us they have lain and felt, breast to breast in the dark,
The fiery rain of possession descend on their limbs while outside
The black rain of midnight pelted the roof of the station; (259)

Here, Wharton, like Whitman before her, reveals how the sexual act connects both her
and her lover to all those who have passed through the “populous city”—for the latter,
namely the cheap hotel that sat near Charing Cross Station, in London. In the afterglow
of copulation, while “the waves of rapture receded,” Wharton imagined “those others, the
nameless the many” who had shared the bed within which she and Fullerton fell asleep,
sated. She considered how those others might have “lain and loved for an hour,” amid
the noise and bustle, “the shaking and shrieking of trains”—again, an important image
used by Whitman to signify the transience of human existence and experience. The
“night-long shudder of traffic” refers to the orgasmic pleasure created in that bed, where
“those others” “have lain and felt, breast to breast in the dark,” the searing passion of
sexual desire. The title “Terminus,” along with the image of the trains, the station and
the traveler, in Wharton’s vision, directly connect to this conception of an expansionistic,
unified experience of human interconnectedness. What really makes her imagining of
these other people taboo is that she thinks of the sexual acts they performed in the same
dingy, stained bed. Yet, the site of the train station itself carries specific connotations
that Fullerton would have understood, given the notoriety of the Charing Cross section of
London, during that time period.
In his *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885-1914*, Matt Cook explains how train stations provided a space for queer men to “cruise” and find suitable partners for sexual activity. He refers to cases in particular, such as Charles Ashbee, “the architect and romantic socialist,” who met his lover at Charing Cross, or George Ives, “founder of the first support and pressure group for ‘homosexual’ men, who enjoyed a chance encounter with a nameless Frenchman in a boat train from the same station. Cook explains, “The stations and trains where these meetings and flirtations took place were relatively new spaces. The construction of the railways, chiefly in the years between 1837 and 1876, caused mass disruption in London and set in chain wide-ranging social and cultural change” (1). Such change resulted in new perceptions of these public spaces. “The various homoerotic possibilities associated with London’s stations and trains intersected with competing ideas about homosexuality,” Cook continues. For example, “Whitmanesque and romantic socialist notions of cross-class comradeship” shaped the way in which such meetings were imagined or received and, even more importantly, such public spaces, like the cheap hotel or train station, began to find association with queer sexuality. Cook asserts:

Stations, theatres, public toilets, particular streets and parks, restaurants, pubs and hotels, university settlements, sports clubs, swimming pools and even the British Museum were loaded with expectations and associations which intersected with the different ways of thinking about homosexual encounter. These places were each implicated in the social, sexual and political aspects of emerging homosexual identities. (3)

Apparently, not only Charing Cross Station, but the area of Charing Cross itself had been well-established within the knowing mind of the nineteenth century reader as a cruising ground for same-sex sexual activity. One particular text, *Yokel’s Preceptor, or More Sprees in London*, from 1855, which provided an overview or guide of London’s popular
places of ill repute, located Charing Cross specifically as an area famous for the
congregation of “Margeries” and “pooffs”—to such an extent that proprietors of nearby
pubs posted signs near their establishments which read “Beware of Sods” (13). Given the
association of queer sexuality with such urban locations, like particular train stations,
hotels, etc, then Whitman’s treatment of same-sex desire within the cityscape seems
understandable, as an important reflection of a historical contextual lens through which
queer sexuality had been imagined.

Michael Trask, in his study *Cruising Modernism*, contends that Whitman’s unique
representation of sexuality within the urban landscape affected many writers, particularly
those who subscribed to “leftist modernism.” In the imaginations of these writers,
Whitman became the “avatar of a primarily self-incorporating, autoerotic sexuality that
stakes its pleasure on the indissoluble ‘solidarity’ of masses conceived as one instinctual
body” (174). He specifically points to Whitman’s *Calamus* section, within *Leaves of
Grass*, as a powerful example where “Whitman consistently aligned his notion of omni-
sexual ‘adhesiveness’ to the rapid urbanization and industrialization of America,
developments which he considered instrumental in allowing individuals to come in
contact with one another” (174). Here, Trask links Whitman’s treatment of sexuality in
an urban setting to a sense of unified sexual experience, with sexual activity being the
means of establishing human interconnectedness, particularly when it involves sexuality
shared between two men. The “tracks of the railroads of the earth” that Whitman
describes, in a poem like “Salut Au Monde,” according to Trask, symbolize “the
technologies that serve transferential nodes of adhesiveness” (174)—“adhesiveness,” of
course, being Whitman’s term for same-sex male sexuality. Interestingly, in this
interpretation, Whitman’s depiction of “sex and the city” becomes inextricably bound up in notions of same-sex male desire, which spring from the setting where men could meet potential nameless lovers and sexually experiment for an hour or a night. Yet, Whitman’s vision of the sexual cityscape did not only apply to Manhattan—where, according to Graham Robb, the poet indulged in numerous dalliances with younger men—but to London as well, as one can see from Cook’s description of urban “hot spots” for cruising. As Fone points out, though, Whitman’s vision of same-sex desire within the city only re-presented a treatment of queer male sexuality—that of a utopia—which had long existed within a homosexual male literary tradition.

When Whitman fashions a “utopia” of male desire in the city, he, according to Fone, taps into a vein of writing that was long established in the homosexual male literary tradition, dating back to ancient Rome. The homoerotic utopia is a place where lovers can explore multiple means of pleasure without the fear of policing or surveillance. Fone explains: “Whitman created an original nineteenth-century site for a homoerotic utopia in his poems celebrating cities of lovers, though the tradition extends as far back as Virgil’s second Eclogue and enters English literature most obviously in Marlowe’s assertion that he will seek a protected place with his lover where they can ‘all the pleasures prove’” (106-7). By “celebrating cities of lovers” as a “homoerotic utopia,” Whitman locates the city itself as a “protected place” that allowed for the meeting of strangers, who became lovers, and Whitman believed that the ever-changing atmosphere of the urban landscape allowed for human connection in the way that Emerson imagined nature to be a space of spiritual connection. Robert K. Martin asserts:

For Emerson the eyeball was transparent, offering no physical barrier between the mind and pure idea; for Whitman the eyeball was restored to
its physical being, and made into an organ of desire. This scene of cruising clarifies the meaning of Whitman's city: It is the place of multiple sexual invitations. If the city offers a confirmation of the widespread nature of male desire, it still offers for Whitman no sense of identity. He proposes "adhesiveness," the unfashioned word, to fill that gap. (739)

In Martin's discussion, the "multiple sexual invitations" of the city led Whitman to the kind of transcendental experiences that Emerson described when he used the image of the all-seeing, transparent eyeball. Yet, instead of the eyeball, Whitman uses the phallus, the "organ of desire," to remove the barrier between "mind and pure idea," instead rooting spirituality in physical, sexual experience. Through such a reimagining of the city, Whitman transforms the urban site from a place of disconnection and anonymity to that of an imagined community of lovers, where one sexual experience becomes analogous to all sexual experience. Thus, when Wharton chooses to imitate Whitman's voice in her aptly-named "Terminus" and imagines the sexual act of intercourse performed in a worn hotel bed, as a means of human connection, she tries to appropriate for herself a queer sexual identity—"queer" here not only relates to same-sex male sexuality, but to non-normative sexualities, such as voyeurism and taboo sexual acts—defined by Whitman in his poetry. Certainly, after Wharton's affair with Fullerton, she started to tackle "taboo" forms of sexuality—read as queer—for the first time in her fiction and examined the subject for the rest of her writing career. The list of works which investigate queer sexuality in Wharton's writing, beginning in 1910: Pederastic desire in "The Eyes" (1910), a quasi-incestuous heterosexual affair in The Reef (1912), an incestuous heterosexual marriage in Summer (1917), same-sex male desire in The Age of Innocence (1920), incestuous same-sex male desire in A Son at the Front (1923), pederastic desire in The Spark (1924), incestuous same-sex female desire in The Mother's Recompense.
(1925), quasi-incestuous same-sex male desire in *Twilight Sleep* (1927), a taboo affair between an older man and a young girl—which may have inspired Nabokov’s *Lolita*—in *The Children* (1928), same-sex male desire in both *Hudson River Bracketed* (1929) and its sequel *The Gods Arrive* (1932), not to mention the blatantly incestuous sex scene in the much-debated pornographic fragment “Beatrice Palmato.” Clearly, Wharton’s affair with Fullerton unleashed a fascination with non-normative sexuality, and the echoing ripples of her experiences with him can still be observed in her works written after their sexual relationship ended.

**To the Dregs**

The morning after Wharton’s night of passion with Fullerton found all three—Wharton, Fullerton and James—going off in different directions, following separate itineraries. James returns from his night at his club to see Fullerton off at the Waterloo Station and then catch the boat train for Southampton. Leaving Wharton in bed, writing her poem in a presumed afterglow, Fullerton had enough time to send his lover a “bunch of roses”—a gesture to which Wharton responded with a “loving message” by telegram that evening. That afternoon, she and James motored down to Guildford, observing “a beautiful circuit to Windsor and Queen’s Acre” (Lewis 261). While James could only stay for the weekend, Wharton enjoyed a ten day stay at Sturgis’ more than accommodating home. Benstock, however, writes that Wharton’s trip out to Queen’s Acre with James was not as idyllic as Lewis would lead one to believe, calling their stay “a dark, wet, and cold weekend at Windsor with Howard Sturgis” (215). The next ten days of Wharton’s visit consisted of daily trips to London—much to the chagrin of Sturgis, who assumed these jaunts were precipitated by boredom with her host—to dine

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with friends for lunch and to play the part of the tourist, visiting spots of cultural interest.

During Wharton’s stay in Windsor, the Babe proved as annoying as ever, except to Sturgis, who tolerated the loud exuberance of his companion with a loving benevolence. Despite her wish to attend Cup Day at Ascot, Wharton declined an invitation from the Babe. Like A.C. Benson, Wharton may have found him a pitiable and annoying figure:

The Babe strikes me as a pathetic figure—secure as he is in the affection of so complex + brilliant a person as HOS he does not learn that he has to win the affection of others—he is abrupt, coarse in expression, insolent,— + yet he is an unselfish + duty loving fellow, I think—his isolation is melancholy—he seems to have no friends. (Benson 67)

Though the Babe peppered his language with colorful expletives and adopted a boisterous air around guests, even Benson, who was repulsed by any sign of vulgarity, had to acknowledge his better qualities, such as his selflessness and loyalty, when it came to Sturgis. As Benson observed on March 24th, 1904, “To my sorrow + rather to my shame I wished The Babe away—I say to my shame because he is genuinely fond of me + shows it; but he had the manners of the stock-exchange + the bar room—I don’t know that my manners or theory of life is better than his, but it is different.” 79 Whether or not boredom with her host or annoyance with his companion tired Wharton, she amused herself in London and in Windsor, while an important gathering occurred in Cambridge, one that involved their close friend, Henry James.

Between June 5th and 15th, Wharton continued her stay at Qu’acre, visiting with Howard and the Babe, while James found amusement in a trip to Cambridge, to pay a call to Lapsley and a key group of queer Cambridge figures. James wrote to Lapsley, “I literally go to Cambridge to stay for forty-eight hours, at 8 Trumpington Street with my

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79 See A.C. Benson’s personal letters, Volume 49 (21 March-5 April, 1904), at the archive at the Pepys Library, Magdalene College, University of Cambridge.
bevy of ‘admirers’—Charles Sayle, Geoffrey Keynes and the elusive Bartholomew (none I have ever seen. I feel like an unnatural Pasha visiting his Circassian Hareem!’ (Edel 395) Citing the sexually-charged image of a “Pasha visiting his Circassian Hareem,” James signaled to Lapsley that his sojourn in Cambridge to see his “admirers” carried with it a palpable excitement. To be around so many men, whose lives were embedded in the pederastic tradition which flourished in the academic setting of Cambridge was potentially thrilling. Geoffrey Keynes, younger brother to John Maynard Keynes, the famous economist mentioned earlier as one of the strong proponents in the Cambridge Apostles who defended “The Higher Sodomy” and had a long-term relationship with Duncan Grant, had long been a friend of Rupert Brooke and enjoyed English literature, taking up a position at Pembroke College, while Charles Sayle and the “elusive Bartholomew” (Theodore Bartholomew) both worked as librarians at the University Library (394). According to Leon Edel, these men represented “a new generation at Cambridge” of “Bloomsbury males,” who “worshipped” Henry James and had finally succeeded in capturing the Master’s attention for this visit in June, 1909. Edel elaborates:

The minutely-planned occasion began on June 12, 1909, and James returned to London June 14. Again to Lapsley he reported, “My Cambridge adventure was the lively exemplification of a leap in the dark—I having absolutely no donnees on my hosts, or host. But they were as kind to me as possible and I liked it, the whole queer little commerce, and them, the queer little all juvenile gaping group, quite sufficiently; so that the leap landed me on my feet and no bones are broken.” (395)

James repeats the word “queer” to describe his new friends and the type of society he enjoyed is very telling. Not only was their exchange a sort of “queer little commerce,” which James very much “liked,” but he was enchanted by “them,” the men themselves who were a “queer little all juvenile gaping group,” who received their Pasha excellently.
Certainly, the word “queer” takes on a significant meaning to Gaillard Lapsley, who not only knew of exclusively male circles in Cambridge, but participated in them. Apparently, the meeting was a success, and James felt decadently appreciated, even worshipped by the younger men.

Edel emphasizes the importance of the cultural subjects that James discussed and shared with his new group of friends, this exclusively queer male set at Cambridge. His stay involved dinners, concerts, lunches and talks—even introductions to new and up-and-coming literary figures. One conversation included a lively debate about Walt Whitman, within which James exposed his real feelings about male exclusivity: “After the concert, back in Trumpington Street, they talked until late. One subject was Walt Whitman. James maintained that it was impossible for any woman to write a good criticism of Whitman or get near his point of view” (395). This detail is of great importance when it comes to James’ friendship with Wharton. Given Wharton’s shared interest in Whitman, using Whitmanian verse to express queer desire to Fullerton, and how Whitman became the linchpin for her initiated friendship with James in the first place, it is rather ironic that Whitman, at least in James’ view, could only be understood by men. For James to assert that it was “impossible” for “any woman” to “write a good criticism of Whitman or get near his point of view,” a little over a week after Wharton and Fullerton’s night of passion at the Charing Cross Hotel and Wharton’s writing “Terminus,” seems incredibly ironic, although James, in the midst of male society, might have been displaying resentment towards Wharton after her sexual affair with Fullerton. Unable to consummate his feelings for Fullerton, James appropriated Whitman to himself. Certainly, James had plenty to keep his mind off of Fullerton, in the presence of
the young Rupert Brooke. "The best-remembered episode of the week-end was James reclining in a punt on velvet cushions—the image of the Pasha had come true—'gazing up through prominent half-closed eyes at Brooke’s handsome figure clad in white shirt and white flannel trousers’" (396). James met John Maynard Keynes, lunched with Desmond MacCarthy, and, in his own words, was entertained “by young men whose mother’s milk was barely dry on their lips,” able to “loll not only figuratively but literally on velvet surfaces exacted to my figure” (396). Did the safe atmosphere of an all-male circle allow James to say things he really felt? Did James really believe that women were unable to “get near” Whitman? If so, then what does one make of his connection to Wharton? Did he, in fact, choose to see Wharton more as a man than a woman?

James was not the only member of Wharton’s circle who felt anxiety around women, which, in turn, expressed itself as created a sense of male superiority and even misogyny. Benson recorded that Howard Sturgis exhibited a dislike towards women in general, in his entry from May 30, 1911, “I agree with Howard Sturgis that on the whole it is better not to have anything at all to do with women—there is something ‘nasty’ about them + they spoil things” (42). Earlier, on July 13, 1906, he had written, “Howard talked very interestingly of women. He said that the more he knew of them the more he felt they were simply unintelligible to the ordinary man—their whole view of life so utterly different, that he doubted if understanding were possible” (62). Galliard Lapsley’s opinion of women seemed problematic as well. On May 15, 1906, Benson wrote that Lapsley “said that in his view women were very primitive creatures” (86) and we know from Goodman’s work that Lapsley “disliked having women at his lectures, would actually have banned them if he could, and did his best to see that any who attended were
segregated into a group on one side of the Hall” (21). Percy Lubbock clearly preferred the company of men and went to great lengths to accommodate those confreres to whom he had attached himself—like Benson, Sturgis, Lapsley and Adrian Graham. We know, from his own account, that he never felt completely at ease around Wharton and, in fact, quietly resented the deeper connections she developed with their mutual friends. So, if James, Sturgis, Lapsley and Lubbock all held strongly sexist views towards women in general and expressed those views publicly, then why did Wharton tolerate such apparent denigrating of her biological sex? Neither these men, nor Wharton herself, considered her gender to be rooted in her biological sex, and they acknowledged the queerness she exhibited in terms of her challenging of gender and accepted her as a result. Some of Wharton’s friends remained skeptical, like Lubbock, who had personal reasons for resenting her popularity, but the “happy few”—the core members of the Inner Circle—loved and protected their Firebird, and she them.

Edel turns to the Master himself, when he explains the dynamic that existed within the Qu’acre set, and he also focuses on the type of man to which Wharton was drawn. Already disappointed by Walter Berry, who had relocated to Egypt and who had failed to propose to her so many years ago, Wharton looked to Fullerton, Edel contends, since he possessed a similar demeanor to Berry, but that his “touch of the feminine” appealed to her more masculine personality. Weininger’s “spectrum” provided a perfect explanation for their union, where the feminine is drawn to the masculine, regardless of biological sex. Edel continues:

James would say that in Mrs. Wharton’s novels “the masculine conclusion” tended “so to crowd the feminine observation.” Having grown up in a houseful of males, with her father and two brothers much older than herself, she was most at home in the company of men; and her
intellectual masculinity made it possible for a man of Berry’s temperament to accept her as if she were a man. But Fullerton’s component of femininity may have made him in turn highly acceptable to her. Some such chemistry was at work among Edith Wharton’s friendships—not least at Qu’Acre where the rites of Astarte were performed by a circle of younger men and not least the embroidering host, Howard Sturgis. (412-3)

Leon Edel shows how Wharton’s interiorized masculinity allowed the members of her circle—who all had varied reasons for disliking women in general—to accept and appreciate her friendship. If Berry treated Wharton “as if she were a man” and Wharton’s masculinity became the magnet that drew these men to her, despite their own levels of masculinity and effeminacy, then the “some such chemistry” that Edel gestures toward is really a sense of an acknowledged queerness. By challenging societal norms privately, the “band of brothers” who met at Queen’s Acre created a space where they could all express their queer interiorized selves within an atmosphere of acceptance and safety. Wharton resided in the comfort of dear Howard’s home for the rest of June through the middle of July, diverting herself, after a whirlwind of social affairs, with trips to Lamb House, to spend time with James, Queen’s Acre, to stay with Sturgis, Oxford, to visit Lubbock, and Cambridge, to see Lapsley. This summer provided the context for Sturgis’ famous naming of Wharton as the “Firebird,” a joke between himself and James which acknowledged her complicated sense of gender, and led to further confidence between Wharton, James and Sturgis, primarily concerning her affair with Fullerton.

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80 Edel’s reference to the “rites of Astarte” carries a specific reading of Wharton and her circle, since the “keleb priests” of Astarte were, according to Will Roscoe, in his essay “Priests of the Goddess: Gender Transgression in Ancient Religion,” men who, in their devotion to the goddess, were linked to “gender transgression and homosexuality” and “esthetic ritual techniques” (218). As an ancient fertility goddess and early version of Aphrodite/Venus, Astarte was sometimes depicted as a hermaphrodite, which illuminates Edel’s reading of Wharton—if she indeed was the Astarte to whom the men of her circle (including James) paid tribute and performed rites, as devoted homosexual men. Edel recognizes, here, Wharton’s possession of both feminine and masculine characteristics, just as he acknowledges the queer sexuality of her closest friends, the “younger men” who gathered at Qu’acre, revealing his understanding of Wharton’s complicated sense of gender and the “chemistry at work” within her friendships with queer men.
After Wharton and Fullerton had been separated for some weeks, since their night of passion at the Charing Cross Hotel, James found it fitting to reunite the lovers at his home in Rye. According to Benstock, when Wharton was “visiting the poet laureate Alfred Austin and his wife on the Dover coast” (217), James “summoned” his Firebird to Lamb House, requesting that they enjoy another motor-trip, before she returned to Paris: “Henry wanted another little motor trip, she reported to John Hugh, ‘and with my usual docility I countermanded Paris plans’ (which included final arrangements for leasing an apartment) ‘and turned Hortense’s prow westward’” (217). On July 12, she came down from her room at Lamb House to find Fullerton engaged in conversation with Henry, situated before the fireplace, with his back towards her, in Benstock’s account, while Lewis claims that James had issued an “unappeasable summons” to Wharton, “urging her to come down to Rye with Fullerton” (262). To support the element of surprise, Benstock reprints a quote by Wharton to her lover, “Your back was turned to the door, and you didn’t feel me come in, but went on talking” (217). Despite whether she really had been surprised by Fullerton, while at Lamb House—Benstock implies that James knowingly telegraphed Wharton his summons because he knew of Fullerton’s imminent arrival—or whether she had traveled with Fullerton in tow, we do know that the three, Wharton, James and Fullerton, motored together to Chichester, an excursion which allowed for the hatching of a scheme to disentangle Fullerton from the insistent claws of his indefatigable blackmailer.

R.W.B. Lewis provides an excellent overview of the plot hatched by Wharton, James and even Fullerton himself, to launder money through Frederick Macmillan. The publisher, from Wharton’s suggestion and James’ urging, had already offered Fullerton
an advance of one hundred pounds to write a book about Paris (Wharton was originally commissioned for the piece) as part of a series for which James was writing a volume on London. When Fullerton, however, appeared to be yet again in need of money, Wharton and James decided to arrange for a second advance, for which Wharton provided the funds. The scheme seemed fairly intricate: “Edith was to write James a check for that amount. James in turn was to suggest to Frederick Macmillan that he, James, should supply funds for a second advance which would come through as though from the publisher” (263). The ruse must have given all three a certain thrill of secrecy and complicity, since Lewis strongly purports that Fullerton was aware of the scheme from its genesis. The biographer asserts:

There is no doubt whatever that Fullerton knew all about it, and had been privy to the plot from the outset. He may have demurred a little, but he allowed himself to be persuaded to go along. James wrote him urgently: “You will give me as much pleasure by accepting as you can have done by any act in your life.” One can only marvel at the exquisite scruples of all three persons as they participated in this circuitous undertaking; Edith might have quietly put the money directly into Fullerton’s hand. But one surmises that such an act would, for Edith, have verged on the sordid. (263-4)

One must imagine that such a plot required all three to experience the excitement of keeping the secret hidden, much like the night spent at Charing Cross, but the scheme also provided James with a role in rescuing Fullerton, something Wharton’s biographers tend to gloss over. I believe that Wharton invited James to be a participant in her relationship with Fullerton purposefully, since, for Wharton, James’ interest in the journalist fueled her own desire, and, as a result, complicated forms of desire (for both James and Fullerton) found expression during that affair. Certainly, as Lewis suggests, Wharton might have “quietly put the money directly into Fullerton’s hand,” but, then,
what role would James have had to play in the rescue of the man that both she and James desired? James had written to Wharton, in January about Fullerton’s “hell of a summer,” and the confidence they shared in regard to Fullerton’s situation deepened the relationship between them. By involving James in the “rescue” of Fullerton, she was not only helping James enter into their liaison and become a part of the plot to save poor Morton, but she also stoked the fire of her own longing for Fullerton, by partially acting out her inexpressible desire for James81 through the affair over which the Master presided.

James’ letter to Wharton on July 26, 1909, reveals that the Master heartily approved of the scheme to rescue Fullerton from impending financial ruin. Commending Wharton for her generosity in helping her lover out of his bind, James praises her effusively, while also reassuring her that their confidence would not be breached. In his characteristic style, James writes:

I could really cry with joy for it!—for what your note received this noon tells me: so affectionate an interest I take in that gentleman. How admirable a counsellor you have been, & what a détente [release], what a blest & beneficent one, poor tortured & tattered W[illiam] M[orton] F[ullerton] must feel! It makes me, I think, as happy as it does you. And I hope the consequence will be an overflow of all sorts of practical good for him—it must be. Of course I shall breathe, nor write, no shadow of a word of what I have been hearing from you to him—but if he should in time—and when he has time (he can’t have now), the pleasure I shall take in expressing my sentiments to him will be extreme. (114-5)

81 I mean to suggest that Wharton harbored desire for the paternal James, much in the way she later admitted and explored sexual desire for father figures in her fiction, that Fullerton became a conduit through which she explored her desire for James. This is part of the reason why, when James extracted himself from her affair with Fullerton, her romance quickly cooled and she began to lose interest in Fullerton. James functioned as the catalyst for her affair, stimulating Wharton's desire for Fullerton both through James' own desire for the younger man and because of Wharton’s desire for the Master himself. Their triangle allowed Wharton to imagine herself as James (as the father figure) with Fullerton, and to express her desire for her own father (whom she later viewed as a closeted queer man) by assuming that role. By involving James and providing him with the 'juicy details' about Fullerton he longed to know, Wharton also allowed James to imagine himself as Wharton, as the one who could sexually enjoy the pleasure Fullerton offered.
James’ exclamation, “I could really cry with joy for it,” stemming from his “affectionate” interest in Fullerton, reinforced for Wharton the depth of experience James actually felt when it came to her affair with Fullerton. Flattering Wharton by calling her an “admirable counsellor,” James emphasizes the necessity of her intervening and the good that would result from such a kind action, the rescue of a “poor tortured & tattered” soul. Likening his joy to Wharton’s, James even goes as far as to write, “It makes me, I think, as happy as it does you”—very strong words to use in that James certainly knew at this point that Wharton felt strongly! In suggesting that he experienced the same level of elation over Fullerton’s liberation, James exposed his feelings of participation in the affair. When he reaffirms to Wharton, “Of course I shall breathe, nor write, no shadow of a word of what I have been hearing from you to him,” he calls attention to the bond of secrecy they now shared, even enjoyed, through their connection to Fullerton. While Lewis cites a fear of the “sordid” as the reason for why Wharton did not give Fullerton money directly, I believe that such an interpretation of the situation is too reductive and oversimplified.

From James’ fiction, readers understand that the Master formulated labyrinths of language in order to suggest, but never directly name, same-sex male desire. The running joke about James is that one sentence in his later novels could run on for pages, winding through a circuitous maze of dizzyingly beautiful, though frustratingly euphemistic verbiage. James’ language mimicked his life in that he played a game of always hinting and suggesting but never directly naming what he felt. To name desire would be to destroy it, since then one would have to enter into the uncomfortable realm of morality, class position, and social custom. As long as one yearned quietly, flirted, exchanged
knowing glances, teased, watched, playfully touched, and never actually crossed the invisible line that separated the socially acceptable from the unacceptable, desire could be acknowledged and expressed. Specifically, for James, queer desire needed to be masked due to the danger of the time; Fullerton’s situation provided a clear illustration of that fact. Thus, when it came to desiring younger men, James fashioned a language of camp that seemed so exaggerated that it would appear harmless to the recipient of his letters. James could kiss, embrace, squeeze, pat the arms of and hold hands with the men he knew because, as he became older and used more flamboyant language, the younger men who enjoyed his company saw these as quirks of his personality, more than actual sexual advances with any real purpose. Wharton understood, from the beginning of her friendship with James, that he picked up on the nuance of forbidden desire in his fiction. She liked the way that James upheld the moral code but carefully employed literary devices to challenge morality and social customs, by using a language of “allusions and cross-references” that the average person could not decipher. Through Wharton’s friendship with James, she was able to unlock key aspects of her personality and sexuality by reimagining herself through the social construct of the queer man, a construct presented to her by various members of the Qu’acre group. Ranging from notably effeminate (Sturgis) to markedly masculine (James), to even the charmingly bisexual (Fullerton), these men of her Inner Circle presented various incarnations of the queer man, in all his complexity. Thus, when reassured and encouraged by James to experiment sexually with Fullerton, Wharton allowed James to enjoy the affair with their shared beloved vicariously through her. James was always there for the most important moments of the affair, and he encouraged Wharton, like a matchmaker, through every
stage of its progress. When James’ interest in Fullerton finally started to flag, precipitated by his own infatuation with Hugh Walpole, Wharton too grows tired of Fullerton’s demands and “high-maintenance” behavior and phases out their romance.

Benstock claims that during that trip, the three day jaunt through Essex, with James and Fullerton tucked into “Hortense,” that “Fullerton and Edith resumed sexual relations” (217). Dating the poem “The Room” to this time, Benstock emphasizes Fullerton’s attractiveness and the appeal of his bisexuality to Wharton. She contends: “Fullerton’s bisexuality undoubtedly contributed to his sexual powers. Playing the male role as sexual partner, he also knew from the ‘other’ side what a woman felt and wanted. A bisexual Don Juan, he took double pleasure in every encounter: in some sense, he was both seducer and seduced” (218). Strangely enough, one might think that James’ presence—given traditional accounts of Wharton as a sort of frigid grand dame—would have inhibited her from renewing her sexual relations with her lover, while James was there. Noting James’ keen eye for observation and his appearance at the Charing Cross Hotel, a month before, the chemistry which existed between two lovers during the height of their passion could not have gone unnoticed by their third counterpart, but it was James who persuaded Wharton not to give up on Fullerton, when she first disclosed her feelings for him. Benstock shows that James periodically “kept Howard Sturgis apprised of their pilgrims’ progress through Essex by frequent telegrams, but neither these announcements nor James’ letters of this period give clues to how much he knew—or did not know—about Edith and Morton’s affair” (218). When Benstock implies that James may not have known what truly was going on between Wharton and Fullerton, it is because she has little physical evidence to prove that James knew that Wharton was
having sex with Fullerton. Of course, both James and Wharton knew only too well the
dangers of letters falling into the wrong hands, which is why Wharton’s affair with
Fullerton was such a late discovery in terms of literary scholarship. For years,
bioographers and critics believed that Wharton had carried on an affair with Walter Berry,
that her romantic works were based solely on him, only to find out that they had been
completely wrong. Wharton, who meticulously prepared her personal papers, tellingly
marked “For my biographer,” and sealed them for fifty years after her death, made every
effort to protect her image among those who knew her and would have survived her
passing—Fullerton included.

James and Wharton were of the same mind when it came to upholding the
appearance of social custom: you could do as you liked so long as your private matters
were concealed from the public. This was an age of intrigue, due, in part, to the rise of
homophobia, blackmail and social persecution if one’s sexual predilections did come to
light. Both James’ and Wharton’s novels investigate this subject—indiscretion and its
concealment—over and over, again, in different settings, with different characters, and
they wrote about this subject with a certain authority because they understood all too
well. Certainly, if one looks for a direct admission in his letters, the reader will be
disappointed, as James would never betray Wharton’s honor by naming her situation.
Scholars know that James playfully alluded to and was intrigued by sex\textsuperscript{82}, as shown by

\textsuperscript{82} When Hugh Walpole told James of the sexual indiscretions of André Raffalovich, a “European-Russian”
who was an author of a “book on homosexuality,” James rejoined with a plea for more detail. Edel
recounts the exchange between Walpole and James, about a sexual encounter between Raffalovich and the
priest, John Gray, friend of Wilde and a possible model for Dorian Gray:

He disapproved of Gray and Raffalovich but instead of saying this to James, or offering
any gossip, he simply wrote—rather angrily—of “immorality on stone floors.” Hugh
said he couldn’t say more; it made him suffer so. James’s rejoinder was a mixture of
laughter and affection. “That’s the very most juvenile logic possible,” wrote the Master.
“There was exactly an admirable matter for you to write me about—a matter as to which

408
Leon Edel, and that, in a private setting, he felt completely at ease asking for detailed accounts of sexual gossip from friends. The problem that arises in creating an accurate image of James is complicated, unraveling that careful balance he preserved between his public and private selves he constructed and cultivated. The public face James presented to the world was a man shocked and distressed by sexual matters—in short, a Puritanical, repressed, and frigid prude. Edel explains, “In public James was shocked by crudity,” and proceeds to use an observation written by Raffalovich himself which centered on James’ noted “puritanism” (408). From Edel’s biography, we have the following discussion:

According to Raffalovich James once called on the Beardsleys, “and Aubrey’s sister (a beautiful and charming girl) pointed out to him on the stairs a Japanese print which shocked him. He called it a ‘disconcerting incident’ and always afterwards fought shy of her, though the print on the stairs was nothing startling. I remember once teasing him with a friend to know what the Olympian young man in ‘In the Cage’ had done wrong. He swore he did not know, he would rather not know.” (408)

Given the gaping discrepancy between the laughing, coaxing James, who plied Walpole with remonstrance in order to read a more detailed account of “immorality on stone floors,” and the shocked, almost apoplectic James, who denied knowing what incriminating acts his own characters committed, one can see that James went to great lengths to maintain the divide between his public and private personae. When reading of James’ response to Beardsley’s sister, in regard to the print, I am reminded of Wharton’s

"you are strongly and abundantly feeling; and in a relation with lives on communication as ours should.” Thus prodded, Hugh seems to have offered a fuller account. James was not satisfied. “I could have done with more detail—as when you say ‘Such parties!’ I want so to hear exactly what parties they are. When you refer to ‘immorality on stone floors,’ and with prayer-books in their hands, I so want the picture developed and the proceedings authenticated. (407-8)

This evidence demonstrates that James in fact did not shy away from detailed accounts of sexuality in private, that in actuality he prodded for more explicit accounts of tantalizing affairs. James clearly relished a ribald tale, within the appropriate setting.
encounter with Fitzgerald, when poor Scott drunkenly informed a regal Edith of a bungled tale related to the brothel near which he was staying. Wharton’s reaction seemed eerily similar to James. When people, who had not earned the privilege of James’ or Wharton’s confidence, presumptively took the liberty of gesturing towards suggestive prints or telling racy stories, such actions were considered an insult. One can only imagine the cool, even icy, response such actions incited.

Evidence of Wharton’s ability to freeze acquaintances—individuals she had not yet welcomed into her circle—appears in Percy Lubbock’s not-so-friendly accounts of Wharton. Two primary scenes demonstrate an icy reserve, in his *Portrait of Edith Wharton*. The first example comes from Mrs. Gordon Bell’s narrative, which captured a revealing moment:

> Being a very normal person she preferred men to women, and often terrified the latter with a cold stare; but she was frequently quite unconscious of it, except when they were gushing—*that* she couldn’t stand. I remember once, when I first knew her, looking up and finding her staring at me with what seemed an unfriendly gaze. I said, ‘What have I done to be looked at so disapprovingly?’—and she said, ‘Oh no, I was just thinking that I liked your hat.’ But many women who only knew her slightly have said to me, ‘She looks at me as if I were a worm.’ Was it an inherited manner or was it self-defence? (28)

It must have been uncomfortable not to belong to that “happy few” who knew the real Edith Wharton, the one who laughed merrily at jokes and teased her friends. For Mrs. Gordon and the other women who felt they were no better than worms, assessment as less than worthy betrays something of the power of Wharton’s stare and the masculine force of her gaze, which must have been intimidating. Whether a self-defense mechanism or a way of coping with paralyzing shyness, Wharton’s intense gaze gave her the air of Medusa, able to freeze those she looked upon, even from a distance. Once a woman
made it past the initial assessment, she still had to earn Wharton’s approval before she would be given a glimpse of the true person beneath the cool exterior. Lubbock immediately follows up the previous sketch of Wharton with another, similar portrait. This time, a Mrs. White—whose interview with Wharton had failed to provide a moment of connection—recalls how her hostess’ voice changed remarkably when in the presence of an intimate friend, as she observed:

Mr. Codman politely accompanied me to the front-door, and while I was struggling with my unfamiliar over-shoes, for there was snow on the ground, Mrs. Wharton leant over the banisters, thinking I had already gone, and called to him in a warm, kind, eager voice that I had not yet heard: ‘What do you think, Ogden—could one in a little house like this allow a Chippendale clock in the hall?’ I liked that voice . . . As I walked home up Park Avenue I reflected that though I had called on another New York lady I had not yet met Edith Wharton. (33)

By pairing these images of Wharton, Lubbock exposes his own feelings, since he too never gained entrance to Wharton’s inner sanctum. Certainly, Lubbock maintained a better vantage point than most, given his intimate ties to the men within Wharton’s circle, like James, Sturgis, and Lapsley, but he often was left out, never earning her approval. These feelings were exacerbated by his marriage to Sybil Cutting Scott.

The other reason that no evidence incontrovertibly proving that James knew of Wharton’s sexual relations with Fullerton exists is that the private writing might have been destroyed. We know that Wharton disposed of Walter Berry’s letters in order to protect his image and privacy. In fact, most literary figures destroyed of those kinds of personal papers in the late nineteenth century. Dickens ritualistically burned his personal letters in his backyard at Gad’s Hill, and we know that James and Wharton too destroyed letters that were too explicit or revealing, although copious epistles still remain. Most notably, Edel reveals that, early in 1910, James indeed gathered “forty years of letters
from his contemporaries, manuscripts, scenarios, old notebooks” and burned them in a
“rubbish fire in his garden” (437). Edel explains:

He [James] was ruthless. A great Anglo-American literary archive
perished on that day. His act was consistent with his belief that authors
were themselves responsible for clearing the approaches to their privacy.
“I kept almost all my letters for years,” he wrote to his old friend Mrs.
Field, on January 2, 1910, “till my receptacles would no longer hold them;
then I made a gigantic bonfire and have been easier in mind since.” He
had done this, he said, in obedience to a law, “as I myself grow older and
think more of my latter end: the law of not leaving personal and private
documents at the mercy of accidents.” He was destroying a part of his
personal past. (437)

The timing of this burning carries significance, when the reader learns that 1909 had been
a year of great disclosure for James, Wharton, and Fullerton, that many letters revealed
the very “personal and private” information that he so carefully tried to guard. James,
acutely aware of Fullerton’s situation, certainly must have thought about his own
vulnerability and that of his friends were he to keep such a collection of correspondence.
One can only imagine what kinds of revelations might have been found in the letters that
Wharton wrote to James during 1909, especially those that specifically related to her
troubles with Fullerton. What letters did James destroy in order to protect hidden, private
selves? Wharton showed in The House of Mirth, a novel James had encouraged her to
write, that letters could and did destroy lives. When Lily Bart burns the letters—letters
which would have rescued both her name and her reputation—she protects Seldon from a
public fall and condemns herself to ruin. Clearly, Wharton knew something of
incriminating letters, and they often appeared as a plot device in her fictional literary
works, with good reason. Rather than assume that an uncharacteristically oblivious
James did not know of Wharton’s sexual relationship with Morton Fullerton, one must
surmise that James was a discreet friend, one who had certain benefits to gain from her
affair with a man he had long desired—the pleasure of knowing their secret, a chance to participate in the intimacy (even if only through reported details), the confidence of both of the people involved, and the trust that sprang from such furtive dealings, as their security depended upon his silence. James wrote to Wharton, begging for "the things, the things, the things—i.e. the details" that he "yearned for" in regard to Fullerton; not only did James want those "things" or "details," but he wanted that "real & intimate" information only Wharton could gain from being Fullerton’s lover. This is why James ends his letter with, "Never mind; I believe I shall see you a bit effectively" (Powers 113)—meaning that Wharton would fill him in on all of those juicy details when they could speak in private.

**What James Knew**

Again and again, we revisit this question of what James actually knew, for most critics and biographers have differing opinions and ideas, which stem often from certain political agendas, whether consciously promoted or not. From my own perspective, I see James’ involvement in Wharton’s affair as the key to her transformation, the impetus for her assumption of the interiorized queer male identity that engendered her sexual awakening with Fullerton. Since James’ relationship with Wharton and Fullerton developed and evolved most dramatically during the summer of 1909, one must look to the valuable resource of James’ notebooks (which were originally published, in 1947, but reissued, in 1987, by the Oxford University Press). In their *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James*, Leon Edel and Lyall H. Powers collected and annotated the “nine scribbler-notebooks” that James kept, during his life, within which he detailed random, but important, information, like feelings about personal relationships and ideas for his
litarary work, amidst the seemingly mundane jotting down of appointments, dates, visits, trips, etc. These two well-respected scholars provide, in their volume, an assessment of James’ role in the Wharton/Fullerton affair that not only precedes that of Susan Goodman’s, but which strongly supports this dynamic of James as presiding over their romance, as a participant through a kind of voyeurism, an idea Goodman clearly supports. (Though Goodman never really unpacks James’ role in the affair, she is the one who has most overtly raised the issue of Wharton’s placement within a queer coterie of male friends in her *Edith Wharton’s Inner Circle*, is the one to give James the moniker of the “facilitator-voyeur.”) In fact, Edel and Powers directly contend that, in June 1909, James “vicariously enters the world of romance,” when he “assists at a lovers’ tryst, a dinner party at the Charing Cross hotel” (299) for the enamored two, as he had been aware of Wharton’s relationship with Fullerton since October, 1908—when “Edith sent HJ a double confidence from the United States: her marriage to Teddy was unbearable, Morton was her accepted lover” (299). Such a claim contradicts Shari Benstock’s careful tiptoeing around the subject of how much James was in the know, where the Wharton biographer, when discussing the same fateful meeting at Charing Cross, warns, in her account:

> Henry James roused himself from his own troubles to come to town, and he dined with Edith and Morton. Where they dined and what they discussed are lost to history, as are James’s conclusions (if any) about his friends’ relationship. He had not seen Fullerton since they parted in Paris in May 1908 and heard virtually nothing from him in the intervening year. He knew only by hints and rumors of Edith’s present domestic problems. (213).

Benstock downplays James’ place within the affair—the use of “if any,” the mention of “heard virtually nothing,” and use of “knew only hints and rumors”—while R.W.B.
Lewis seems to keep James at a distance on the fringes, as observing and encouraging figure, but not one directly participating within the relationship between Wharton and her lover. Yet, Edel—who actually met Wharton and completed the mammoth, multivolume, groundbreaking biography on James that has become of sort of “go to first” in Jamesian scholarship—openly asserts James’ role as being primary in the affair, that he had been a loyal confidant for Wharton. Meanwhile, two of Wharton’s most cited, major biographers tend to either gloss over or ignore the possibility that James actively pursued an immediate role within the affair between Wharton and Fullerton—a role that was sexually charged, where his desire for Fullerton fueled Wharton’s, and her attraction for James became sublimated into her passion for Fullerton.

The schedule of events that took place between James, Wharton, and Fullerton appear in the detailed records within James’ notebooks. On June 4th, he met and dined with Edith and Morton at the Charing Cross Hotel, and, on the following morning, “Saw W.M.F. off to N.Y. at Waterloo 10 a.m.”; later in the day, he “went by motor with E.W. to Guilford and thence by beautiful circuit to Windsor and Queen’s Acre” (301). On June 6th, he spent time with Edith at Queen’s Acre, on a wet day, on the 7th, he lingered at Sturgis’ home and then left with the Firebird, who motored him for a “long and beautiful run (to Wallingford) in the afternoon” (302). Nine days later, he dined with Wharton at Lady St. Helier’s; on the day following, he joined her again, this time with John Hugh-Smith. He goes on to note all of the dinners and jaunts that he and Wharton enjoyed together, during her stay with Howard Sturgis and The Babe. In July, Wharton’s name starts to appear again, as on the 12th, she and Fullerton “arrived to dinner and for night,” on the famous evening when Wharton entered the room at Lamb House, only to be
surprised by finding Fullerton there. The next day, she, Fullerton, and James took off in Hortense for a ride to Chichester, where they stayed over for a night, only to return the following morning, after a visit to Petworth for lunch, a stop in Arundel, and “Tea at Brighton” (305). The three returned to Lamb House by the evening of the 14th. On Thursday, July 15th, Wharton and Fullerton rode with James to Folkestone, then to Canterbury for lunch, whence they departed—Wharton and her lover for Folkestone, to return to France, and James by train to Lamb House, in Rye. Here, we see that these three spent an intense series of days together, between the 12th and 15th, as they dined together for numerous meals, motored together for long hours, and stayed over in the same spots. Given that Wharton’s memorable night with Fullerton took place only a month earlier, in London, then certainly the sexual charge between the two must have been palpable to James when these three reunited. Cooped up in a rather tight motorcar for hours at a stretch, one can only imagine the discussions they must have had, the laughter and teasing, and the shared observations of the countryside. Too, meals provided another opportunity for playful discussion, suggesting that this growing confidence between Wharton and James led to the latter’s openness about Fullerton by July 26th—the date when James wrote his letter to Wharton that expressed the joy he felt in knowing that Wharton planned to rescue Fullerton from his blackmailing landlady. After James’ intimate inclusion in their relationship during those few days in July, a definite frankness emerges in James’ letters that suggests that he knew more about what was going on with Wharton and Fullerton than Benstock or Lewis will comfortably allow. Since James’ discussion of Fullerton’s “hell of a summer” in January of that year, he had been developing a deeper kind of confidence with Wharton, where they were able
to discuss Fullerton’s past and his present predicament. When they all met at Lamb House, in July, Wharton and James must have started to think more concretely about how they would help Fullerton, and Wharton sought a method that included James.

Given how shy Wharton was with men and her own confession of almost a sexual paralysis, caused largely by her mother’s policing of what sexual information Wharton knew growing up and a careful ignorance that had been cultivated, James’ role within the affair not only allowed Wharton to relax and allow herself to be open to the romance that ensued, but James, in fact, strengthened her desire, as she took on his role (as she imagined it), in her affair with the younger man. The accounts of Wharton’s sexual frigidity in the numerous biographies, accounts that have examined her marriage to Teddy, her nervous breakdown early in the union83, and Wharton’s accounts of her mother—in both her “Life & I” and A Backward Glance—which paint the picture of Edith as heartbreakingly repressed. The suggestion has been that Wharton’s fear of sex was so great that she needed medical intervention to cope with the pressure of sexual demands from her husband, who certainly expressed a sexual appetite. For example, A.C. Benson, when he first met Wharton with her husband—having been introduced by their mutual friend Gaillard Lapsley, who came with the couple to visit Benson at Magdalene College, in Cambridge, on May 5th, 1906—noted the husband’s sexual inappropriateness: “I told the story of Mr Wharton (This argument was apropos of Mrs Wharton)—who said to Lapsley as Mr Wharton + I walked on ahead in the Magdalene Garden ‘God, look at that woman’s waist’—(pointing to his wife) ‘Look at it! You wouldn’t find another working novelist with a waist like that!’—Percy thought her very

83 Lewis contended that Wharton sought the care of Weir Mitchell, famed innovator of the disastrous “rest cure,” though Benstock later claimed this to be impossible, since Mitchell was away during the dates that Wharton visited his clinic.
brilliant; him simply detestable. Such a snippet is revealing in that Teddy embarrassingly (at least to Benson) drew attention to his wife’s body when around other men and made comments about how her in a way that seemed more like that expected from a clichéd construction worker than a genteel man of high society. Also, Teddy’s outrageous affairs and behavior betrayed something of his sexual demeanor, which must have affronted Wharton during the beginning of their marriage, especially seeing how she emphasizes how little she knew before her wedding night. Years later, on September 15th, 1915, Benson recorded a fascinating summary of Wharton’s marriage troubles, as conveyed to him from Percy Lubbock:

We had some talk about Mrs Wharton—P. says that she made the mistake of marrying a man for whom she didn’t really care for: the man for whom she did care, didn’t care for her. The actual husband is now crazy after a career of the vilest sensuality. Mrs W. feels very lonely + wants a domestic background, but is at the same time fearfully fastidious. I think she must be prepared to be unhappy.

From Percy Lubbock’s view, as filtered through Benson’s writing, the image of Wharton is very different from the sensual woman who wrote “Terminus,” “Beatrice Palmato,” and who reveled in the sexual pleasures of her affair with Fullerton. Lubbock, who remained on the fringes of the Inner Circle, never was able to penetrate the social mask Wharton carefully held up to the world, like the one her good friend James had taught her to protect her interiorized self.

84 See Benson’s diaries, Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Volume 81 (24 April to 21 May 1906), page 68.
85 See Benson’s diaries, Pepys Library, etc., Volume 155 (31 August-16 October, 1915), pages 31-32.
When James started to extract himself from Wharton's affair with Fullerton, partly due to his shifting attention to younger men and to his declining health, her romance began to cool. As the forbidden elements (the infidelity, the third member of the triangulated affair, the actual same-sex male desire, etc.) of the affair were removed, Wharton's desire for Fullerton slowly dissipated, leaving her disappointed and disillusioned, alone and misunderstood. Frustrated by the idea that Fullerton never really comprehended the meaning of the "comradeship" she sought with him, Wharton started to pull away from the relationship, retreating into her place within her circle of close friends, her "happy few." As a way of working through her feelings during this period, specifically in the year 1910, Wharton's writing of the short story "The Eyes" uncovers the complexity of the feelings she observed or imagined in James, Fullerton, her father, and even in herself. Facing her fears, she wrote a tale that still haunts its readers, not only due to its central theme of one's denying of one's true identity, but as a result of anxiety stemming from forbidden desire. The image, within the story, of the older, educated patron, who dotes on a younger dilettante, may have been inspired by Wharton's observing the Master, as she likely knew about James' "beloved boys."

The day after James wrote his letter to Wharton, which expressed excitement over her decision to help out Fullerton, A.C. Benson confided to his diary his notice of James'
budding friendship with another younger gentleman, on July 27, 1909. Benson, in an
entry tinged with envy, observed, “Letters from Henry James, Gosse etc. all kind +
affectionate. H.J. has formed a romantic friendship with Hugh Walpole very good + very
happy for both, I expect. But I feel envious, alas. If I could but experience a real
emotion, or find some work, this cloud would disperse a little—but that is the disease, of
course.”\textsuperscript{86} The timing, here, is significant. According to Leon Edel, James, since late
1908, had been developing a relationship with the much younger Walpole. Their
introduction began with a letter from Walpole which invoked the name of Benson. They
corresponded, and, when Walpole arrived in London, James met him, in February, 1909,
for a dinner at the Reform Club and a matinee of \textit{The High Bid} (398-9). In April, young
Hugh stayed at Lamb House, in Rye, for a pleasurable visit, an account of which exists in
Walpole’s diary: “A wonderful week-end with Henry James. Much more wonderful than
I had expected. I am very lucky in my friends. The house and garden are exactly suited
to him. He is beyond words. I cannot speak about him” (400). By July, even Benson
was aware of the “romantic friendship” that brewed between James (who was in his mid-sixties) and Walpole (who was only 24 when he met the Master), even “envious” of the
sympathy that existed between the two. Of course, for Benson, the idea of the same-sex
male pederastic relationship held the appellation “romantic friendship,” as demonstrated
in its assignation to Howard Sturgis’ connection with Percy Lubbock and its invocation
in Benson’s own discussions about this kind of same-sex male desire with Gaillard
Lapsley—not to mention the many other times the term resurfaces in his personal writing.
Certainly, Benson’s observations of the close relationships between the men who were

\textsuperscript{86} See Benson’s diaries, Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Volume 106 (30 April-15 August, 1909), page
84.
his closest friends betrayed something of his regret in not having found that kind of 
sympathy with a younger man who could respect the physical boundaries he maintained, 
while expressing devotion, even desire, that stemmed from “romantic” affection.

When Benson writes of James’ relationship with Walpole and uses the personal 
term, “romantic friendship” as a telling descriptor of a sexually charged relationship 
between the two men (one older, one much younger), he confesses his own feelings of 
longing for the kind of love that he witnessed between Sturgis and The Babe, The Master 
and Walpole, and even between Percy Lubbock and Adrian Graham. James wrote 
Walpole, after his first visit to Lamb House, “See therefore how we’re at one, and believe 
in the comfort I take in you. It goes very deep—deep, deep, deep: so infinitely do you 
touch and move me, dear Hugh. So for the moment enough said—even though so much 
less said, than felt” (403). The language James employs is markedly provocative and 
sensual. The repetition of the word “deep” four times suggests a level of penetration like 
sexual intercourse, and James calls him, his “darling darling little Hugh,” his “beloved 
boy,” and even “belovedest little Hugh” “touch” and “move” him. James’ use of the 
word “moved” is almost euphemistic for sexual arousal, phallic engorgement. James 
ends the passage with a “moment” that could not be discussed but rather “felt,” as if in a 
physical way, enticing and flirting with the younger man. (Also, James’ repeated use of 
the words “beloved” or “beloved boy,” directly corresponds to the language Percy 
employs when describing the eronemos, the “beloved” who was a boy, within the Greek 
practice of pederasty. Clearly, James emphasizes Walpole’s “boyhood” repeatedly, in a 
way that suggests that their age difference was not only noticeable, but alluring to him.)
Only a day after James’ approbation of Wharton’s decision to help Fullerton, in Cambridge, Benson noted his good friend’s increased interest in and “romantic friendship” with the young Walpole. Clearly, during that summer of 1909, when James’ feelings for Fullerton must have started to wane, just as his affection for his “darling darling little Hugh” waxed, and further examination of the papers from this period reveal the transition. On August 16, James flirted more openly with Hugh, in his writing, over Hugh’s failure to properly secure the envelope within which he placed his letter, with a postscript that read: “Your envelope arrive this a.m. unglued—not having evidently received, on its gum, the lick of your silver tongue. Your gentle text wd. Have been accessible—but there was no harm done. Do, however, always apply the lingual caress” (Gunter and Jobe 189). Not only does James tease Walpole with his seductive play on words—the “silver tongue” that gives the gum of the envelope its “lingual caress,”—but he also warns of the danger of leaving the contents of their correspondence vulnerable to a third party, again the threat of blackmail. With a declaration of “no harm done,” James made light of the situation, though his anxiety was clearly and rightly conveyed to Walpole. James is still carefully guarding appearance versus reality, the public and private selves. Any obvious slip of the mask or veil could have meant social doom, especially to one so well-versed in its codes and practices. Late in his life, Walpole, himself, provided an account of James which supported this view of James as a man who flirted with male desire within protected environments but found himself unable to

87 When looking up the etymology of the term “silver-tongued” in the OED, one of the earlier appearances of the adjective occurs in 1713, by a J. Warder, who applies it to Virgil, in a work called Two Amazons: “Relying too much upon the silver-tongued Virgil.” Virgil, in his several of his eclogues supported the the concept of pederasty. In the second eclogue, Virgil, it is believed by scholars, fashioned the figure of Corydon, after himself, and Alexis, after Alexander, a slave that had been given to him. Given the name Corydon and its import within this tradition (Gide’s work of the same name, William Johnson “Cory,” etc.), I believe that this is connection to Virgil may more than just a coincidence.
sexually consummate that desire, due to his religious and social upbringing. For James, an open acknowledgement of “the love that dare not speak its name” might destroy the exact element one found so enticing in its sublimation. Trotting that desire out into the glaring light of a heteronormative society made it subject to judgment, both in terms of the law and one’s own moral code. James’ cry, “I can’t, I can’t,” expresses an internalized Puritanism preventing him from acting upon the constant “yearning” for a deeper connection with other men, and Wharton captures his yearning in her *The Age of Innocence* captures, although played out by Ellen Olenska and Newland Archer in a heterosexual pairing.

By November, Benson reported that James’ relationship with Walpole had grown to such an extent that he found the former besotted with the latter: the Master was a slave to his desire for his “beloved boy.” Benson imagined what it would be like to have James enamored of oneself, to be wined and dined, to be given all that privilege at such a young age, in a letter he wrote on November 21, 1909: “But it must be very surprising to have Henry James fall in love with you, go everywhere, to meet everybody, to be welcomed by all the best literary men of the day—Wells, Max Beerbohm, Gosse, etc.—to have a dinner given for you at the Reform etc.—he must have a great deal of ballast” (44). Certainly, there is a bit of envy in this passage. Benson probably would have liked to have been in the position of either James or Walpole—to be in love or be beloved, to be the *erastes* or the *eronomos*. Benson’s use of the phrase “fall in love” is unarguable and unmistakable, even almost 100 years after it was written. The diarist also connects the word “beloved” to describe the younger men who caught his older male friends’

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88 One cannot help but consider too that James, due to the famed back injury or the dysfunction of age, perhaps lacked the physical ability to sexually consummate such desire for younger men.
attention, noted in later writings. For example, when prompted by Percy Lubbock's display of his embarrassingly obvious infatuation with Adrian Graham (which became almost unbearable for Benson to observe), Benson observes:

Howard Sturgis loved the Babe and H. James loved Hugh Walpole—but neither H.S. nor H.J. were ever under any illusions whatever as to the Babe's or H. Walpole's intellect or character or superiority. It is a horrible dethronement of Percy's inflexible power of valuation. Percy writes to me lamely, as if palely smiling—but I feel he has cast me off, or drifted away. If only the Beloved were not so common, perky, calculating a youth. (Newsome 367)

In a fascinating twist, again, this word “Beloved” crops up, used in the passage by Benson to describe the younger of the two men in the “romantic friendship,” just as James had chosen the word to describe the younger men to whom he was attracted (so often that both recent, published collections of James' letters to younger men—by Gunter and Jobe, and Zorzi, respectively—have the word “Beloved” in their titles). For centuries, the word eronemos has been translated from the Greek to English as the word “beloved.” When Benson invokes this word, he connects the capitalized “Beloved,” a proper noun, as synonymous with Adrian Graham—the “perky, calculating youth”—as a knowing reference. Apparently, Benson identified the other “Beloveds” in of his friends, men like The Babe and Hugh Walpole, who had entralled much older admirers with their exuberance and vitality. Given that Benson and Lapsley had “cruised” the shores of the Cam, eyeing the youthful male coeds who rowed so excellently, trying to find living examples of “Athenian beauty,” as their own beloveds (to no avail), one can understand Benson’s envy and resentment. Thus, it is not unexpected that Benson became jealous of James’ relationship with Walpole, just as he struggled with Sturgis’ partnership with The Babe, and just as he later found annoyance in Lubbock’s connection to Graham. The
emphasis on the “perky” demeanor of youth in such beloveds relates to long-standing imagery rooted in uninhibited behavior in boyhood, often depicted in an image of unclad boys bathing—a motif James would draw upon, when writing to Walpole, during the summer of 1909.

The bathing, nude young man appears as an image to which James alludes in his letter to Walpole, on August 24, 1909, as an indirect reference to paintings by Thomas Eakins and Henry Scott Tuke—who pictured disrobed boys frolicking in bodies of water. James reveals: “I tend to yearn over you & your rich young experience, much more than less. I sit sedately on the bank while you plash in the stream—but I am content with my part, which suits much better my age & my figure, likewise what I am pleased to call, for the occasion, my genius; & so long as I don’t lose sight of you all is well” (Gunter and Tobe 189). As with Benson and Lapsley (who cruised the Cam), the powerful gaze of the older man asserts itself, as the young man observed expends seemingly boundless energy, which invigorates the viewer. The younger man becomes an object of desire, with the older man taking on the role of the subject, as the one who views/desires. In this scene, James reclines “sedately” on the imaginary shore of the stream, “yearning” for Walpole. He doesn’t “lose sight” of the handsome Hugh, who actively “plashes” in the water (like the nude boys who, in Eakins’ The Swimming Hole (1885), jump into the water and splash about, or, as in Tuke’s August Blue (1893) or Ruby, Gold and Malachite (1902), display themselves without reservation in the water89). James, aware of the image that he

89 Again, this image of the nude male bather as an object of desire appears, years later, in a letter written by Benson, on September 3, 1923, as he describes seeing a drawing of Gaillard Lapsley, by Adrian Graham—a middling artist with whom Percy Lubbock had been smitten. Yet, when it is an older man, not a younger one, who exhibits his physical body, the viewer becomes revolted by the display. The perennial diarist detailed: “A letter from A Graham, with a picture, not very good of Lapsley sunning himself unclad on the roof of the boathouse at Cambridge—a scene that needs no satirist—too horrible to be made even farcical” (32). From Benson’s view, Lapsley, as the older don, had no business to act as the beautiful young men,
creates, playfully teases Walpole about their age difference, reminding him of his “age” and “figure,” characteristics that made him extremely self-conscious, though he compensated with his assertion of his “genius.” His attraction to Walpole sprang from the younger man’s fresh, good looks and his unabashed forwardness with James, his eagerness and adoration of the Master—who always appreciated those who worshipped him. Clearly, the physical beauty of Walpole attracted James, who subscribed to the Greek ideal of form and content with an emphasis on external, bodily perfection. Given that the role of aesthete was that of one who appreciated beauty, the role of the older man, whose body had been altered by age, became that of the observer, the admirer, the patron. The older man had other assets—professional connections, literary genius, financial security, fame, etc.—which made him enticing to the youthful beloved.

In a letter that followed only weeks later, on September 8, James again emphasizes Walpole’s appeal, by describing a photograph that had been sent to James upon request—a picture that sat framed before him when he wrote his missive to Walpole, from The Deanery, in Hereford. James sent young Hugh a provocative passage that picks up on the language from his earlier correspondence. For example, James combines the Walpole to whom he writes his letter, with the photographic Walpole in miniature, flirting with his correspondent as if Walpole were really there in the room: “I
can tell you to your handsome young face that it gives me infinite pleasure thus to possess you. You direct upon me a consideration that has quite the air of being rather intended for me . . . while our eyes meet, I seem almost to do something (in the way of guarding it & getting hold of it tighter,) for our admirable, our incomparable relation” (191). James’ attention to their shared gaze, the look exchanged between the still image of Walpole as framed (object) and James as the viewer (subject) takes on a sexual charge that James cannot deny. He feels the heat of desire of his penetrating gaze, which increases in intensity as the letter continues. James compliments Walpole’s “handsome young face” and seductively purrs how “infinite” the “pleasure” is “to possess” his beloved boy; he elaborates by describing the fire of their imagined locking of eyes, which he wished could be even “tighter,” suggesting an erotic depth of visual penetration. He explains this further, by continuing with sexual innuendo: “So there you are—by which I mean here, so intimately, you are; & here we are—if it isn’t “there,” rather . . . This photographic intercourse is but a hollow stopgag at best, but, as photographic intercourse goes, it will serve; & in short, dearest Hugh, it does help me to live with you a little more. Thus I am leading the Life, as I say, with greater intensity” (191). In these lines, James carries on with his use of camp language, coyly using the words “intimately” and “photographic intercourse,” words that hearken back to the letters he penned to Howard Sturgis, in 1900, concerning their “happy little congress of two.” As he did with Sturgis, James uses a word with a specific sexual connotation that can be masked as innocuous to an unexpected reader, as the use of such a word could be explained away as coincidental. With Sturgis, James presented the double entendre of “congress,” while, with Walpole, he alluded to “intercourse”—a word that, according to the OED, had been in use to
describe sexual relations since 1798. Clearly, things were heating up between James and Walpole, so much in September, in fact, that two months later Benson confided his observations about the pair in the cited diary entry, which expressed his belief that James had fallen “in love” his dashing protégé. While James’ feelings for Walpole grew, he started to withdraw more from Fullerton, despite the pleas he wrote to Wharton for more information about him. James’ investment in a chosen beloved shifted, during the latter part of the summer in 1909.

According to Fred Kaplan, the autumn of 1909 found James not only interested in the young Hugh Walpole, but he had invested himself in another relationship with a very attractive, younger man: Jocelyn Persse. Edel called James’ initial attraction to Dudley Jocelyn Persse (1873-1943) “a case of love at first sight” and Kaplan contends that it was Persse, of all the young men James admired, that The Master “loved best.” When he first met Persse, in 1903, James quickly developed passionate affection for him, not unlike that which he eventually felt for Walpole. The beginning courtship was much the same, with photographs and playful letters that expressed desire: “As he always did with a new relationship, James initiated an exchange of photographs almost immediately. He could not get over his young friend’s handsomeness. ‘I want to hold on to you,’ he told him. They shared long London walks, brief Rye visits, and evenings at dinner and the theatre. ‘There is, for me, something admirable & absolute between us’” (513). The tactile nature of James’ language, his wanting “to hold on to” Persse, echoes that which he used when writing to Sturgis, Fullerton, and Walpole. On July 16th, 1909, James wrote to Persse, telling him of his “3 days’ motoring bout” with an “imperative friend” (Wharton), who had “swooped down” on him just after Persse had left Lamb House, only the week
before. This jaunt with Wharton and Fullerton was the same period during which Wharton resumed her sexual relations with her lover, with James in tow. Describing his recent visit with Persse as idyllic, James gushed, “Our days together a week ago but confirmed for me (as such always do) the felt beauty of our Intercourse. We shall never fall below it—it is the dearest thing possible; & I am, as always, dearest Jocelyn, ever so tenderly yours” (Gunter and Jobe 103). James uses the capitalized word “Intercourse, flirting with Persse, whose beauty he emphasized in a following letter, from November 5th: “I envy you thus more than ever your enchanted physique—though I would compromise on your beauty if I could only have your ease!” (104) For James, Persse was “the dearest thing possible” and he remained “tenderly” his, despite his other attachments to young men, like Fullerton and Walpole—men he saw and pursued during this same period. In November, 1909, James and Persse “celebrated a glorious weekend together at Lady Lovelace’s estate, Ockham,” from the 27th-29th, enjoying a “rather odd & melancholy, but also exquisite” time “in those fantastic contiguous apartments” (86). Kaplan cites additional lines from the same letter: “When I think if such scenes & occasions from this point of view I grind my teeth for homesickness, I reach out to you with a sort of tender frenzy” (515). James’ camp language resurfaces, as he claimed to “grind” his teeth (his favored image of “gnashing teeth”) and “reach out” to Persse, with a “tender frenzy” (here, the word “frenzy” carries a meaning of “uncontrollable excitement90”). This was the same month, of course, during which Benson remarked on Hugh Walpole’s growing popularity with James, who showed him off to fashionable crowds and gatherings of intellectual and artistic friends. Clearly, James kept himself

90 The OED defines one meaning of “frenzy” as linked to mental affliction, madness, derangement, and delirium, due to “uncontrollable rage or excitement,” even passion.
busy with his young men, especially Walpole and Persse, who drew his attention away from Fullerton, more and more. Perhaps the severity of the journalist’s blackmail situation continually warned James of the dangers that could arise out of such relationships and this, in turn, caused James to distance himself from such a reminder.

**Secret Sharers**

The letters exchanged between James and Wharton during the month of August, 1909—which addressed the blackmailing of Fullerton and their successful plan to allocate him the money, to pay off his extortionist—has been so well-documented and reviewed that I feel no need to rehash their exchange at length. What is most notable about this period of their correspondence, though, is that James focuses so much on the details of Fullerton’s pitiable situation that his voice shifts from one who was enamored to that of one anxious over the young man’s fate as a victim. This disempowering of Fullerton, in James’ view, stripped the journalist of his masculinity, where Fullerton had to rely upon the financial kindness of James and Wharton to rescue him from blackmail. On August 3, James explained to Wharton, “Now that we have got him—& it’s you, absolutely, who have so admirably & definitely pulled him out—we must keep him & surround him & help him to make up for all the dismal waste of power—waste of it in merely struggling against his (to put it mildly) inconvenience” (117). Here, James draws validates Wharton’s role in the rescuing of her lover, stressing the word “you” to affirm that she acted as the one who “pulled out” Fullerton, something deeply regrettable, as James goes on to discuss Fullerton’s loss of power in the whole affair. James appeals to Wharton that they need to “keep him,” “surround him,” and “help him,” pointing out the “dismal waste of power” that had been exhausted in the “struggling against” Fullerton’s
particular "inconvenience," as James puts it euphemistically. James suggests that their beloved had been stripped of his male power as the subject (the active writer), by his affair with Madame Mirecourt, and that, in order to reclaim his manhood, Fullerton needed the support of both Wharton and James. James and Wharton’s concerted effort in buoying up Fullerton’s writing career, during the months that followed, reveals their concern. James emphasizes the need for Fullerton to have the incriminating letters in hand, to ensure his own safety, since the danger of the blackmail itself even threatened James’ safety: "Kindly meanwhile say to Morton that I did receive his Boulogne letter & am still belatedly replying to it. I want to write him now—ever so discreetly & generally, but ever so attachedly. My delay was inevitable at the time" (118). Using discretion as the reason for his noticeable, “inevitable” silence with Fullerton, James expressed his need to back away a bit from becoming too enmeshed in the former’s affairs, which still remained dangerous, given the situation. Reassuring Wharton that he continued in his “attachment” to Fullerton, he, at the same time, looks to disentangle himself from any hint of scandal that could besmirch his carefully protected public persona. James, then, only a few lines later, quickly segues into a discussion of Walter Berry, reinforcing his growing detachment and necessary extraction from the difficult situation they were trying to resolve. Certainly, Wharton could see that James was starting to fade out of their triangulated dynamic—his emphasis on Wharton’s primary role as rescuer supported this—which would have been understandable, given his budding interest in Walpole and the discomfort of Fullerton’s all-too-frightening reminder of what could happen, should he let that his social façade, his mask, slip. Wharton, as a result of James’ impending removal, began to question her own role in her relationship with Fullerton.
These few months, between August and October, in 1909, became a charged period of emotional change for James, Wharton, and Fullerton, as their connections to each other shifted and evolved. Just as James’ relationship with Hugh Walpole started to flower, Wharton and Fullerton’s started to wilt, as the bloom was now off of the rose—since Wharton had discovered some of the weaknesses in her lover (his carelessness, loss of control, indiscretion, loss of power, etc.). Due to his infatuation with Walpole, James found Fullerton less enticing; he still cared about Fullerton, gnashed his teeth and yearned achingly, but now these expressions seemed less confident, more an expected part of the rhetoric employed in his correspondence with Wharton (as most of his communication with Fullerton filtered through her), affected by his reserve, his caution. Wharton started to question her own place within the affair with Fullerton, since without James to preside over their relationship she began to feel less anchored, less secure. The shift in the tone of the correspondence between August and October acts of evidence of this change. For, by August 15, James questions how Fullerton will react to his role in the rescue: “Of course he will interpret—my overture—but, frankly, I venture to hope & believe that he will, after the first step back, see the thing in a light—in the light in which it will have been presented. And if he does that I shall rejoice, & I am sure you deeply will. For it will mean the release of his mind, his spirit & his beautiful intelligence from a long bondage. And they are worth releasing” (119). Taking R.W.B. Lewis’s claim as accurate—that Fullerton had known of the scheme of loaning him the money for his blackmail through their publisher—the reader then finds it curious that James expressed anxious concern over how Fullerton would respond to his involvement, how he would “interpret” (here, the word is stressed by James) his “overture.” If Fullerton has
understood and accepted James’ involvement, then why would James have felt insecure? Perhaps, he needed reassurance, validation, even information, from Wharton, about Fullerton and this was his way of coaxing such valuable jewels of communication out from his dear Firebird. Since Wharton remained the conduit through which most of the energy between James and Fullerton flowed, James sought more disclosure from her, more of the “details” he always longed for in relation to her lover. Emphasizing the “light” in which something like their gesture needed to be viewed, only accessible by having to take a “step back,” James accentuates the need for Fullerton to see their act “in the light in which it will have been presented.” If Fullerton proves able to do such a thing, James suspected that they (he and Wharton) would then be able to “rejoice,” since finally “his mind, his spirit & his beautiful intelligence” would find a “release” from a “long bondage.”

Within a letter marked on a “Saturday Night,” which R.W.B. and Nancy Lewis date to “Late summer 1909,” Wharton expresses her growing sense of inferiority within her connection to Fullerton, since she no longer had James to bolster her role within the affair. She saw that they were growing apart, explaining: “It is impossible, in the nature of things, that our lives should run parallel much longer. I have faced the fact, & accepted it, & I am not afraid, except when I think of the pain & pity you may now feel for me” (189). As she was wont to do, Wharton expressed to Fullerton her fear of his losing interest in her, demonstrating her need for considerable and consistent validation from her lover. Afraid of being hurt, Wharton resigns herself to the “fact” that they would separate, with their lives no longer running “parallel.” One can only wonder at what kind of response Wharton was trying to coax out of her lover. She explains that she
only became “afraid” when she thought of Fullerton feeling “pain & pity” for her, exposing her deeply-rooted anxiety that was starting to crop up again within an intimate connection. Without James to help guide and reassure her, Wharton’s worry went unchecked, thus leading to her concern over the state of her romance. Considering Shari Benstock’s proposed trajectory for Wharton’s sexual relationship with Fullerton, Wharton’s growing need for reassurance from Fullerton starts to make sense, in that, by the end of that summer, she and Fullerton had reached the climax of the sexual activity:

Although one cannot date the end of the affair with absolute certainty, references in Edith’s later letters suggest that its sexual component was framed by her summer sojourn in England—“some divine hours,” as she would later refer to them. If so, their trysts included one night of lovemaking at the Charing Cross Hotel in London in June 1909, another at a hotel in Boulogne on the return trip in August, and several more nights during the week of their motor-flight with Henry James. Edith seems to have taken enough from these experiences—and their love letters, afternoon drives in the country, stolen kisses, and handholding—to ease her anger and anxiety at having been denied something she assumed other women took for granted. (225)

While Benstock pays careful attention to the physical expression of the desire that Wharton and Fullerton shared, the biographer also skims over James’ role, during that same period, as a companion within the affair. James had been there in France, when Wharton first consummated her passion for Fullerton, dined with the couple in London, when she and Fullerton had their night of passion at the Charing Cross Hotel, and he brought the pair together at him home, reuniting Wharton and Fullerton, for a week of romance. James played an integral role within the affair and without his presence, encouragement, and channeling of his desire into the pairing of Wharton and Fullerton, his Firebird started to falter. Wharton began to retreat, feeling unworthy of Fullerton, as if she were truly incapable of fulfilling his needs as a lover. Perhaps their union worked
so long as James played his part, since her biology impeded her ability to satisfy all of her lover’s desire. She explains, “I long to spare you; & so I want to tell you now, Dear, that I know how unequal the exchange is between us, how little I have to give that a man like you can care for, & how ready I am, when the transition comes, to be again the good comrade you once found me” (189). Wharton calls attention to Fullerton’s unique requirements as a lover, when she writes, “how little I have to give that a man like you can care for,” with her “like you” denoting his difference from ordinary men. Retreating into the role of “comrade,” Wharton signals her own confusion over what role she could play with Fullerton, what passions she could quell. Fearful that she will be unable to recognize in her lover the signs of ennui, Wharton confesses, “My only dread is lest my love should blind me, & my heart whisper ‘Tomorrow’ when my reason says ‘Today’ . . . To escape that possibility, can’t we make a pact that you shall give me the signal, & one day simply call me ‘mon ami’ instead of ‘mon amie’? If I felt sure of your doing that, I should be content!” (190) Pleading with Fullerton to give her a sign to warn her of his growing indifference towards her, Wharton asks him to use a subtle “grammatical gender shift from feminine to masculine in French that cannot be heard in the spoken word” (Benstock 225), with his referring to her as “a male friend” as the firing of the signal flare. Susan Goodman, in her *Edith Wharton’s Inner Circle*, refers to this same passage from Wharton’s epistle as a moment of complexity within their relationship, where Wharton assumed multiple roles with Fullerton that echoed those of both his parents, of both genders, a result of his sexual versatility.

Goodman argues that Fullerton’s bisexuality allowed Wharton to experience the desire she witnessed in the queer men who were her closest friends and that Wharton,
within her affair with her lover, assumed the dual role of his father and mother, that their affair allowed her to explore queer forms of desire. “Wharton embodied the rectitude of her lover’s minister father and the ‘sensual effusiveness’ of his overly solicitous mother,” claims Goodman. “With the bisexual Fullerton, she was able to explore not only her own eroticism but also that of James, Sturgis, Lubbock, Lapsley, and Norton. He supplied the one missing element in her relationships with these men, whose friendships prepared her to take a lover” (59). Wharton felt safe with Fullerton, according to Goodman, because of his bisexuality, which allowed her, in turn, to become uncharacteristically submissive and dependent—attributes traditionally considered womanly and feminine. It certainly is interesting that, in her letters to Fullerton, Wharton perpetually describes herself as a woman, as female, as connected to a feminine experience, given that she went to such great lengths to disassociate herself from any overt feminist cause and that she subscribed to the view that women’s intellects were inferior to men’s. Hence, this is why Wharton begins to experience fear with Fullerton. Fullerton’s bisexuality allowed Wharton to explore her femininity and womanhood, while at the same time she too could participate in the male exchange of desire in that she became a surrogate for James. The more Wharton felt connected to a female subject position, the more she saw herself as vulnerable and unworthy, causing her to feel insecure in her relationship. Without James there to support her, Wharton experienced confusion and her use of the French terms “ami” and “amie” expresses her unease, in that she sought a relationship with Fullerton outside of the anxiety, judgment, and rigid constraint that both she and James, at times, found paralyzing.
In *To Walt Whitman, America*, Price directly connects Wharton’s play on the French words “ami” and “amie” to Whitman and his concept of comradeship, explored in his volume of poetry, *Leaves of Grass*. As the “borders between friendship and love became blurred,” Wharton invoked Whitman’s image of the “comrade,” which for her remained ambiguous and somewhat undefined, to communicate to Fullerton her understanding of their shared otherness, that she understood that they were alike in their difference. “Wharton seems to call for a clear distinction between friend and lover, but she uses the term ‘comrade,’ which clarifies little about the degree of intimacy implied,” claims Price. “Given that Wharton had been reading *Leaves* with Fullerton, a man she knew was drawn to both sexes, what does she signal in offering to be his comrade, his ami? . . .

The polyvocal character of Wharton’s utterance—especially notable in the use of the Whitmanian term ‘comrade’—creates complexity” (46). Though Wharton claims to want a clarification of her role with Fullerton, Price’s interpretation of her play on the words “ami” and “amie” suggests that she, instead, sought to obscure any clearly defined positions they might take with one another. She hoped for a complexity in their connection that stemmed from Whitman’s liberating sexuality, expressed in the verse that appealed so strongly to all of the members of her Inner Circle. Price investigates Whitman’s treatment of the terms “ami” and “amie” in his poetry:

Wharton distinguishes between “amie” and “ami,” and, as a close reader of Whitman, she may have noticed the poet’s use of the word “amie” in the 1855 “Song of Myself” (“Extoler of amies and those that sleep in each other’s arms”); “Choosing to go with him on brotherly terms”). Since Wharton’s French was impeccable, it is likely that she would have noted the oddity of Whitman’s usage: he employs the feminine form of the ending (amie) in applying it to male friends. The poet’s gender crossing was clearly purposeful: in the

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91 Whitman alludes, here, to the root of the word “comrade,” to men who shared each other’s bed, or “cama,” and often slept “in each other’s arms.”
essay “America’s Mightiest Inheritance” (1856) Whitman defines and
distinguishes between the words “Ami (ah'-me, masculine)” and “Amie
(ah-mi, feminine)—Dear friend.” James Perrin Warren observes that the
word “amie” is an especially important element in Whitman’s vocabulary;
the term is “sexually ambivalent, and . . .  is an early version of the
‘Calamus’ theme of ‘need of comrades.’” Whitman turns to the French to
describe a relationship for which English lacks vocabulary. The poet’s
word “amie” is meant to “project a new social relation between men, and .
. . to help bring about the new social relation. In her most helpful moods,
Wharton turned to Whitman to pursue a similar goal—an altered sense of
human connectedness—that would bring to relations between men and
women a new equality and depth of feeling. (46-7)

Price seems convinced that Wharton felt excluded from the “new social relation”

Whitman proposed, due to the limits of her biological sex. For Price, Wharton’s biology
prevented her from truly participating in the sort of brotherhood that Whitman expoused.

(The reader notes that, in Price’s passage from “Song of Myself,” Whitman associates
“amie” with “brotherly terms,” as a reference to the Greek fraternity among comrades.

Given Wharton’s term “The Brotherhood,” her allusion to Fullerton, in wanting to be his
“amie,” his “comrade,” suggests that she wanted more from their relationship, an
intellectual companionship that went far deeper than any purely physical connection they
had.) Price opens up what Benstock sees, on the part of Wharton, as a simple signal of
wanting male friendship (using a simple gender shift in language) to a complex
understanding of Whitmanian sexual interconnectedness, revealing how the word “amie”
functioned within Whitman’s poetry. Most biographers have read this passage from
Wharton’s letter to Fullerton as a moment of weakness, of resignation to an eventual
fading out of their sexual connection. Price’s reading of Wharton’s letter suggests the
opposite, that Wharton actively sought a deeper, more liberated relationship with
Fullerton that challenged traditional constructs of desire, gender, and sexuality. That we
even have Wharton’s letters to Fullerton to study is something of a gift, considering that

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Wharton meant such correspondence to be returned to her or destroyed for personal protection.

In her recent biography of Wharton, Hermione Lee reinforces the fact that Wharton purposefully and meticulously weeded through personal correspondence, to destroy evidence that could potentially cause some sort of scandal or would reveal more about the author and her friends than she would have liked. During the “autumn and winter of 1909, her chance of personal happiness seemed to be fading away” (334) and Lee contends that, as her romance with Fullerton started to wilt, she became more and more anxious about his possession of the love letters she had written to him. Lee explains:

Regrets and resentments began to dominate the correspondence. She was getting anxious about her letters, and wanted her old ones back: ‘My love of order makes me resent the way in which inanimate things survive their uses!’ An intriguing letter of 1910 implies that Morton was thinking of using Henry James as the ‘custodian’ for his papers, but with James so ill that was now out of the question. If any of ‘those old letters in which I used to “unpack my soul” to you’ still survived, she would rather ‘immolate them on a beautiful pyre of bright flames’ than have them fall into other hands. When her divorce was looming, her ‘documents’ were becoming an increasing cause for alarm, and she had ‘very special reasons’ for wanting them safely back. But Morton never did return them. (334)

The timing here is more than coincidental, if one remembers that James had performed a massive burning of his letters, in his garden, at the beginning of the year of 1910.

Wharton imagines a “beautiful pyre of bright flames” that will “immolate” the old letters which contained information about her private self, the interiorized Wharton that she fought so diligently to shield from a public audience. On November 27th, 1909, Wharton petitioned Fullerton, “Can you arrange, some day next week—before Wednesday—to bring, or send, me such fragments of correspondence as still exist? I have asked you this
once or twice, as you know, & you have given the talk a turn which has made it impossible for me to insist without all sorts of tragic implications that I had wished above all to avoid. Therefore I write instead” (193). Emphasizing the fact that she had to ask Fullerton numerous times, in person, to send her back her letters, Wharton expresses frustration and tries to persuade Fullerton that her wanting the correspondence back had nothing to do with the “tragic implications” he made, but rather sprang from a personal quirk of maintaining order in her life. Using writing instead of losing a verbal argument, Wharton shows that Fullerton must have been quite charismatic, even manipulative, in the ways he could twist hurt words around to exploit her emotions. Feeling that it was now “impossible” to request the letters from Fullerton in person, Wharton confesses that she must now resort to writing (creating in fact another letter to collect) in order to kindly demand the missives she felt had “survived their use.” Clearly, Wharton’s increasing concern about these letters, when viewed in conjunction with James’ burning of his personal papers, in 1910, signifies a clear end to the affair both she and James had shared with Fullerton.

Wharton’s affair with Fullerton had brought about recognition, on the part of her closest friends, of her interiorized, masculine, queer self that she discovered through her relationship with both the journalist and James. Those who knew Wharton best and had earned her confidence understood the significance of her self-discovery and initiation into the brotherhood of the Inner Circle, as a participant within the pederastic tradition, that year. This was most openly revealed by Howard Sturgis when he presented Wharton with the symbolic gift of William Johnson Cory’s Ionica II, on October 31st, 1909—a rare and beautiful volume, one of only 500 copies that were “privately printed” (Ramsden...
28)—inscribed with an important passage. Sturgis tellingly composed the following verse in recognition of Wharton’s acceptance:

To Edith Wharton.
Although, dear lady, you decry
Your servant’s taste in poetry,
I think you will not wholly scorn
this book I loved ere you were born.
I loved, as only schoolboys do,
the poems and the poet too.
Grown old, I pass the torch to you. (28)

By figurative passing “the torch” to Wharton, Sturgis accepts and indoctrinates Wharton into “The Brotherhood,” their “band” and “happy few.” He calls attention to his own age, as he has “grown old,” past the age of those younger “schoolboys” who love Cory’s poetry as only they can without “scorn.” Despite the fact that Sturgis calls Wharton, “dear lady,” he still includes her in the pederastic tradition, giving her a text that was notably recognized as representing queer male desire, as Linda Dowling explains. The import of the phrase, “I pass the torch to you,” cannot find overemphasis in terms of its significance concerning Wharton’s assuming an accepted, recognized role within the Qu’acre Circle as an equal, an initiate. Sturgis’ assertion, “I loved, as only schoolboys do / the poems and the poet too,” demonstrates his awareness of Cory’s place within the male homosexual literary tradition that Wharton had begun to understand. His time at Eton and Cambridge ensured his awareness of the Hellenistic ideal of same-sex male desire within an educational setting and now Sturgis passed this knowledge along to Wharton, revealing his confidence in her ability to understand his sexuality and pederasty itself. Wharton’s relationship with James and Fullerton had provided its own education: an awareness of Whitman and idealized comradeship; an appreciation of a rich, queer cultural history that included numerous, talented male writers, artists, and performers; a
more sophisticated understanding of language in terms of camp, euphemism, and playful
double entendres that simultaneously concealed and celebrated same-sex desire; wisdom
about the sublimation of desire within complicated, triangulated relationships (especially
those between two men and a woman); a challenging of traditional social mores and
constructs (in terms of both gender and sexuality); and an exploration of the taboo. Faced
with much to learn, Wharton reached out to Fullerton and James, those whom she felt
were instrumental for her successful initiation. She would only find disappointment,
during the winter of 1910, when both men, for very different reasons (for Fullerton, it
was a lack of interest, for James, it was illness), failed to support her during her
metamorphosis.

In a letter written in “Mid-April 1910,” Wharton wrote to Fullerton to express her
disappointment and hurt over his treatment of her, ever since a change occurred in him
during December, 1909, which she had noticed but failed to understand. Fullerton started
to pull away and noticeable gaps in communication emerged, creating considerable
frustration for Wharton, whose letters became increasingly frantic, due to a perceived loss
of his interest. Given her ability to comprehend Fullerton’s uniqueness and needs,
Wharton felt bewildered that their connection changed in the way that she had feared.
Perhaps her fatalistic view of their affair brought about its end, with her anxiety and need
for validation suffocating such a free spirit as Fullerton, but, certainly, Wharton felt
bitterly wounded by his behavior and did not mince words when informing him of her
resentful feelings:

I understand something of life, I judged you long ago, & I accepted you as
you are, admiring all your gifts & your great charm, & seeking only to
give you the kind of affection that should help you most, & lay the least
claim on you in return. But one cannot have all one’s passionate
tenderness demanded one day, & ignored the next, without reason or explanation, as it has pleased you to do since your enigmatic change in December. I have had a difficult year—but the pain within my pain, the last turn of the screw, has been the impossibility of knowing what you wanted in me, & what you felt for me—at a time when it seemed natural that, if you had any sincere feeling for me, you should see my need of an equable friendship—I don’t say love because that is not made to order!—but the kind of tried tenderness that old friends seek in each other in difficult moments in life. My life was better before I knew you. That is, for me, the sad conclusion of this sad year. And it is a bitter thing to say to the one being who has ever loved d’amour. (207-8)

Wharton powerfully reveals her pain to Fullerton in this moving letter. She reminds Fullerton that she understands his sexual complexity in that she is not as naïve as some had thought her to be—her love of French novels betrayed something of her interest in more worldly subject matter. She writes that she comprehended “something of life,” that she had “judged” Fullerton “long ago,” and that she “accepted” him, “admiring all” of his “gifts” and his “great charm.” Wharton only ever wanted to “help” Fullerton, to share an “equable friendship,” and, as a result, then felt very hurt by his lack of care, in that he refused her even the “kind of tried tenderness that old friends seek in each other in difficult moments in life.” Wharton then hits him with her regret: “My life was better before I knew you.” The reader can only imagine the kind of heartache Wharton experienced when she wrote this line. The one man she thought understood her complexity, in the way that she understood his, had abandoned her, and was fading out of her life; she had no control over his leaving. Her letters from earlier in the year, from the Winter of 1910, accounted for her growing resentment of and frustration by Fullerton’s neglect, during a time when she needed him most.

When Fullerton exhibited the “enigmatic change in December” (Wharton’s use of italics), Wharton herself had been finding herself in a maelstrom of change concerning
her marriage to Teddy Wharton. On December 8th, Teddy approached Wharton with an “unexpected confession”: “He told Edith that the previous summer he had converted a number of her holdings, including those in steel, into cash, had speculated on his own behalf, and then purchased an apartment in Boston,” R.W.B. Lewis writes. “He established a young woman there as his mistress and lived with her for several months. He also claimed to have let out the spare rooms to several chorus girls as tenants; and he added other picturesque details” (275). One could only have imagined Wharton’s response to such incredible news. Given her own affair and the poor state of their marital relations, Wharton must not have been so shocked to hear that her husband had been unfaithful, but embezzlement was an entirely different issue. That her husband stole from her in order to keep a mistress must have infuriated Wharton beyond belief. As Wharton dug deeper, during the following months, she learned that matters were much worse than she had originally thought: “But it came out that Teddy had embezzled— and spent—not less than fifty thousand dollars from Edith’s several trusts. The ‘small flat’ turned out, according to the deed of sale, to be a ‘parcel of land with buildings’ on Mountfort Street, near Beacon Street in one of the most desirable sections of Boston and near his mother’s former home” (277). With threats of being sent to a sanatorium, Teddy pleaded not to be sent away and, to gain empathy, visited a specialist numerous times. Dr. Kinnicutt assessed his mental state and was able to extract, from Teddy’s narratives, certain kernels of truth which countered the fictional embellishments meant to shock Wharton, his wife. Drawing upon his inheritance from his mother’s will, Teddy made restitution to Wharton, when his brother arranged for fifty thousand dollars to be transferred to one of her trusts. Strangely enough, Wharton learned that her husband’s
infidelity followed a timeline that matched her own, beginning in 1908. Lewis suggests that Teddy sensed the attraction between his wife and Fullerton and that, after “over more than two decades” of the “sexlessness of his marriage,” he finally acted upon the “perfectly normal,” “vigorous, sexual nature” he possessed. “Teddy could not have failed to detect, in the Paris winters of 1908 and 1909, that something more was in the air than Edith’s customary enjoyment of the conversation of other males, and that Morton Fullerton was playing a role in her life very different from that of the others,” Lewis asserts. “It is not unlikely that, by way of recompense, the fact induced him to step up, if not to initiate, his own program of misbehavior” (278). Thus, when Wharton wrote to Fullerton of “the difficult moments” in her recent life, she referred to the disastrous state of her marriage to a man whose mental instability became overwhelmingly burdensome. Certainly, it is understandable that Wharton would have expected Fullerton to offer her some sign of support during those trying months, to show her some consideration and concern, especially given his own contribution to her marital struggle. Sadly, in addition to Wharton’s financial, marital, and romantic troubles, Wharton could only watch as James retreated into a dark fog of depression, in 1910, which rendered him unable to be the support and guide he had been to her for so long in her affair with Fullerton.

**Nervous Conditions**

In his biography of Henry James, Leon Edel writes that beginning early in 1909 Henry James wrestled with feelings of depression which foreshadowed a collapse into melancholy, occurring in 1910. Prompted by the abysmal failure of New York Edition of his novels—evidenced by the meager royalty statement he first received in October, 1908—James felt horribly disappointed by what had been a four year investment “of
unremunerated labor, the gathering in of his work of a lifetime, which he had counted on to yield revenue for his declining years” (433). The shock of the poor sales apparently launched James into a depression, as noted by Miss Bosanquet in her diary, when she recorded “Mr. James depressed. Nearly finished Golden Bowl preface—bored by it—says he’s ‘lost his spring’ for it” (434). By the January of 1909, James exhibited marked physical symptoms, bodily manifestations of nervous energy—heart trouble, palpitations, and shortness of breath—which motivated his contacting of Sir William Osler; Osler would then refer James to a “renowned heart specialist of the time, Sir James Mackenzie” (435). The heart specialist, during an appointment on February 25, 1909, reassured James that he was in good health, that he only had been demonstrating the expected signs of his 66 years of age, and that he should carry on with life in a normal fashion. Edel suggests that since James identified with his brother’s health issues, he experienced psychosomatic symptoms that were more psychologically than physiologically based: “He had apparently decided that he was as ill as his brother” (436). Since James had been anxious over William’s condition and perhaps this led to his hypochondria, a fixation on his own state of poor health. Mackenzie’s advice had a cheering effect on James, despite the Master’s skepticism, in that the doctor managed to rally James’ spirits and “during the rest of 1909 found himself much improved” (436). One must acknowledge the ramifications of the depression James suffered in the beginning of the year, since, in 1910, James relapsed into a full-blown melancholic state, prompting serious and recurring thoughts of suicide. Clearly, during the time when Wharton carried on her affair with Fullerton and James fostered his budding romantic friendship with Walpole, James also had to shoulder the weighty burden of his physical ailments. His
excess weight made it more difficult to remain ambulatory and A.C. Benson took note of James’ poor eating habits, when they dined together, watching The Master delight in rich foods that could not have helped matters any. Early in 1910, the cloud of depression reappeared, this time, causing James to sink into such deep levels of despair that he, on several occasions, considered committing suicide.

Beginning with the New Year, 1910, Henry James started to show signs of mental affliction, once again. Food lost its taste and James’ hands shook so badly he could no longer write; his limbs became weak and he lost weight unexpectedly, experiencing shortness of breath and suffering nervous palpitations, according to Kaplan (522). Edel records that James had experienced “two bad attacks of gout, first in one foot and then in the other” prior to the end of 1909 and the resulting frustration exacerbated his other health problems in the following months—health problems which stemmed more from the state of his mind, than his actual corporeal condition. By the close of January, James “crawled into bed” and sought the medical advice of his local physician, Dr. Ernest Skinner, who subsequently found nothing organically wrong with his patient, ordering James to seek “absolute rest and quietness.” “It appeared to the doctor that his patient was deeply depressed,” writes Kaplan. “The fault, James was certain, lay with that damn Fletcherism92, which had ruined his stomach and brought on, he told Henrietta Reubell, ‘a fiendishly bad & vicious gastric & digestive crisis.’ The rest of his miseries followed from that” (522). During the month of February, James’ spirits started to lift, as he began

92 Wharton wrote to Fullerton of James’ terrible state of his gastrointestinal affairs, a result of “Fletcherizing.” R.W.B. Lewis and Nancy Lewis explain: “For half a dozen years, James had been ‘Fletcherizing’: that is, following the regimen of the American author and lecturer Horace Fletcher (1849-1919), who in books like *Glutton or Epicure* and *The A.B.-Z of Nutrition* had advocated the slow and lengthy mastication of food” (201). Sir William Osler dispelled the idea of James’ chewing habits as the cause of his ailments, suggesting instead that James suffered from “melancholia.”
to take drives with Skinner, willing to wait in the car, as his doctor visited other patients, so desperate was he for “air and company” (523). Lonely at his home Lamb House, James “felt in dismal enforced exile from anything lively or interesting” and during “the beginning of March, he had another, but this time more dismal relapse” (524). William James sent his brother his son Harry (named after his uncle) to look in on him and the timing of his arrival perhaps saved James’ life, as James had become suicidal, collapsing in his nephew’s arms with sobs of despair. James’ struggle with depression only started to lessen by July of 1910.

The timing of James’ psychological troubles, during the latter part of 1909 and the first half of 1910, coincides with the period of decline for Wharton’s affair with Fullerton, providing a potential contributing factor to the end of the relationship. As James lost interest in Fullerton, distracted by his flirtations with Walpole and Persse, he also found himself sinking into a debilitating state of melancholy. Simultaneously, Wharton’s marriage to Teddy Wharton started to crumble, as her husband’s infidelity, his embezzlement of her money, and his severe mental illness drained her spirits. Wharton became very concerned with James’ well-being, during his period of depression, sending him regular letters and baskets of fruit to cheer him. Aware of Sturgis’ own struggle with depression as well, Wharton wrote to Fullerton, on March 24th, 1910, of just how bad things had gotten with James, when she thought of where he could stay in order to recover from his malady, considering dear Qu’acre:

I don’t think Rye a solution, & I am full of forebodings, & so is Howard, to whom James spoke openly of suicide.—Enfin, now I shall feel that for the next ten days I can do my best, whatever’s that’s worth. But what a strange situation I shall be in, entre mes deux malades [between my two patients]!—And what queer uses destiny makes of me! So different from those I fancied I was made for.—All I know is that I seem to have

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Wharton’s use of key words, here, like “strange,” “queer” and “different,” emphasize the new identity she had been discovering in herself, as a result of her relationship with Fullerton. Claiming that her “perennial springs of strength” had “never flowed so freely as since my love for you has fed them,” Wharton located the change in her emotional connection to Sturgis and James as being rooted in her love for Fullerton, a love that opened up the “queer” aspects of her destiny. James’ emotional state was dire, in that he was speaking “openly of suicide” to Sturgis, a subject of conversation that had been arising when James spoke with his nephew as well. Wharton felt overwhelming concern for the Master, “These sudden changes are so unnatural & alarming in such a nature as his, & the ups are so much less up than the downs are down, that I dread the reaction when his nephew leaves on Thursday, & am infinitely glad that I shall be there to help him through that bad moment” (205). Though James still insisted that his illness had digestive causes, his brother William helped him to see that he had experienced a “nervous breakdown” (Edel 441). “William continued to call it ‘melancholia,’ and after a while Henry accepted the idea, writing to Edmund Gosse that he had had ‘a sort of nervous breakdown,’” asserts Edel. “Hugh Walpole, who came to see the novelist at Garland’s Hotel, found him ‘most frightfully depressed—most melancholy conversation.’ But life in a hotel was no solution for the nervous Master” (441). James had been staying with his nephew at the Garland Hotel, mid-March 1910, and Wharton’s letter to Fullerton expressed her worry over proper arrangements for James’ care, once Harry James returned home, leaving his uncle on his own once again. Thankfully, William and Alice James sailed from America to be with James, to provide him with “family, distraction,
company,” which would bolster his spirits and divert his attention away from the matters that troubled his mind (like financial concerns).

When Wharton wrote to Fullerton, during the April of 1910, and expressed her disappointment that he offered her no support during a period that had been one of the most “difficult moments in life,” she found his abandonment of both her and James to be a betrayal. During the months between December 1909 and April 1910, Wharton had repeatedly written letters to Fullerton, seeking not only her own support, but that for James as well: “Henry asked for you with such tenderness that you wd write him a little word of congratulation & souhaite [hope or wish] if you could hear the inflexion of his voice as he said:—‘Down there, alone at Rye, I used to lie & think of Morton, & ache over him” (200). Wharton tried to appeal to Fullerton’s sympathy for James, stressing how much the Master did “ache” (Wharton’s use of italics) for the younger man, when alone at Lamb House. Hoping that such a sad admission of desire for Fullerton, on the part of James, would move her lover to be more caring towards the older Master, Wharton called attention to the “inflexion of his voice” when James had mournfully confessed how much he had missed and longed for Fullerton. Her correspondence yielded little of the response that she had expected from Fullerton, as her letters remain peppered with references to comradeship—repeated reminders of what such a thing meant. She began to question whether or not Fullerton understood what Whitmanian comradeship was, what it entailed and what obligations one had to fulfill. Caring for comrades when they took ill was a core theme, since Whitman had nursed young soldiers back to health during the Civil War and this act inspired his *Calamus* poems. For James, Wharton, and their confreres, the act of nursing became an important one; within the
Inner Circle, all of the James’ and Wharton’s most intimate friends engaged in or benefited from this act of caregiving.

The onset of World War I created a space within which members of the Inner Circle were able to participate in the tradition that Whitman had drawn upon in *Leaves of Grass*, with his caring for soldiers on the battlefield. Given pederasty’s roots in a Greek military setting, this connection between warfare and male bonding makes sense, as those older men who did or could not serve in battle became the nurses who offered their beloveds care and support when they were wounded. In 1914, this became a significant act for the Inner Circle, in that James, Wharton, Lapsley, and Lubbock all did their parts to help those wounded in France. Susan Goodman examines the importance of their service:

Infused with the spirit of Walt Whitman, who tended Civil War casualties, Lapsley spent weeks in Boulogne sitting by the bedsides of old pupils. (In the next war, he worried about consuming food that could go to others and eventually returned to the United States.) Lubbock worked for the British Red Cross in France, Egypt, and London. James made his Watchbell Studio available to Belgium refugees, chaired the American Volunteer Motor-Ambulance Corps, and helped Wharton collect pieces for *The Book of the Homeless* (1916) . . . Norton joined the British Admiralty; Smith was commissioned first in the Yorkshire Regiment and then in the Coldstream Guards and awarded the Military Cross and the Croix de Guerre; and Sturgis took lodgings in London and read, censored, and readdressed the correspondence of German prisoners. (66-7)

James, Wharton, Lapsley, Lubbock, Norton, John Hugh Smith, and Sturgis all assumed specific roles during World War I that revealed a great deal about their commitment both to their political beliefs and Whitmanian service during the war. For the Master, the war had given him a sense of purpose and a chance to live out a fantasy that had haunted him since youth, when he was unable to serve in the Civil War and watched his brother go off
Kaplan, like Goodman, calls upon the image of Whitman during the Civil War in connection to James' investment in such service during 1914: "Like Walt Whitman, he had become a nurse to the wounded flower of the nation. Having over the decades become a lover of Whitman, he again had a chance to do what Whitman had done. At last he did his Civil War service" (555). During times of crisis, comrades needed to "band" together as brothers, to care for each other and offer the support that only they could give each other as participants in the pederastic tradition. Edel also emphasizes James' self-envisioned role, when he cared for soldiers during World War I, as being like that of Whitman during the Civil War: "Friends of the Master wondered how the soldiers reacted to his subtle leisurely talk—but he seemed quite capable of entertaining and comforting them. He likened himself to Walt Whitman during the Civil War" (516). In addition to the examples that World War I offered (in terms of the Qu'acre set's deep concern for one another's well-being), men in charged, "romantic friendships" often demonstrated great care for one another—as evidenced by William Haynes-Smith's devotion to Howard Sturgis and Percy Lubbock's commitment to A.C. Benson—when men in these relationships fell ill. Another example could be found in Gaillard Lapsley's attentiveness to his living companion, a man by the name of "Morgan," at the estate of Fen Ditton Hall, outside Cambridge, in the village of Fen Ditton.

According to Benson, in a diary entry from November, 1909, Gaillard Lapsley had moved in with a wealthy American friend, at Fen Ditton, by the name of Morgan,

93 According to Sheldon M. Novick, in his Henry James: The Young Master, the Civil War loomed heavily in James' mind, due to his inability to serve, when his brother, Wilky joined the 54th regiment and was eventually injured severely in battle on July 18th, 1863. James' brother Bob also enlisted, serving in the 55th regiment. In August, 1862, James visited army hospital tents to see and cheer wounded soldiers and later "thought that Walt Whitman's tender, elegiac emotion was like his own," when he read "Whitman's book" and "thought that Whitman, too, had felt something of the unity" (81).
who seemed unwell and tragic in his purposelessness. Morgan seemed to admire his housemate Lapsley, from Benson’s observations of the pair, despite his generally morbid demeanor. "Morgan is a bald, grizzled, lined man—very rich + hopelessly selfless + demoralizes, who fleets over the world," wrote Benson. "He has nothing to do + does nothing. Lapsley says he is kind, able, sensible, + that it is a sad tragedy, his strenua inertia. I took him to be a man of 60, + found him to be not 40! . . . He was pathetically kind + hospitable, + was delighted to see Lapsley so brilliant + admired, but something uncomforted + miserable wafted to me, like a grievous odour, from the soul of the man." Disturbed by something unnamed (again, the "love that dare not speak its name") concerning Morgan, Benson—who often became intensely jealous when his younger male friends (like Lapsley, Sturgis, or Lubbock) took up with other men, for Benson meant being forgotten or neglected—demonstrated anxiety when watching the relationship between his good friend and Morgan. The "grievous odour" of the "something uncomforted + miserable" that "wafted" to Benson suggests that Benson might have suspected Morgan to be was actively engaged in a sexual relationship with either Lapsley, or other men, given the other admissions Benson makes about finding

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94 According to Guglielmo Ferrero’s *Characters and Events of Roman History: From Caesar to Nero*, translated by Frances Ferrero, published in 1909:

> This is the state of mind that is now diffusing itself throughout Europe; the same state of mind that, with the documents at hand, I have found in the age of Caesar and Augustus, and seen progressively diffusing itself throughout ancient Italy. The likeness is so great that we re-find in those far-away times, especially in the upper classes, exactly that restless condition that we define by the word “nervousness.” Horace speaks of this state of the mind, which we consider peculiar to ourselves, and describes it, by felicitous image as strenua inertia—strenuous inertia—agitation vain and ineffective, always wanting something new, desiring most ardently yet speedily tiring of a desire gratified. (28-9)

As Ferrero describes it, “strenua inertia” resembled neurasthenia and ennui, as a psychological disorder of the wealthier classes, bored by the need for constant change, immediate gratification, and feelings of continual dissatisfaction. I find the significance of the Roman allusion, here, from the same year fascinating in its coincidence; perhaps, Benson had been reading material like that which Ferrero wrote.

sexual relationships between men disagreeable and distasteful, although he clearly did
approve of same-sex desire, if not physically expressed. The observations that Benson
recorded suggests that Lapsley moved in with Morgan to be a help and support to him,
with Morgan appreciating other people’s recognition of Lapsley’s “brilliance.” In an
entry from October 25th, 1910, Benson calls Morgan “the Lapsley millionaire,” and
apparently Morgan completely renovated Fen Ditton Hall, much to the liking of Benson,
who envied the beautiful estate. By 1911, Benson resented how much Lapsley benefited
from his relationship with Morgan, who was ill enough at that point in time to be abroad
due to his poor health: “Went out unwillingly to dine at Fen Ditton—a charming house—
I never saw anything nicer: but I should not like to live, as Lapsley does, at Morgan’s
expense, drinking his wines, etc, etc, no one giving a thought to the poor host, who is ill
at Wierbaden.” That Benson makes such a point of Lapsley’s possession of Morgan,
calling him “Lapsley’s millionaire,” and suggests that he was able to exploit his
relationship with Morgan for living expenses, fines wines, and the “etc, etc” that Morgan
proffered, implies that Lapsley possibly had an arrangement not unlike that of The Babe
with Howard Sturgis. In return for complete financial support, Lapsley, as his living
companion, could offer his own form of care, which must have been enough to satisfy
Morgan, who continued to allow Lapsley to live with him. Eventually, Morgan’s
hospitality grew to the extent that he acquiesced in permitting Percy Lubbock to move
into Fen Ditton Hall, as well, by Lapsley’s request (during the time that Benson suspected
that Lapsley and Lubbock were starting a “romantic friendship”). This relationship
between Lapsley and Morgan contributes to the overall pattern that the members of the

96 See A.C. Benson’s diaries at the Pepys Library, Magdalene College, University of Cambridge, England,
Vol. 119 (1 February to 11 March 1911), pp. 5-6.
Inner Circle created with their care for living companions and the wounded from World War I. This recurring act of caring for the afflicted becomes symbolic of the self-sacrifice that Whitman modeled through his form of comradeship, a practice that signified the commitment of same-sex male bonding—especially where such relationships could not lead to marriage or having children.

Part of James’ intense loneliness in 1910 sprang from his recognition of the isolated existence he led, due to his fear of sexual intimacy. James had not been able to directly act upon his desire for Fullerton, for many years, and his experiment with Wharton (their shared relationship) had failed to bring him any closer to the actual physical satiation of that desire for him. His growing and continuing relationships with both Walpole and Persse made James all the more aware of the intense feeling of loneliness that celibacy and the absence of a companion wrought. He imagined the physical intimacy that his closest friends possibly enjoyed, like Wharton and Fullerton, Sturgis and the Babe, and Lapsley and Morgan (later Lubbock), who all had more than photographs of and letters from their lovers to admire or appreciate. “He felt painfully lonely, ‘without Babes or Kith or Kin of any kind,’ he told Howard Sturgis,” writes Fred Kaplan (523). Only when his family arrived to stay with him did James’s spirits start to lift, as he now had the “Kin” to care for him, who would take over the role that Wharton maintained, when Harry James had left, awaiting the arrival of William and Alice James. The close proximity of Wharton to James during his nervous breakdown must have shown Wharton that their triangulated relationships was not really working and that James had retreated from her affair with Fullerton. James still asked after Fullerton, as demonstrated clearly in the letters that James wrote to Wharton, with his snatches of his
characteristic camp language, but something had changed. Fullerton’s withdrawal and lack of support for both Wharton and James sent a strong message, signaling the journalist’s selfishness and concern only for his own well-being. Wharton became exasperated, over the course of their correspondence during the spring of 1910, pleading with Fullerton to show some sign of concern and love for James, for it was in that same letter from March 18th, where she confided, “How little I believe in Howard Sturgis’s theory, that he is self-sufficient, & just lets us love him out of god-like benevolence! I never saw anyone who needed warmth more than he does—he’s dying for want of it” (200). Wharton’s use of italics to stress “dying” creates the sense of urgency she hoped would motivate Fullerton to some expression of compassion, to move him to act out the relationship of the comrade by caring for James. Fullerton failed this test with both Wharton and James. Wharton’s resulting confusion finally forced her to see that Fullerton possibly did not understand their relationship as she did.

Wharton struggled to make sense of her role with Fullerton, which she tried to work out for herself through the act of writing to Fullerton during 1910. In one letter from that winter, Wharton reassured Fullerton, “Don’t answer. It’s useless.—I am your camarade” (197), and, in the next, took the opposite tack, writing, “What you wish, apparently, is to take of my life the inmost & uttermost that a woman—a woman like me—can give for an hour, now & then, when it suits you; & when the hour is over, to leave me out of your mind & out of you life as a man leaves the companion who has accorded him a transient distraction. I think I am worth more than that, or worth, perhaps I had better say, something quite different” (197). Wharton emphasizes that she is different from other women, using “a woman like me” to signal her queerness, and
suggested that Fullerton needed to recognize that she deserved better treatment, "something quite different" from the current state of their relationship. In April, Wharton had reached the point of frustration and recrimination, but by May she started to accept that Fullerton was incapable of giving more than he could, that he had brought about positive changes in her, despite the hurt she now experienced. "I said once that my life was better before I knew you," Wharton reminds Fullerton. "That is not so, for it is good to have lived once in the round, for ever so short a time. But my life is harder now because of those few months last summer, when I had my one glimpse of what a good camaraderie might be... Before I knew you I had grown so impersonal, so accustomed to be my own only comrade, that even what I am going through now would have touched me less" (216). Wharton’s use of the terms “camaraderie” for her relationship with Fullerton, combined with her belief that she for so long had been her “own only comrade,” acknowledges her interiorized self which finally another person, Fullerton, privately had seen. Their intimacy allowed for an unveiling of that self, the “personal” (here the opposite of “I had grown so impersonal”), the inner, masculine Wharton who had finally heard a knock at the door. Her pain echoes that which James felt during the winter months, when she writes in the same missive, “When one is a lonely-hearted & remembering creature, as I am, it is a misfortune to love too late, & as completely as I have loved you. Everything else grows so ghostly afterward” (216). The culminating catharsis for Wharton’s affair with Fullerton, and subsequently Henry James as well, took the form of her ghost story (here the reference to “Everything else grow so ghostly afterward” is apropos), “The Eyes,” which reveals Wharton’s powerful discovery about the fear of becoming paralyzed by queer desire.
Haunting Eyes

Shari Benstock dates the writing of Wharton’s most popular, enduring, and powerful ghost story, “The Eyes,” to the spring of 1910, the exact time when Wharton struggled to resolve her feelings for both James and Fullerton and when James’ health had deteriorated greatly. When Wharton wrote this ghost story—a genre that had a direct link to queer male literature from the period—she painted a portrait of Henry James and offered a critique of how his fear had robbed him of the very thing he wanted most in his life—intimacy. While several scholars have speculated that Wharton had other men in mind (such as Morton Fullerton, Walter Berry, Howard Sturgis, Egerton Winthrop, and even Wharton’s father, George Frederic Jones), when creating the character Andrew Culwin, a pederast, in her story, I believe that Wharton created a lasting image of James that related to suspicions she had about her own father’s sexuality. James and Wharton’s father become connected through the image of the tragically repressed queer man, haunted by his desire for younger men. Part of what is so frightening in tale Wharton creates stems from Wharton’s fears about herself, the interiorized self that she recognized in her identification with James, and with her father. Both James and Wharton’s father had terrified Wharton with their eyes when they fell ill, as their powerful gaze, which she longed to command, became filled with regret and sadness over missed opportunities in youth. Benstock emphasizes the impact of James’ blighted appearance during the time when Wharton wrote her piece: “Henry James’s eye had also taken on a haunted look; they were the eyes of a man who had ‘looked on the Medusa,’ Edith told Fullerton; he stared out of a ‘stony stricken face’ with ‘tragic eyes’ that elicited her compassion” (245). Like John Marcher, whose realization in “The Beast in the Jungle” results in an

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emotional death (one that echoes the physical death of May Bartram), James too had experienced that kind of emotional death when he understood how he spent his life waiting for something that now was too late to experience—the physical expression of his desire for younger men. Wharton expressed how the memory of her father’s eyes “haunted” her, decades after his death, in *A Backward Glance*, when she wrote: “I am still haunted by the look in his dear blue eyes, which had followed me so tenderly for nineteen years” (88), demonstrating how much power his look had effected over her and still continued to exert in memory.

Biographers like R.W.B. Lewis, Benstock, and Hermione Lee, stress the death of George Frederic Jones, in Wharton’s life, as moment of trauma for Wharton in that she would forever remember the look of her father’s pleading eyes. Barbara A. White, in *Edith Wharton: A Study of the Short Fiction*, also points out the impact of Wharton’s father’s death, in 1882, in that, even after more than thirty years, Wharton still felt dogged by the stare of her father, with eyes that tried to communicate something that he was unable to say (67). I see Wharton’s father’s inability to speak as connecting to the trope of the unnamable, the unspeakable, in a male homosexual literary tradition, in Wharton’s mind. In *A Backward Glance*, Wharton wrote of her father’s literary tastes, naming many authors that belonged to the literary canon she had been studying, ever since her initiating friendship with James had opened her eyes to the pederastic tradition. Writing about her father’s library, Wharton reveals something of her father’s hidden aspects of himself: “The new Tennysonian rhythms also moved my father greatly; and I imagine there was a time when his rather rudimentary love of verse might have been developed had he had any one with whom to share it. But my mother’s matter-of-
factness must have shriveled up any such buds of fancy” (39). Given Wharton’s understanding of Tennyson’s charged relationship with Arthur Henry Hallam, in his In Memoriam—both members of the Cambridge society “The Apostles”—and its place within the male homosexual literary tradition97, her mention of her father’s appreciation of Tennyson becomes significant in the context of the whole passage from her memoir. Her imagining of her father continues, when Wharton writes, “I have wondered since what stifled cravings had once germinated in him, and what manner of man he was really meant to be. That he was a lonely one, haunted by something always unexpressed and unattained, I am sure” (39). The powerful connection between Wharton’s father, James, and unnamed, queer desire (as expressed through haunting eyes) resonates in the image of Andrew Culwin, in her story “The Eyes,” from 1910, and in the pages of her autobiography, written in 1933, years after both her father and Henry James had died.

The figure of Andrew Culwin, in Wharton’s ghost story, is clearly a pederast who engages in the Hellenistic movement that became so popular in the educational systems of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (which Linda Dowling describes in her scholarship), as participant in a pederastic tradition that found its roots in ancient times. The narrator within the story, a young man, observes Culwin:

His mind was like a forum, or some open meeting place for the exchange of ideas: Somewhat cold and drafty, but light, spacious and orderly—a kind of academic grove from which all the leaves have fallen. In this privileged area a dozen of us were wont to stretch our muscles and expand our lungs; and, as if to prolong as much as possible the tradition of what

97 For more on the role of In Memoriam within the male homosexual literary tradition, please see Christopher Craft’s Another Kind of Love: Male Homosexual Desire in English Discourse, 1850-1920, where Craft devotes his second chapter to a study of Tennyson’s poem and its effect on Havelock Ellis’ Sexual Inversion. See also Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s Between Men (201), and works by Gregory Woods, Alan Sinfield, and Richard Dellamora, for more on Tennyson’s place within this specific canon of literature.
we felt to be a vanishing institution, one or two neophytes were now and then added to our band. (29)

Wharton’s use of the word “forum” alludes to the male educational setting of ancient Greece and Rome, with an “exchange of ideas” like that at a symposium (or the teachings of Plato in his work *The Symposium*, which glorified pederasty) or with a Socratic style of teaching within “an open meeting place.” When she writes of the “privileged area” in which the “dozen of use were wont to stretch our muscles and expand our lungs,” Wharton refers to the gymnasium, the area in which young men in ancient Greece would train for battle or competition, with masculine athleticism finding emphasis. The goal of Culwin’s “band” (an allusion to the Sacred Band or the Theban Band, the “band of brothers”) is to “prolong as much as possible” a “tradition” of a “vanishing institution,” clearly that of pederasty. Directly, in this passage, Wharton draws upon a known image from the pederastic tradition to signal to the reader the same-sex male desire expressed between the older don (the *erastes*) who teaches the young students (the *eromenoi*), within a setting that is an “academic grove” like those within which Socrates would teach. The young students tease Culwin about his sexual interest in the young men who surround him, with the narrators comment, “Young Phil Frenham was the last, and the most interesting, of these recruits, and a good example of Murchard’s somewhat morbid assertion that our old friend ‘liked ‘em juicy.’ It was indeed a fact that Culwin, for all his dryness, specially tasted the lyric qualities in youth” (29). The “lyric qualities in youth” here refer to positive images of male adolescence as admired in the writings of Cory in

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98 The “academic grove” could also be an allusion to the “Bohemian Grove,” cited in Sedgwick’s *Between Men*, as “an all-male summer camp for American ruling-class men,” founded in the late nineteenth century (220). Ellen Olenska’s connection to bohemia, through her European husband, carries connotations of queerness that suggest that Wharton linked bohemianism to sexual liberty, in terms of bisexuality and homosexuality.

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Ionica, Sturgis in Tim, and in A.E. Housman’s A Shropshire Lad—all texts Wharton had read and knew belonged to the male homosexual literary tradition that idealized pederasty. The word “recruits” carries with it a sense of a military setting, like the term “comrades,” and hearkens back to the warrior training of ancient Greece, which presented the original impetus for pederastic relationships, preparing for combat. The “morbid assertion” that Culwin wanted to “taste” the “juicy” male youths—notice the connection to the image of Ganymede and the cup of wine, thirst, and drink, here, with same-sex male desire, once again, for Wharton—suggests that the narrator voices a pejorative, outside judgment on the physical expression of such desire, representing a mainstream pathologizing view of a larger, dominant, heteronormative society. (Culwin is likened to a “night-blooming flower,” where the flower imagery connects to words used for male homosexuals from the period\(^99\), such as “hyacinthine,” “daisy,” and “pansy,” which demonstrates Wharton’s knowledge of such an association.)

The horror of Wharton’s tale relates to Culwin’s repeated experience of being haunted by a pair eyes at night, in his bedroom, after situations where he represses his inner self—his identity as a queer man. The apparition first appears after Culwin resigns himself to a future with his first cousin, who has developed a sexual interest in him, evidenced by a kiss she gives. Feeling obligated to marry her, Culwin develops anxiety, “The prospect frightened me a little, but at the time it didn’t frighten me as much as doing anything to hurt her” (33). This sentiment echoes that of Sainty, in Howard Sturgis’

\(^{99}\) Graham Robb explains: “Sometimes, tokens were used, like the beautifully primped poodles of Parisian lesbians or the green carnations of British aesthetes. The significant bouquet could also include tulips, lilies, orchids and any exotic, delicate, artificial bloom that was hard to propagate” (151). What could have been more difficult to propagate than a “night-blooming flower”? Wharton’s play on flower imagery with questionably queer characters in her fiction (like the name Lily Bart, which refers to May Bartram from James’ “The Beast in the Jungle”) betrays her awareness of this connection, just like her reference to the “hot-house flower.”
*Belchamber*, who enters into a marriage due to a feeling of familial obligation, rather than actual interest or love for the woman he marries. On the very night that Culwin gives his cousin his “seal ring,” he first sees “the queer sight” (33) of the eyes that will haunt him. Awakened by a “queer feeling” (34), Culwin see a pair of eyes staring at him in his bed: “They were the very worst eyes I’ve ever seen: a man’s eyes—but what a man! My first thought was that he must be frightfully old. The orbits were sunk, and the thick red-lined lids hung over the eyeballs like blinds of which the cords are broken. One lid drooped a little lower than the other, with the effect of a crooked leer” (34). The “leer” suggests “a look of immodest desire100” that sickens the viewer, who describes, “What turned me sick was their expression of vicious security.” The reference to “crooked,” also the word “bent,” finds a direct connection to images of homosexual men from the period101. Culwin finds the eyes detestable in the fact that he imagines they belong to a man who could never act upon his desire, who could only communicate desire through his powerfully immoral gaze. “I don’t know how else to describe the fact that they seemed to belong to a man who had done a lot of harm in his life, but had always kept just inside the danger lines,” explains Culwin. “They were not the eyes of a coward, but of someone much too clever to take risks; and my gorge rose at their look of base astuteness. Yet, that wasn’t the worst; for as we continued to scan each other I saw in them a tinge of derision, and felt myself to be its object” (34). Wharton shows how the male gaze, when turned on

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100 The *OED* provides a definition of “leer” as a “side glance” or a “look or roll of the eye expressive of slyness, malignity, immodest desire.” Clearly, one connotation here is that of sexual desire.

101 Graham Robb asserts that specific allusions to homosexuality from this period are no longer widely recognizable to the reader, due to changes in language and contexts: “Words, gestures and symbols, even from one half-generation to the next, become almost prehistorically obscure. ‘Lavender aunts,’ ‘musical’ young men, crooked fingers and green carnations are no longer widely understood as references to homosexuality. But the evidence is there” (13). The word “crooked”—here, Robb uses the image of “crooked fingers”—denoted queerness during this period and, given the cultural sophistication of Wharton’s set of friends, she certainly would have understood its meaning.
Culwin, reduces him to feeling like an “object,” rendered powerless and impotent in a loss of manhood. The eyes that gaze belong to a man who gains power through the sexual stare, always looking but never touching, in that he remained “much too clever to take risks,” staying always “just inside the danger lines.” Like other literary characters linked to male homosexuality from the late Victorian period, such as Stevenson’s Mr. Hyde or Wilde’s Dorian Gray, the possessor of the haunting eyes appears depraved and lewd, despite the lack of evidence which would incontrovertibly prove immoral behavior. After he sees the eyes, Culwin abandons the cousin, boards a steamer for England, and lives abroad for some years.

When Andrew Culwin finds himself confronted by the eyes for a second time, he does so after he develops a pederastic relationship with a beautiful young man, Gilbert Noyes, whom he symbolically meets in the Roman Forum. Culwin describes Noyes’ as “beautiful to see, and charming as a comrade” (39), with Wharton drawing attention to the younger man’s role as the beloved, the *eromenos* who inspires desire in the older Culwin. Despite Noyes’ “stupidity” and lack of literary talent, Culwin becomes his patron, his mentor, encouraging him to write literature even though he knows none of what Noyes produces is any good: “His stupidity was a natural grace—it was beautiful, really, as his eyelashes. And he was so gay, so affectionate, and so happy with me, that telling him the truth would have been as pleasant as slitting the throat of some gentle animal” (39). Wharton’s use of the word “gay” here connotes queerness in that she also writes that Noyes is “happy,” which would suggest that she chose to be redundant if

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102 Though the term “gay” did not enter the English language as a mainstream word denoting same-sex sexuality until the 1920s and 1930s (according to George Chauncey), several scholars have established that the word had been used since the beginning of the twentieth century, by certain groups of writers, knowingly as a reference to queerness.
she meant “gay” to mean “happy” (which is unlikely given the “so affectionate” she employs in the same sentence). The romantic friendship between Culwin and Noyes reaches its climax when Culwin has to dash his beloved’s dreams of literary success to pieces, revealing his lack of talent and the fact that publishers will not print his writing. Remembering his desertion of his cousin Alice, Culwin decides against telling Noyes the truth in a pivotal scene where he intends to face his desire for the young man:

But my intuition was like one of those lightning flashes that encircle the whole horizon, and in the same instant I saw what I might be letting myself in for if I didn’t tell the truth. I said to myself: ‘I shall have him for life’—and I’d never seen anyone, man or woman, whom I was quite sure of wanting on those terms. Well, this impulse of egotism decided me. I was ashamed of it, and to get away from it I took a leap straight in Gilbert’s arms. ‘The thing’s all right, and you’re all wrong!’ I shouted up at him; and as he hugged me, and I laughed and shook in his clutch, I had for a minute the sense of self-complacency that is supposed to attend the footsteps of the just. Hang it all, making people happy has its charms.

When Culwin leaps into Noyes’ arms, he feels contented and charmed by his embrace. His claim of “I shall have him for life” symbolizes the second time that Culwin tries to enmesh himself in a romantic relationship with another person, this time a man, as an attempt at physical and emotional intimacy. The result of this attempt is the same as the first: the eyes appear to Culwin, with a menacing gaze that makes him question his decision. The transitory “minute” of “self-complacency” vanishes, replaced by the spectre of the older male eyes that yearn and desire but cannot attain what it wants most. Corrupted by repression and self-loathing, the eyes represent a man’s soul ravaged by sexual want, an unnatural state of sexual frustration that leads to a sense of morbidity, even perversity.
As he retells the story of his haunting, Culwin demonstrates knowledge of self that exposes his complicity in eventually possessing the eyes he so fears; in the eyes that frighten him, he sees disturbing aspects of his own repression, as he recognizes something familiar, due to gained understanding from life experience. He describes the eyes as worse than he remembered: “Worse by just so much as I’d learned of life in the interval; by all the damnable implications my wider experience read into them. I saw now what I hadn’t seen before: that they were eyes which had grown hideous gradually, which had built up their baseness coral-wise, bit by bit, out of a series of small turpitudes slowly accumulated through industrious years” (42). Like Dorian Gray, whose portrait exhibits registers all of the physical effects of moral depravity through a dissolute lifestyle, Culwin’s eyes (both those he sees and those he uses) become changed through the acquisition of worldly knowledge, the understanding of sexual want. The “damnable implications” of Culwin’s “wider experience” helps him to comprehend what it is that make the eyes so terrifying. “As their stare moved with my movements, there came over me a sense of their tacit complicity, of a deep hidden understanding between us that was worse than the first shock of their strangeness,” writes Wharton. “Not that I understood them; but that they made it so clear that someday I should . . . Yes, that was the worst part of it, decidedly; and it was the feeling that became stronger each time they came back” (42). The “strangeness” of the eyes becomes all the more disturbing in that Culwin develops a “deep hidden understanding,” a hint of future perception of what that “queerness” represents, what that difference will mean. By the end of the story, Culwin discovers that the eyes that have haunted him have been his own, aged eyes—eyes that signify a lifetime of yearning and repression, fear and loneliness, and an inability to
accept his own sexual orientation openly. Wharton depicts Culwin as a kind of “morbid”
degenerate (to use a contemporary term), not due to his latent homosexuality but as a
result of his unnatural state of sexual repression. His inability to accept his otherness
becomes the root of his terror.

Clearly, Henry James largely inspired Wharton’s characterization of Andrew
Culwin, as the aged mentor who counseled beautiful young men but could never satiate
his desire for them; he becomes a man haunted by a life of loneliness and emptiness—the
result of his paralyzing sexual fear. Culwin is a man with an obscure injury, an unnamed
bodily maiming, that has become the stuff of legend: “Among his contemporaries there
 lingered a vague tradition of his having, at a remote period, and in a romantic clime, been
wounded in a duel” (28). As mentioned earlier in this study, James’ “obscure hurt” has
entered literary history as a famous mystery, in that nobody knows whether James was
truly rendered impotent by his back injury, although many have speculated at length on
the subject. Also, the cousin to whom Culwin commits himself romantically in the
beginning of the story is named Alice, not unlike James’ sister, to whom the Master was
exceedingly attached and wrote sexually charged letters. In addition, Culwin bathes in
the glow of the admiration his protégés emit, when they gather around him in all their
beauty, in the same way that James relished being worshipped by younger, admiring men.
Wharton certainly must have been aware of James’ charged relationships with numerous
younger males, like Sturgis, Lapsley, Lubbock, definitely Fullerton, Walpole and Persse,
or even the Cambridge set that treated him like a “Pasha.” The circle of young men who
clustered around Culwin was not too unlike the Qu’acre Circle itself, to which Wharton
herself belonged. Too, Culwin’s relationship with Gilbert Noyes seems a great deal like
James' relationship with Jocelyn Persse, who was one of the few men who lacked the mental prowess to keep up with James' literary pursuits. Gunter and Jobe contend, "Persse, unlike Fullerton, could not provide intellectual companionship for the elderly writer, and he professedly never understood the grounds for James's affection. But he made him an excellent private companion. James envied his friend's enchanting physique and lauded his genius for life, claiming the younger man made him feel like a giant refreshed" (130). Since James had been in the thick of a relationship with Persse during the time that Wharton wrote her story, it is possible that she knew something of their relationship and parodied their dynamic within her story, much in the way that James teased her in certain pieces of his own fiction (e.g. "The Velvet Glove," written circa 1908-9, first published in March 1910). The number of similarities between James and Culwin suggest that Wharton wrote "The Eyes" from a place of concern, after having watched her closest friend and mentor battle depression, a psychological malady she connected to his feelings of absolute loneliness, in that he was "dying" for want of human affection. His isolation and fear of intimacy, in Wharton’s view, was literally killing James.

Wharton’s anxiety over the fear of losing James combined with the memory of losing her father, another tragic figure she felt remained prisoner to his sexual inhibition and inability to act out on his true desire. From her autobiography, Wharton suggests that her father was possibly a latent homosexual, whose sexual placement on Weininger’s spectrum had been repressed as a result of her hen-pecking, domineering mother. This image of her father also affected Wharton’s depiction of Culwin. The story opens with the setting of Culwin’s library, “with its oak walls and dark old bindings” (28). The
library became a space in Wharton’s imagination directly linked to her father, in terms of initiated sexuality, as asserted by Gloria C. Erlich in her *The Sexual Education of Edith Wharton*:

> We do not know what occurred in George Frederic Jones’s library, but given the conjunction of books, libraries, and compulsive outbursts of oral narration using certain books as fetishes, one may hypothesize the existence of a psychic nexus that embraced Wharton’s creative as well as her erotic life. Books and even words became libidinized, the library became a place of secret initiation. (42)

Given all of the extensive scholarship that has investigated the importance of the library, books, and language as the site of Wharton’s sexual experimentation, the connection between her father’s library and the image of Culwin’s own repository resonates in terms of queer male sexuality. Wharton’s own initiation into James’ circle sprang from The Master’s reading of Whitman aloud at The Mount, from books taken from her “library shelves” (Lewis 140), again connecting James to Wharton’s father in terms of understanding the pederastic tradition. Wharton’s first memory of reading poetry is inextricably bound up in her remembrance of her father: “Edith turned to her father as the source of what she valued most in herself and to his library as the locus of her most valued experiences. With important consequences for her artistic persona, she came to regard him as the generator of her literary self. He taught her how to read and introduced her to poetry” (Erlich 32). The first volume of verse Wharton recalled reading with her father was “Lays of Ancient Rome”—which creates a connection to the Roman Forum, an image Wharton uses to describe the educational setting for Culwin and his younger admirers. More than the obvious correlation between the library of George Frederic Jones and that of Andrew Culwin, one scholar, Barbara A. White, has claimed that other reasons exist to suggest a linkage between Mr. Jones and Mr. Culwin. “I suspect the

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portrait of Andrew Culwin, and thus perhaps Wharton’s detached male character type, owes less to Berry, Fullerton, or James than to her father, George Frederic Jones,” contends White. “Mr. Jones is the “parasite” (the original title of the story “Mr. Jones”) with a taste for flesh much younger than his and related to him by blood. In her brief account of her father in A Backward Glance, Wharton depicts a man similar to Culwin in both a broad sense and in specific details” (67). By creating an amalgam of James and her father, Wharton examined her greatest fear about her own sexual identity and the possible outcome of repressing her queer desire: a life of absolute isolation. The eyes that haunted her, those of James and of her father, communicated that suffering, that pain, of complete and utter loneliness.

Susan Goodman suggests Wharton presents a “corrupted version of the inner circle” in her ghost story “The Eyes,” with a narrative that explores the author’s fear of remaining a stranger to herself. “As the only woman in a group of men, Wharton could not escape the fact that she was an anomaly,” Goodman explains. “The ‘otherness’ that was a source of pride was also a source of fear, another form of linguistic and spiritual exile” (112). The mystery and terror that arises within Wharton’s tale develops from a fear of the split between the external and the internal, the public and the private, the performed feminine persona and the true masculine self. Goodman continues, “Culwin’s personal and artistic failures occur because he refuses to confront his own doubleness. The company of those happy few who mirror his thoughts and feelings has allowed him to avoid this other, horrifying self” (113). While Goodman’s interpretation brings great insight into Wharton’s probing of the identity dance she learned from James (the balancing of the public and private personae they fashioned), Goodman suggests that the
Inner Circle prevented, or allowed Wharton to ignore, an awareness of her own sense of doubleness, her otherness. Rather, I believe that Wharton’s “happy few” provided her with an emotional and physical space within which she discovered that split, that duality between her exterior and interior selves, which was the key to her complicated, masculine identity as a writer. The knowledge she gained from her initiation into “The Brotherhood” of men-of-letters allowed her to develop a keen sensitivity to a depth of human emotion, a more sophisticated understanding of complex human sexuality and gender construction, and a mature authorial voice that defined her greatest works of fiction. The terror within “The Eyes,” in my opinion, springs not from a prevention of self-discovery by others but from the individual’s own inability to develop intimate relationships, which creates an intense loneliness that few can understand. The eyes have no voice. For Wharton, there was nothing more terrifying, nothing more frightening, than being rendered voiceless, than becoming the object of the male gaze. As a woman in patriarchal society during this period, Wharton found that the position of the father translated into the role of the active speaker, as one who controls verbal and literary transactions within language; to remain outside that exchange, to have no place within that commerce, meant one had no power, no efficacy, no worth.

When Wharton wrote “The Eyes,” she worked through the cathartic process of extracting herself from the triangulated relationship she had formed with both James and Fullerton. She started to openly examine the role of male homosexuality in her life and her place within the pederastic tradition. Recognizing the monumental changes in her own comprehension of self, Wharton began her exploration of queer desire between men—a recurring theme in her most widely acclaimed pieces of fiction from her
collective body of works. Pederastic relationships—those between older, wiser men and the more innocent male youths who became their objects of desire—figure largely in Wharton’s literature from 1910 through the rest of her writing career, until her death in 1937. The formative period between 1905 and 1910 (a time when Wharton developed her relationship with James and carried on her affair with Fullerton) led Wharton to discover her active position as the masculine speaker within her writing, understand the sublimation of complex sexual desire, and find a deeper level of compassion for those whose sense of gender went against the grain of traditional and socially accepted constructs that correlated to biological sex. When this story was first published in the June of 1910, the timing notably coincided with the same time frame biographers identify as the end of Wharton’s affair with Fullerton. As cited before, R.W.B. Lewis suggests that the affair lasted from “the fall of 1907” to “the summer of 1910” (285), pointing to Walter Berry’s moving in with Wharton, on July 1st, as evidence that her relationship with Fullerton by then was over. Lewis asserts that Walter Berry had then effected “his gradual replacement of Fullerton in her deepest affections,” something which Berry specifically “had in mind,” when he decided to live with Wharton for six months in her Paris home, after returning from his post in Egypt. Given her new bachelor roommate, Wharton terminated her relationship with Fullerton, by Lewis’ account, due to Walter Berry’s arrival; yet, according to my own trajectory, her romance with Fullerton already had faded out by then, due to Fullerton’s abandonment of both her and James, during the time when they needed his emotional support the most. She had written numerous letters and the ghost story “The Eyes” to work through her complicated emotions, to make sense of the comradeship she had thought they had developed, and to find a resolution, some
closure, to the disappointment she experienced when she realized that Fullerton was not
the man she had thought him to be. In any case, he had served his purpose. He had been
the catalyst for her discovery of her queer, masculine, interiorized self and identity as an
active writer. Her understanding and acceptance of Whitmanian comradeship became the
key to her connection to James and other members of her Inner Circle. After her
relationship with Fullerton, the men of the Qu’acre set openly recognized Wharton’s
queerness and allowed her into their brotherhood, their own sacred band, as the “happy
few.”

By late summer and the autumn of 1910, Wharton’s letters to Fullerton
communicate a very different tone of voice, betraying that a different kind of relationship
that emerged between them, and that their affair indeed had found an end. In July, 1910,
Wharton no longer engaged in the pleading and Jamesian gnashing of teeth for Fullerton,
as she resigned herself to the fact that Fullerton could never be the lover she needed him
to be. His desertion of both Wharton and James had proven that fact and she knew she
could not rely on him for the support she needed; for such care and comradeship, she
turned now to her Inner Circle, her closest friends, like James, Sturgis, Lapsley, Smith,
and Berry. When Walter Berry had moved in, she found a companion who replaced
Fullerton’s role in her life, in most ways that were important. True, Berry never became
her lover, but the sympathy that existed between them was the ideal comradeship she had
imagined, which went beyond the physical, since she had expressed that intellectual
communion could be far more intimate than sexual intercourse. Wharton’s letters to
Fullerton, from the latter part of 1910, demonstrate a new independence and agency in
her writing—an assertion of a confident and active speaker/writer. No longer would
Wharton expose her feminine weakness to Fullerton, in that she had been able to conquer that vulnerability in her assumption of the role of the pederastic father, the erastes who became a mentor or patron to younger men. In her letter of October 25th, 1910, Wharton communicated to Fullerton her happiness in that her friendship might now have some use for him, that her knowledge as an experienced writer could have some purpose in the propagation of his own literary talent: “I think I have never had a letter from you that gave me such deep & unmixed pleasure. It made me feel that I had really solved the problem of being of use to you, of making our friendship something worthwhile to you, & happy & consoling to me” (223). By taking her place as the active speaker of language, assuming the role of the masculine subject who writes, Wharton was now able to become Fullerton’s “amie,” his male comrade, who could be on equal terms with him intellectually. Wharton had effected her initiation into the brotherhood, the fraternity, the “band” of the “happy few,” an intellectual exchange between men that strengthened her authorial voice and helped to shape her imagined selves in terms of queer desire.
CHAPTER X

CONCLUSION

The Queering of Edith Wharton

Henry James represents the key to understanding the importance of the pederastic tradition, and Wharton’s initiation into the “brotherhood” of the Qu’acre Circle, in that he became, for Wharton, a father figure whom she both desired and wanted to replace. As “The Master,” James, in Wharton’s view, assumed a powerful role as the active speaker in a patriarchal system of language that rendered women powerless, marginalized by their biological sex (which historically had prevented them from being literate altogether). From her earliest memories, Wharton connected her father to language and agency. He taught her how to read, gave her admission into his library, encouraged her to write, and recited beautiful lines of verse which captured her imagination. In fact, the male voice itself became linked to verbalized language in that Wharton, within her autobiographical writing, continually sexualizes male oratorical performance. Readings by Wharton’s father (who read “Lays of Ancient Rome”), Reverend Washburn (who beautifully delivered sermons that Wharton found sexually exciting), Mr. Henry Bedlow (who regaled Wharton, as a girl, with stories of “the gods and goddesses of Olympus,” while holding her on his lap), and even James (who “crooned” lines from Whitman so dramatically at The Mount that Wharton immediately knew she had found a sympathetic soul) represent moments of male literary agency, where the masculine voice commands the imagination of the female listener (here, Wharton), creating vivid experiences that
become quasi-orgasmic and sexually charged. This sexualizing of language forced Wharton to explore ways of recovering a sense of agency, to find her own unique voice within a tradition which could not find representation in mainstream, heteronormative literature. Wharton looked outside of predominant, heteronormative discourse from the period to the male homosexual literary tradition—specifically, the pederastic tradition—to find a perspective that reflected her complexity in terms of her gender construction and sexual interiority. Wharton took the most dramatic steps within this journey of self-discovery between the years of 1905 and 1910, beginning with her relationship with Henry James, deepening during her affair with Morton Fullerton (which included James), and arriving at a mature, authorial voice which emerges in literature after the publication of Wharton’s cathartic ghost story, “The Eyes.” In order to better understand the significance of Henry James to Wharton’s sexual, psychological, and intellectual development in her adulthood, one must look to Judith Butler’s interpretation of Joan Riviere’s essay, “Womanliness as a Masquerade” (first published in 1929).

In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Judith Butler explores the theoretical framework Joan Riviere established in examining women who fashion a “mask” of overt femininity as a public performance of gender. Butler explains that Riviere asserted that the psychological conflict between the daughter and father, in a family dynamic, stemmed not from a shared desire for the mother, but rather related to a struggle for literary agency. “The rivalry with the father is not over the desire of the mother, as one might expect, but over the place of the father in public discourse as speaker, lecturer, writer—that is, as a user of signs rather than a sign-object, an item of exchange,” writes Butler. “This castrating desire might be understood as the desire to
relinquish the status of woman-as-sign in order to appear as a subject within language” (51). Wharton exhibited definite anxiety over her use of language and her role as a woman writer, due to the strong influence her mother exerted over her in childhood (for example, when Lucretia Jones reprimanded her daughter for wanting to read or “make up” instead of play with dolls or other girls). When Wharton tried to share her literary creativity with her mother, she met only bitter criticism or discouragement, which strongly impacted her self-esteem as a writer. The result of Lucretia Jones’ stifling of her daughter’s literary impulses, for Wharton, translated into a definition of femininity as devoid of linguistic agency. As devastating as her mother’s control remained (a telling example of this remains the wedding invitations Wharton’s mother ordered, on which Edith’s name did not even appear, reinforcing a lack of agency or even subjectivity), Wharton found refuge in her connection to her father, who nurtured his daughter’s interest in literature and writing, giving her access to his “gentleman’s library” and providing her with opportunities to create her own fiction or verse. Eventually, Wharton found strong identification with her father, as a victim of Lucretia Jones’ selfishness and superficiality, rendered powerless, even voiceless. To placate her mother and protect herself from further derision, Wharton learned how to fashion a hyper-feminine self, a public persona, she would perform and present to the world to hide her interiorized queerness. Wharton’s mastery of this artificial hyper-femininity stands in the lasting image of her as the “grand dame,” a woman skilled when it came to fashion, interior design, etiquette, social codes, and the upholding of moral order—an image to which many scholars and fans cling, even in modern day. The “grand dame,” though, only
represented one side of Wharton’s complex identity, one part of the duality that defined her overall personality, as both a persona and a writer.

Wharton’s studying and self-presentation as a hyper-feminine lady, a woman of fashion, betrayed her anxiety over a wish for and interiorized masculinity that defined her inner, private self. According to Riviere, in Butler’s analysis, “Femininity is taken on by a woman who ‘wishes for masculinity,’ but fears the retributive consequences of taking on the public appearance of masculinity” (51). This certainly held true for Wharton, who scorned, both publicly and privately, women she felt were too masculine or who openly challenged femininity in a public arena, in that she saw such resistance as evidence of female homosexuality. Wharton distanced herself from women she thought “morbid” in a recognized lesbianism, showing “signs of degeneracy” by their flouting of heteronormative convention, women like Emelyn Washburn or Natalie Barney. Shari Benstock, in her Women of the Left Bank, explains that Barney’s “‘private character’ was, no doubt, too unorthodox and too public for Edith Wharton,” who was “not at all tolerant of lesbianism” (87). This move, on Wharton’s part, to disassociate herself from female homosexuality makes sense, when one comes to see how anxiety operates in the discovery of self. Butler teases out the insightful implications of Riviere’s concept of “femininity as masquerade,” which involves a refusal of female homosexuality: “Femininity becomes a mask that dominates/resolves a masculine identification, for a masculine identification would, within the presumed heterosexual matrix of desire, produce a desire for a female object, the Phallus; hence, the donning of femininity as a mask may reveal a refusal of female homosexuality” (53). Wharton must have feared that open display of her masculine, interiorized, private self would have been read by
society as a sign of female homosexuality, similar to the way that (after the Wilde trials in 1895) the public often linked male effeminacy to male homosexuality, with an expectation of a direct relationship between the two. Challenging of gender, as seen within the context of the hegemonic, heteronormative society that policed sexual difference, became evidence of the challenging of heterosexuality itself, within a larger, homophobic and public social arena. Thus, Wharton, who experienced a deep sense of “lesbian panic,” did everything she could to convince her readers and the public at large that, despite her literary success, she was every bit a feminine woman. This becomes clear in Wharton’s constant reassurance in her autobiographical writing that all, despite her unusual childhood, she exhibited “all of the normal instincts of her sex.” Privately, Wharton was anything but hyper-feminine, demonstrated by her nicknames (the “Angel of Devastation” and the “Firebird”) given to her by those who understood her best. When Wharton lovingly bossed James and assumed control within her relationships with the men from her Inner Circle, with confidence and strength, she revealed her masculine sense of power.

The second piece to the theoretical puzzle that illuminates how Wharton conceived of her own gender, sexuality, and relationship to authorship, appears in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s discussion of René Girard’s concept of the “erotic triangle” (from his book *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*), in her *Between Men*. In the paradigm that Girard establishes, the erotic triangle that emerges when two lovers vie for the attention of the beloved—the third member who participates within the affair as the object of desire—has more to do with the two rivals than it does the beloved. In an interesting twist, Girard explains that the two lovers, in fact, express desire for each other when they act upon...
their desire for the shared beloved: “What is most interesting for our purposes in his study is its insistence that, in any erotic rivalry, the bond that links either of the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved: that the bonds of ‘rivalry’ and ‘love,’ differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent” (21). Specifically citing the trope of the erotic triangle with two men who become “rivals for a female,” Girard suggests that homosocial, and even homosexual, desire finds expression through the site of the female body, in that the desire that fuels the rivalry is just as much a powerful same-sex desire shared between the two male rivals as it is a heterosexual yearning of each rival for the shared woman. In other words, when Wharton and James shared their desire for Fullerton, they engaged in a powerful flirtation with each other, through their common want for their beloved. Since Wharton read Otto Weininger’s *Sex and Character* and knew of the Law of Sexual Relations that the sexologist had proposed—his assertion that humans were, by nature, innately bisexual—she would have had a complicated understanding of her relationship to James. Fullerton’s confirmed bisexuality, in fact, was crucial in that it allowed Wharton to reveal her own duality: her feminine, submissive role in being the beloved of Fullerton, and her more masculine, active, dominant self who assumed the role of the lover, the “comrade.”

The tradition of pederasty allowed Edith Wharton to find her mature, authorial voice, to claim an identity rooted in otherness, and to discover a self-definition outside of mainstream heteronormativity, which not only allowed her to assume agency as a writer but helped her create her greatest works of fiction. Developed out of her immersion into the pederastic tradition and initiation into the Qu’acre circle, Wharton found an original
artistic perspective, a unique artistic vision, which penetrated the core of human relationships in new and profound ways. Wharton developed a deeper register of human emotion, in that she could now detect, understand, and sublimate more profound forms of desire (since same-sex desire often had to find indirect expression, due to the societal homophobia which created an atmosphere of “danger” when it came to such queer desire). Her sexually charged relationships with James and Fullerton helped Wharton to arrive at a complex identification with her father by the time that she wrote “The Eyes,” an important identification that provided the literary thrust behind innumerable works she would write that investigated taboo kinds of desire. Specifically, Wharton sought the role of the active father, the older male erastes, and the masculine mentor, within fictional relationships with younger men, who were the beautiful eromenoi, often the desired sons or stepsons of the aged patrons, as their beloveds. Over and over, Wharton returned to this paradigm in her writing, unearthing sometimes disturbing forms of taboo sexuality that continue to puzzle the modern reader or scholar. The first novel that most openly revealed Wharton’s inner struggle to find her authorial voice was The Reef, a novel that many have seen as her most autobiographical literary work.

Beginning, in 1912, with the writing of The Reef, her “most Jamesian novel,” Wharton embarked on a journey of self-discovery, as she tried to work through and express queer male desire in her novels. George Darrow (a bachelor who lives in London) creates an erotic triangle with his future stepson, Owen Leath, when he sleeps with Sophy Viner, Leath’s fiancé, at the “Hotel Terminus” (a knowing reference to Wharton’s tryst with Fullerton, in July 1909, which resulted in the writing of her Whitmanian poem, “Terminus”). In an early scene, Darrow drifts off in thought about
his future stepson, “Owen Leath, the charming clever young step-son whom her husband’s death left to her care . . . A porter, stumbling against Darrow’s bags, roused him to the fact that he still obstructed the platform, inert and encumbering as his luggage” (5). In such a scene, Wharton’s use of ellipsis shows how Darrow starts to think so intensely about Owen Leath that he forgets that he is blocking the platform and is “roused” only when the porter disturbs his reverie. Leath’s background suggests an awareness of the Hellenistic education found in the English public schools, in that he attended both Harvard and Oxford (“for a year of supplemental study”)—both institutions that produced many of the men who became the strongest supporters of the pederastic tradition, during Wharton’s time. Another telling moment appears between Darrow and Owen Leath, when the former walks with the latter, thinking about the connection they are forming: “He had already become aware that the lad liked him, and had meant to take the first opportunity of showing he reciprocated the feeling . . . Young Leath, it appeared, felt that he had reached a turning-point in his career . . . At one point he had had musical and literary yearnings, visions of desultory artistic indulgence, but these had of late been superseded by the resolute determination to plunge into practical life” (139). Calling to mind the epithet “‘musical’ young men”—which Graham Robb lists as a popular contemporary term for a queer man (13)—the reader roots Owen’s “musical and literary yearnings” and his “desultory artistic” sensibility in specific definitions of queerness that both Darrow and Wharton recognized. Often, Darrow observes Leath, cataloging his every move and admiring his “fresh fair countenance” (50). Wharton continues her description of the younger Leath: “The young man, slim and eager, had detached himself from two companions of his own type, and was seeking to push through the press to his
step-mother’s friend. The encounter, to Darrow, could hardly have been more inopportune; it woke in his a confusion of feelings of which only uppermost was allayed by seeing Sophy Viner” (50). Owen Leath’s slimness and echoes Wharton’s description of Gilbert Noyes, from “The Eyes,” whose body appears in a “warm light, slender and smooth and hyacinthine” (38). The word “hyacinthine” demonstrates Wharton’s knowledge of another popular term for a the beloved in a pederastic relationship, from this period (in that Wilde called Lord Alfred Douglas “Hyacinthus” and Graham Robb lists “hyacinth” as such a reference to male queerness). In addition, Leath’s appearance with two friends from the “Beaux Arts,” the Parisian art academy, provides another, possible clue or connotation of queerness, in that Thomas Eakins and John Singer Sargent, who respectively produced famous paintings of male nude youths, had both studied there\textsuperscript{103}.

The climax of The Reef—a book often linked to the end of Wharton’s affair with Fullerton in that she enlisted his help in the editing of its earlier form—occurs within a scene very much like that depicted in “The Eyes,” where the desiring, older man is forced to look figuratively into his own eyes to recognize his sexual otherness, despite his inability to break social convention. For Darrow, his moment of recognition brings him to a place of self-knowledge, in that he knows that his taboo sexuality marks him as different. When Anna discovers the truth about Darrow and her future step-daughter-in-law, she only has to look into Darrow’s eyes to learn the reality of his relationship with Sophy Viner. Anna cries out, “Only go and look at your eyes!” in a moment of horror (reminiscent of the terror experienced by Andrew Culwin when he understands that the

\textsuperscript{103} One also cannot help but think of Wharton’s playful name for Robert Norton as “Beau Norts,” which adds to the complexity of Norton and his connection to queerness through this association—especially given his close ties to E.F. Benson.

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eyes that have haunted him for so long, in fact, have been his own), signaling to Darrow
her awareness of his dishonesty, his artifice. Wharton writes:

He was as conscious of what had happened to his face as if he had obeyed
Anna’s bidding and looked at himself in the glass. He knew he could no
more hide from her what was written there than he could efface from his
soul the fiery record of what he had just lived through. There before him,
staring him in the eyes, and reflecting itself in all his lineaments, was the
overwhelming fact of Sophy Viner’s passion and of the act by which she
attested it. (260)

When Darrow faces the truth “staring him in the eyes,” he confronts his own otherness in
that he carried on a quasi-incestuous relationship with Sophy Viner, with the truth finding
itself reflected “all his lineaments,” like that of Culwin’s grotesque visage. Darrow
creates an erotic triangle with Leath, binding both him and his future stepson together
through their shared desire for both Sophy, and their sublimated desire for each other.
Both Darrow and Owen Leath obsessively watch each other from a distance, cataloging
exchanges and admiring each other, in the process of exposing their jealousy concerning
Sophy and keeping her attention. When Anna discovers the truth about Darrow’s
relationship with Sophy, the more complicated implication their affair suggests a desire
for Owen, where a “veil” of sorts is lifted that forever changes the way in which Anna
sees Darrow. The end of their relationship comes when Darrow sadly realizes, “Other
thoughts come, and you can’t banish them. Whenever you see me you remember . . . you
associate me with things you abhor” (343). The horror of the truth of Darrow’s eyes
haunt Anna, just like the eyes that haunt Andrew Culwin, in two fictional works Wharton
wrote to find closure with her affair with Fullerton. Unable to separate Darrow from
“things” she “abhors,” she realizes that despite the fact that she wants to possess him—
her outburst, "He’s mine—he’s mine! He’s no one else’s" (345)—they cannot remain together, as the “veil” has been lifted and now she must abide by her moral code.

Shari Benstock reveals how Wharton used the writing of *The Reef*, “the most autobiographical of her novels,” to explore her relationship with Fullerton, whose counsel she fervent sought, during the book’s composition. This novel remains “the only work of fiction in which she depended so heavily on the advice of another person” (266), according to Benstock, where Wharton frequently applied to Fullerton for feedback on her writing. Crucial to this literary exchange between Wharton and Fullerton was the former’s concern over the latter’s reading of Chapter 27, “in which the truth of their relationship comes out” (267). Chapter 27 presents the scene where Darrow must confront the truth in his eyes as reflected by Anna’s stare, a telling moment that conjured up the eerie mood of the ghost story, “The Eyes,” which is extremely telling, in that this chapter in *The Reef* is considered to hold “the truth” of Wharton’s relationship with Fullerton. Specifically, Benstock asserts, Wharton “wanted Fullerton’s advice on the narrative method of the scene,” which in turn created concern for Fullerton in that he worried that Wharton had shown Walter Berry the pages she had written. Benstock continues:

His letter on the subject no longer exists, but he was evidently worried about how much of the story Walter had read. Edith’s answer was categorical: “No—Walter Berry has never read a line of The Reef, and does not even know its donnée. He takes not the slightest interest in my literature.” How can one explain this flat denial of Walter Berry’s longtime interest in her work? In *A Backward Glance*, she would credit him with having encouraged and patiently guided her through her writing; as recently as winter 1911, he had listened to her read aloud the draft of *Ethan Frome*. Edith reassured Fullerton that she had not revealed their own little secret; there would be no recognition scene exposing the hidden attachments of their triangle. (267-8)
Calling attention to the “hidden attachments of their triangle” that Wharton tried to conceal, Benstock emphasizes the author’s need to obscure the truth from Fullerton: that her relationship with Berry too was a literary one and that he also was her comrade. When Wharton blatantly lied to Fullerton about her relationship with Berry, she revealed her anxiety over disrupting the literary exchange she wanted to cultivate with Fullerton. That she relied so heavily on Fullerton during the writing of this particular novel seems fascinating in that her lover had to recognize the investment she made of herself in the characters she depicted, had to acknowledge the truth of their own triangulated romance.

Susan Goodman, in her study *Edith Wharton’s Women*, claims that Wharton tries to work out elements of her own identity in the trio of characters, Anna Leath, Sophy Viner, and George Darrow: “*The Reef*, with or without its author’s conscious intent, ‘takes up the same [autobiographical] material in complete freedom and under the protection of a hidden identity,’ as Wharton projects her own internally warring aspects of the self as separated individuals: Anna, the repressed lady; Sophy, the unconventional, exiled woman; and George, the privileged aesthete” (27). Goodman here identifies Darrow as “the privileged aesthete,” a figure Eric Haralson locates in James’ imagination as the “protogay aesthete” who represented a “sympathetic masculinity whose bearings are homosexual, whose own sex appeal is significantly ambivalent, and whose affective complexities are not easily reducible to the rigidifying grids of the modern sex/gender system” (25). Given the aesthete’s entanglement in late Victorian conceptualizing of the male homosexual, often rooted in a prolonged bachelorhood, Wharton’s imagining of herself in a character like Darrow reveals her identification with men like James, who reminded her of her father.
When Wharton calls upon the image of the bachelor-aesthete in her writing, she exposes her interiorized masculine identity, an identity that was rooted in male queerness and had been fashioned from her relationships with men from her Inner Circle. Goodman explains that Wharton’s literary development stemmed from her close relationships with men from her “happy few,” most importantly, Walter Berry, Henry James, and Morton Fullerton, who helped her to find her own literary voice: “Though she frequently talked with Walter Berry, Henry James, and Morton Fullerton about her work, Berry was the man who taught her how to write; James, the literary father she had rejected but held dear; and Fullerton, the enigmatic lover” (33). Wharton clearly knew that all of these men challenged traditional modes of heteronormativity through their unconventional lifestyles, as bachelors whose sexuality remained ambiguous enough to the public that, in private, they could reveal their queerness to those who understood and sympathized. Creating for herself a “fraternity of male writers,” a brotherhood or band of brothers who bonded together due to a shared sense of otherness, queerness, Edith Wharton, after her affair with Fullerton, was able to reimagine herself in terms of masculine queerness. Her identification with Darrow represents this shift in her understanding of her own identity. R.W.B. Lewis writes, “Darrow, that is, represents the Edith Wharton of 1912 rather than 1909,” contending that Wharton’s self-portrait in the novel became one of “distaste,” “revulsion against her own behavior” and a sense of judgment. As in “The Eyes,” Wharton’s apparent negative treatment of the older aesthete who desires the younger man stems more from that individual’s inability to act upon his true desire, which demonstrates an avoidance of his true, queer identity, than it does any sort of condemnation on Wharton’s part of same-sex male sexuality in general. What caused the
end of Darrow’s relationship with Anna Leath was his betrayal of and dishonesty to both
his fiancé and himself.

Complicated erotic triangles define Wharton’s fiction, from the onset of her friendship with Henry James, when he first urged her to “Do New York” and write *The House of Mirth*, published in 1905. If one looks to the novels which have garnered Wharton the most recognition and acclaim, they are the works that Wharton wrote when she was most heavily influenced by her relationship with Henry James. Works like *The House of Mirth, Ethan Frome, Summer, The Reef, The Custom of the Country,* and *The Age of Innocence* all investigate complicated triangles of desire that involve queer desire, which finds sublimation through a shared longing for a beloved. Wharton examines both same-sex male and female desire in her fiction, in an attempt to work through and hone the mature, authorial voice she assumed in literary adulthood, after she had been undergone an education of the pederastic tradition and had realized her complex identity.

More recently, scholars have started to question the role of male homosexuality in Wharton’s fiction, encouraging reexamination of Wharton’s major works. One notable voice is that of Gregory Woods, who, in his study *A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition,* calls attention to the potentially queer figure of Newland Archer, in Wharton’s *The Age of Innocence.* In her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, Wharton shows how Archer, while abroad in Europe, finds himself surrounded by a queer subculture of decadence and social excess, as participants in a kind of carnival or sorts. Wharton details Archer’s experiences with allusions that become unmistakable:

Only once, just after Harvard, he spent a few gay weeks at Florence with a band of queer Europeanised Americans, dancing all night with titled ladies in palaces, and gambling half the day with rakes and dandies of the fashionable club; but it had all seemed to him, though the greatest fun in
the world, as unreal as a carnival. These queer cosmopolitan women, deep in complicated love-affairs which they appeared to feel the need for retailing to everyone they met, and the magnificent young officers and elderly dyed wits who were the subjects or the recipients of their confidences, were too different from the people Archer had grown up among, too much like the expensive and malodorous hot-house exotics, to detain his imagination for long. (197)

Woods calls attention to Wharton’s use of words like “gay,” “dandies,” and “queer,” to describe a defined European scene that challenged American social tradition with “elderly dyed wits” who desire “magnificent young officers” (14). Woods begins a line of inquiry that could have very long-ranging effects on the reading of Wharton’s body of literary work; if she threads careful references to queer culture throughout her texts, then her fiction requires reexamination, in lieu of this deeper understanding of Wharton as a writer. For example, as I thumbed through *The Age of Innocence*, I noticed that Archer “prided himself on his knowledge of Italian art,” having experienced a “boyhood” that had been “saturated with Ruskin,” with his reading works by John Addington Symonds, Vernon Lee, and Walter Pater, all of whom were linked to same-sex sexuality (69).

Certainly, Wharton purposely suggests that Newland Archer possesses a complicated sense of his own sexuality, developed out of his boyhood reading material and his experiences abroad in young adulthood. When she refers to the “expensive and malodorous hot-house exotics,” Wharton alludes to a popular image of queerness that only certain contemporary readers were able to recognize, readers who were schooled in and understood the male homosexual literary tradition that celebrated pederasty.

Due to the specific limitations within this study, concerning time and length constraints, I can only signal toward the numerous erotic triangles that inform Wharton’s fiction written both during and after her friendship with Henry James ended, with the
Master's death in 1916. The ramifications of the self-knowledge Wharton gained through her affair with Fullerton and her identification with James irrevocably changed her mode of writing, enabling her to assume a mature authorial voice that was not afraid of thematic experimentation, in terms of complex understandings of human sexuality. Deeply fascinated by the psychological underpinnings of same-sex male desire, Wharton explores taboo forms of masculine desire—especially that of a father for a son, in either direct biological relationships (as witnessed in A Son at the Front) or in quasi-incestuous connections (as seen in The Reef or Twilight Sleep) between a stepfather and his stepson. Pederasty and images of sexually charged, male comradeship appear in Wharton’s fiction as well, as observed in works like The Spark and The Gods Arrive. Erotic triangles appear at the center of Wharton’s most influential books, including relationships that posit a mother within an erotic triangle with her own daughter, as seen in her piece The Mother’s Recompense. Incest interests Wharton in that it represents a taboo form of sexuality which becomes exciting in its unusualness, its foreignness, and symbolizes a breaking of that social and moral sexual convention enforced by expectations of heteronormativity. When Wharton wrote her famous pornographic fragment “Beatrice Palmato,” creating a sensuous scene that explores a father’s consummation of the desire he feels for his daughter, she started to investigate her own complicated questioning of her relationship with and desire for her father. What triggered, for Wharton, all of this prodigious literary output—largely produced after her meeting of Henry James—was her connection to the Master and her finding a safe haven within the Inner Circle, where she could reveal her private, interiorized self and accept her otherness, her internalized sense of queerness. Without her initiation into the “happy few” of her own “band of brothers,”
Wharton would have never come to understand the pederastic tradition and, therefore, would have never have discovered her own powerful literary voice as an author. For Wharton, comradeship was the key to her literary and sexual awakening. In her memoir, *A Backward Glance*, Wharton confesses, in the opening of her chapter on Henry James:

> I cannot think of myself apart from the influence of the two or three greatest friendships of my life, and any account of my own growth must be that of their stimulating and enlightening influence. From a childhood and youth of complete intellectual isolation—so complete that it accustomed me never to be lonely except in company—I passed, in my early thirties, into an atmosphere of the rarest understanding, the richest and most varied comradeship. (169)

Wharton identifies the “stimulating and enlightening influence” of the “two or three greatest friendships” of her life, with men (like James, Fullerton, and Berry) who provided for her “an atmosphere of the rarest understanding, the richest and most varied comradeship.” Finally, Wharton was no longer “lonely,” in that the greatest fear that she and James faced was that of absolute isolation and alienation. The horror James describes in “The Beast in the Jungle” and Wharton details in “The Eyes” stems from a deep loneliness wrought from a failure of self-recognition, an avoidance of one’s queer interiority. Luckily, Wharton had that moment of self-discovery during her relationship with Fullerton and James, when she saw in herself in the eyes of James and the eyes of her father, as she remembered him. Refusing to live a life paralyzed by fear, Wharton used writing as a way to connect to herself and others, to communicate the hidden aspects of her private self that her hyper-feminine public persona obscured. If we, as readers and scholars, look intently enough, Wharton has left us the clues to understand her interiorized self, where some part of her awaits a knock within that innermost of chambers.
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

TIMELINE OF IMPORTANT DATES

1843: James born on April 15.
1855: Howard Sturgis born.
1859: Walter Berry born.
1862: Wharton born on January 24, A.C. Benson born on April 24.
1865: W. Morton Fullerton born.
1871: Gaillard Lapsley born.
1873: James and Sturgis become friends.
1875: James publishes Roderick Hudson.
1876: James meets painter Paul Joukowsky. The Master moves to London and his relationship with Sturgis deepens.
1878: Wharton publishes Verses and James’ Daisy Miller: A Study first appears in print.
1879: Percy Lubbock born.
1880: James’ Portrait of a Lady begins serialization.
1881: John Hugh Smith born.
1883: Wharton disappointed by Berry in Bar Harbor, Maine.
1884: James and A.C. Benson meet.
1885: Edith marries Teddy Wharton.
1887: Wharton meets James for the first time at the Boits’ (Sturgis’ cousins) dinner party; A.C. Benson meets Howard Sturgis at Tan.
1888: Wharton and Sturgis meet.
1890: James becomes friends with Fullerton and Jonathan Sturges; James writes “The Pupil,” addressing desire of an older tutor for his boy student.
1891: Sturgis publishes Tim (presenting a “romantic friendship” between two schoolboys at Eton). Second meeting of James and Wharton takes place in Venice.
1892: William Haynes-Smith (“The Babe”) moves in with Sturgis at Queen’s Acre (“Qu’acre”). Alice James dies.
1893: Wharton works with Ogden Codman, Jr., on Land’s End; John Addington Symonds dies.
1894: Sturgis publishes All That Was Possible.
1895: Disastrous opening of James’ Guy Domville, on January 5, at the St. James Theatre; Wilde’s The Importance of Being Earnest opens with great success, on February 14, at same venue. James resents Wilde’s popularity. Wilde’s trials ensue between April 3 and May 24. James reads biography on Symonds, connects to Wilde in letter to Edmund Gosse. Sturgs asks James to sign public petition in support of Wilde; James refuses, writes about Wilde’s scandal.
1897: Wharton and Codman publish The Decoration of Houses. Walter Berry resumes friendship with Wharton.
1898: James moves from London to Rye, begins to live at Lamb House.
1899: James visits Rome and meets sculptor Hendrik Christian Andersen.
1901: The Whartons buy the property for The Mount; Lubbock begins friendship with Benson.


1906: In March, Wharton meets André Gide and, in April, she arrives in England to visit James. Lapsley gives Wharton tour of Cambridge; she meets Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, during “mood for the Hellenic.” The “earliest partial gathering” of Wharton’s “happy few” meet at Queen’s Acre, in May. Wharton is introduced to Lubbock; she travels to France to visit George Sand’s estate, Nohant, in mid-May. James begins the *New York Editions* of his novels and tales.

1907: In January, Wharton cites Otto Weininger’s *Sex & Character* in letter. During March, Wharton takes second trip to Nohant, with James, and, in the spring, intrigued by Fullerton. James sees Andersen in Rome, in May and June. In October, Fullerton visits Wharton at The Mount, with a letter of introduction from James. On October 29, Wharton begins love-diary to Fullerton and their romance starts. In November, Fullerton confides to James his blackmail situation.

1908: In April, James visits Wharton and Fullerton in France, sits for portrait by Jacques Émile Blanche. Wharton sees James in London, in September, and meets Katherine Fullerton in Paris, in October. During November and December, Wharton stays in England, visits friends; Wharton

1909: In January, Wharton and James discuss Fullerton's blackmail. Benson witnesses Lubbock's and Sturgis' "loverlike kiss." In February, James begins friendship with Hugh Walpole. On June 4, James visits Wharton and Fullerton at the Charing Cross Hotel, leaves the two lovers to have their night of passion. Wharton writes her Whitmanian poem "Terminus." James and Wharton travel to Lamb House, in Rye, and Wharton stays at Queen's Acre, remaining in England for a month. Wharton visits Lapsley in Cambridge and Lubbock in Oxford. In July, Wharton and Fullerton resume sexual relations. Sturgis encourages Wharton's affair with Fullerton in a letter; James and Wharton set up their plot to help out Fullerton, give him money through their publisher. Wharton writes letter to Fullerton about distinction between "ami" and "amie." In October, Sturgis gives Wharton inscribed copy of Ionica II.


1912: James writes to Sturgis about Wharton's marital problems. Wharton publishes her Jamesian novel The Reef, after working on drafts with Fullerton. In July and August, Wharton visits England, stays with James at Lamb House and sees Sturgis at Queen's Acre. In December, Lapsley and Lubbock stay with Wharton, to celebrate the holidays in France.
APPENDIX C

EXPLANATION OF ILLUSTRATION

The preceding graphic “Illustration of Introductions” shows, through a visual representation, how Henry James acted as the center of the Qu’acre Circle, or, as Wharton called their “band of brothers, the “Happy Few.” Each circle holds the name of a member of the group, the dates of their births and deaths in parentheses, along with the abbreviations (initials or last names) of the individuals with whom they had “romantic friendships,” or for whom that person had expressed desire (either documented in personal writing or suggested by another member of the circle). The lines that connect different members of the circle have printed on or next to them the year that their friendships began. What starts to emerge within the graphic is a pattern of circles and almost fluid connections that show how this group functioned and came together, primarily between 1900 and 1910. With the James as the core member of the major cluster of circles (representing the “Inner Circle”), one sees how Wharton’s friendships, given the exception of Walter Berry, started after she had met the Master, suggesting that James was the initiator of her relationships with several of the key members of their group. Outside the central cluster of circles, the satellite figure of A.C. Benson appears, demonstrating that, despite the fact that he never became a direct member of the Qu’acre Circle (as it has been defined), he carried on important friendships with many of its participants and provided personal insight into the goings-on within the group dynamic (recorded in his diaries). Like James, Benson became a kind of older patron of the younger men within the circle, who promoted and encouraged relationships between them. Ultimately, the reader should observe how the image of the circle repeats within the groupings of smaller circles, which should convey the idea of how the circle itself became symbolic of the dynamic between these friends.