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ALLAN HEPBURN

A Passion for Things: Cicerones, Collectors, and Taste in Edith Wharton's Fiction

ON AN ISTHMUS OF LAND, at the narrowest and highest point of the Cap Ferrat on the French Riviera, stands a pink Italian *palazzo*, built between 1905 and 1912 for the Baroness Béatrice Ephrussi de Rothschild. In 1934, Rothschild donated the palace, stocked with priceless objects and canvases, to the Académie des Beaux-Arts. The Blue Guide, indispensable cicerone to the sites of Provence, states that the house has preserved its character as “la résidence d’un riche amateur d’art à l’aube du XXe siècle” (709). This residence, turned museum, contains Louis XV and Louis XVI furniture, Sèvres porcelain, forged iron objects, paintings by Boucher, Fragonard, Moreau, Monet and others. Legend has it that the baroness had items shipped from all over Europe to the train station in nearby Beaulieu. She then sauntered among heaps of goods that sat on the platform and selected and rejected at whim. Her diverse taste manifests itself also in the assemblage of garden styles behind the house. There, Italian fountains, English hedges, Spanish pergolas and French promenades each have a designated place, as if landscape were an esperanto of flowers and greenery.

The pink palace incarnates a modern collector’s passion and raises two interrelated questions. First, why do so few women collect art or art-objects in the modern period? Second, how is space designed to display the modern collector’s possessions and regulate her privacy? The Baroness’ collection is the distillation of a female art-lover’s taste, the emblem of female purchasing power manifest in teacups, paintings and

side-chairs all displayed in a joyously pink *palazzo*. Meditating on material things refines and rationalizes itself into connoisseurship, a discernment of nuance that Edith Wharton understands and uses throughout her fiction. Wharton herself, despite a manifest interest in décor and houses, did not collect art, yet an interest in collectors infuses her fiction between 1902 and 1913. In stories such as "The Moving Finger," "The Dilettante," and "The Pot-Boiler," she exposes the complex relation between those who produce art, those who are the subjects of art, those who appreciate art, and those who collect art.

Wharton's knowledge of collectors derived from close contact with a coterie of men who understood art markets: American collector Eger-ton Winthrop, Harvard professor of art history Charles Eliot Norton, and art expert Bernard Berenson (Dwight 47). Although the imperatives of appreciation put forward by John Ruskin, Walter Pater and Bernard Berenson for would-be collectors were known to Wharton as the foundation for "good taste," she creates no collectors in her fiction who are women. Male collectors, on the other hand, figure in *The Valley of Decision* (1902), the short story "The Daunt Diana" (1905), *The Reef* (1912), and *The Custom of the Country* (1913). Affected by Wharton's understanding of commerce and taste in an American context, collectors in her stories and novels attempt to preserve a private world that gets displaced into or onto objects. The bond between collector and commodity is a dangerous one, particularly for women, for it poses questions of taste and possession. Wharton's literary representations of collectors respond to shifts in the culture of collecting in the first decade of the century. Wharton, by classifying identities according to taste—"dilettante," "connoisseur," "collector"—demonstrates the complex effects that material culture has on women and their relations to identities wholly determined by, or in opposition to, material goods. In *The Custom of the Country*, Undine's relationship to commodities, as well as Wharton's view of women's place in the world of art and art-collectors, becomes shaded by the understanding that things entrap women and must be kept in circulation in order to avoid the metonymic slide from possessor to possessed. One solution to this quandary is to make women become cicerones who exhibit knowledge or good taste without necessarily becoming collectors.

Walter Benjamin argues that the collector, a product of high capitalism, lives a life parallel to commerce and implicitly judges commodity

culture by bidding for and accumulating *objets d'art*. When commodities multiply, taste (meaning, in this case, a fluid aesthetic category invoked to frustrate the uninitiated), masks "lack of expertness," whereas the collector possesses genuine expertise (105). Benjamin's conception of taste differs considerably from David Hume's eighteenth-century notion of rational "true" taste, made up of "strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice" (247). Nor does Benjamin's definition resemble John Ruskin's tautological assertion that "perfect taste is the faculty of receiving the greatest possible pleasure from those material sources which are attractive to our moral nature in its purity and perfection" (26–27). For Ruskin, moral perfection duplicates itself in perfect taste.

Taste becomes critical to the vocabulary of the first decade of the century insofar as *belle époque* and Edwardian styles emphasize the abundance and whimsy of things for sale: swirls, volutes, drapery, swags, weight, upholstery. Amid proliferation of material goods, choosing a "tasteful" object becomes fraught with complexity as the purchaser understands less and less about the skill or materials required to make it. In America, the arrival of Ruskin's, Wilde's and Pater's precepts of taste caused an "aesthetic craze" in which ownership of art objects was sufficient proof of refinement (Freedman 106). Tinged by commercial interests, art assumes the status of suspect endeavor because it attracts both the phony artist and the effete dilettante. The collector therefore emerges as a cultural inevitability: an expert who distinguishes the authentic from the fake and buys accordingly. It is neither a moral nor a rational category; rather, taste mystifies and justifies commercial activity. "Taste" in this sense is the triumph of individualism in the marketplace. When Virginia Woolf grouses about the over-representation of "bells and buttons" and the solid "fabric" in modern fiction, she means that materialism crushes spirit and character during the Edwardian and Georgian periods (Woolf 32). The absorption in material goods cannot be dismissed, however, without some investigation into the penalties that all that silver, all those pictures, and all those collections exacted. Woolf's quibbles aside, character expresses itself not in opposition to, but through commodities, and the collector in particular attempts to master the world of tasteful things by purchasing and organizing them. The collector prowling through the auction houses and old estates of Europe, or marauding among the bric-à-brac in "materialist" fiction,

becomes historically possible when the logic of capital permits the sequestering of art and the separation of commodities from use or labor values.

In fiction preceding Wharton's, the figure of the collector is invariably male. Wharton, cognizant of this gendered heritage, treats women's relations to commodities ambiguously since few of her female characters can afford to buy art objects or paintings with their own money. In *The House of Mirth*, Lily Bart, with no money of her own, relies on invitations to be a house-guest and loses a promised inheritance from Mrs. Peniston; in *The Custom of the Country*, Undine Spragg requests money from her father, then from her several husbands, to buy opera tickets and gowns; in *The Age of Innocence*, Ellen Olenska, married to a philandering Count, is relieved of financial desperation when Mrs. Mingott bequeaths her a legacy. As Thorstein Veblen claims in his 1899 analysis of American leisure classes, women serve as "trophy" wives for wealthy men, an index of status, even if marriage is based on coercion and "the custom of ownership" (23–24). Women, especially those within the New York elite that Wharton herself issued from, put themselves forward as articles of commercial exchange out of an enculturated sense of duty. Self-sufficiency was possible for Wharton, the recipient of a trust fund, but few of her heroines achieve it. In *The House of Mirth*, Simon Rosedale, who wants to marry Lily in order to gain access to social circles that remain beyond him, appraises her "as though he were a collector who had learned to distinguish minor differences of design and quality in some long coveted object" (300). The collector, as a character type, stands as a cipher for the relation between material and metaphysical realms, between taste and vulgarity, and between men and women. Acutely conscious of space and the way women do or do not control the spaces designed to contain them, Wharton attempts to move away from the paralyzing self-stylization that Lily Bart practices in *The House of Mirth* by creating the more complex character of Undine Spragg in *The Custom of the Country*.

Like Lily, Undine initially offers herself as a transfer of property, but she comes to see the pitfalls of behaving as if she were a prized sculpture put up for auction. During her stint as a French châtelaine, Undine sits among rooms furnished with "embroidered hangings and tapestry chairs" and stares at her nails out of boredom (289). Although her expressed desire is to be "able to buy everything she wanted" (207), once

she acquires décor and objects, she abandons them, sells them, or alters them. She resets jewels that are Marvell heirlooms. She forces the sale of the Boucher tapestries that hang at the de Chelles' country mansion in order to acquire more dresses. If we interpret this, however, as disrespect for heirlooms and tapestries, we invest material goods with more value than the subjects who own them, whereas Wharton, despite her personal attachment to material things, sides with those who possess appreciation without necessarily owning possessions.

Raised in Europe, fluent in French, Italian and German, Wharton deplored the American habit of plundering Europe to furnish America. "Her whole attitude towards America," claims her close friend Gaillard Lapsley, "was enigmatical. . . . She habitually expressed the strongest aversion to it" (Lubbock 149). Anti-Americanism may express some of Wharton's disdain for the crass mercantilists and stock-brokers who invade Manhattan from the midwest in *The Custom of the Country*. It also expresses an anxiety about being associated with a culture that collects surface impressions and misunderstands complexity. In a 1903 essay on "The Vice of Reading," Wharton draws an analogy between the mechanical reader and "the tourist who travels from one 'sight' to another without looking at anything that is not set down in Baedeker" (*Uncollected* 101). Snobbish and élitist, Wharton disapproves of touring or collecting that manifests only cultural acquisition without cultural erudition.

The sophisticated American understands European ways without effort, yet never forces familiarity with Europeans for fear of appearing vulgar. According to Wharton's autobiography, "the Americans who forced their way into good society in Europe were said to be those who were shut out of it at home." However, Wharton is not mocking Americans who shove their way into European society. Instead, she ridicules those who hang back and do not "profit much by the artistic and intellectual advantages of Europe" because it "was thought vulgar and snobbish" to become acquainted with Europeans "of the class corresponding to their own" (*Backward* 62). Wharton indicts American anti-snobbish snobbery as debilitating anti-intellectualism. Her criticism begins with an assumption about the prerogatives of class. Moreover, despite Susan Goodman's claim in *Edith Wharton's Women* that Wharton "sought value for her life and her work in relationships with women" (4), Wharton's principal relationships were with men who possessed knowledge of Eu-

ropean culture. Percy Lubbock refers to her "family" as comprised of Gaillard Lapsley, Charles Norton, Paul Bourget, Kenneth Clark, Bernard Berenson, Walter Berry and Lubbock himself (177). The majority of her male friends were polyglot, American expatriates who found haven in France, and who prized literature and art. Barbara White states that "she was always socially and politically conservative in that she never showed any inclination to renounce her class and race privileges and never could imagine any institutions to replace the ones she criticized" (85). Wharton's attitude towards America is compounded, therefore, by her attitudes towards gender and privilege.

Because of social position, because of fear of exposure, because of lack of capital, because no precedents existed, because women's possession of property remained tenuous (especially in Europe through the nineteenth century), women by and large did not collect art. As a female collector, Baroness Rothschild, furnishing her pink villa on the Cap Ferrat, is somewhat anomalous. With few exceptions, the first European collectors of impressionist painting "were men acting alone," according to Anne Distel (141). However, the way gender figures in modernist acts of collecting is complicated by American, as opposed to European, sensibilities and traditions of acquisition. In the most excoriating speech in *The Custom of the Country*, Raymond de Chelles accuses Undine of American, and therefore barbarous, rapacity: "You come among us from a country we don't know, and can't imagine, a country you care for so little that before you've been a day in ours you've forgotten the very house you were born in—if it wasn't torn down before you knew it! You come among us speaking our language and not knowing what we mean" (307). Raymond condemns the American habit of imitating surfaces without understanding traditions, and destroying private spaces in order to possess culture. Undine translates this fascination for novelty into a habit of donning dresses and redecorating houses. When she perceives that her husband Ralph might be a successful writer and that "literature was becoming fashionable," she imagines herself "wearing 'artistic' dresses and doing the drawing-room over with Gothic tapestries and dim lights in altar candlesticks" (163).

One modern American woman who acted with erudition and temerity in collecting art was Louisine Havemeyer. At first buying with her husband Harry, Louisine specialized in contemporary painting, which, in itself, bespoke audacity. American male collectors, including Loui-

sine's husband, steered towards authenticated masterpieces by Titian, Rembrandt, and Giorgione. Female collectors, too, like Isabella Stewart Gardner, tended to pursue Old Masters since their value was assured and the fad for Renaissance style had been legitimated architecturally and art historically. That Louisine Havemeyer bought art in the garish impressionist style testifies to her independence and artistic instinct. She also had the good fortune to meet Mary Cassatt and to enlist Cassatt as an explicator of impressionist innovations (Weitzenhoffer 50–51). Louisine was sixteen when she “first heard of Degas, of course through Miss Cassatt.” Cassatt escorted the Havemeyers through Europe and coaxed and cajoled them into purchases. When, for instance, on a tour through a private collection in Italy Harry saw a portrait by Veronese that he judged dull, Cassatt countered that it was “very fine” and vowed to buy it herself (Havemeyer 249, 110). Cassatt made artistic traditions and subtleties intelligible and converted the Havemeyers into connoisseurs. After Harry died in 1907, Louisine embarked on a solo buying career. In 1912, she spent almost half a million francs for Degas' *Dancers Practicing at the Bar*, the highest sum ever paid for a painting by a living artist. In control of her own fortune, Havemeyer acted as purchaser in her own name, not through her husband.

Havemeyer pioneered both the idea of a female collector and the idea of American interest in contemporary European art. Along with Havemeyer, a list of American women who purchased art during this period reads like a short—a very short—Homeric catalogue: Isabella Stewart Gardner, Gertrude Stein, Peggy Guggenheim, Claribel and Etta Cone, and Bertha Honoré Palmer. Collecting remained largely the province of men. To set beside the catalogue of women collectors a list of male collectors from the period is to give a roll call of capitalist prestige: Cornelius Vanderbilt, Henry Huntingdon, John Pierpont Morgan, P. A. B. Widener, Henry Walters, Henry Flagler, Stephen V. Harkness, Leland Stanford, Jay Gould, Andrew Mellon, Henry Clay Frick, John Harper, W. A. Roebling, and Albert Barnes (Watson 118–50).

To launder money gotten from oil or railroads or steel, men bought art. At the same time, the collection conspicuously displayed the purchasing power of the collector and enhanced his public persona. The intimate connection that collectors develop with objects cannot really be explained because the relation is unique for each collector. Objects in a private collection refract personal taste. Psychotherapist Herbert

Muensterberger posits that the motivation to collect arises from “an underlying experience of hurt or unsafety and the subsequent recurrence of moodiness or depression.” In this psychological model of creating and controlling a world, the collector regains “equilibrium and self-composure” by controlling objects (252). Jean Baudrillard similarly pronounces that the collector acts out of jealousy to sequester unique objects in systems of exchange: “It is because he feels himself alienated or lost within a social discourse whose rules he cannot fathom that the collector is driven to construct an alternative discourse that is for him entirely amenable,” insofar as they refer back to the collector as orderer of a miniature universe (Elsner and Cardinal 24). Susan Stewart distinguishes the collection from the souvenir by their differences .. relation to the past. If the souvenir is sentimentally mired in the past, the collection, by contrast, hopes to transcend the past by spatializing time. Stewart writes that “the collection is a complex interplay of exposure and hiding, organization and the chaos of infinity. The collection relies upon the box, the cabinet, the cupboard, and the seriality of shelves” (157). These explanations may be more true for male than female collectors whose connoisseurship is attached not to the past, but to the avant-garde. Furthermore, women like Gertrude Stein and the C one sisters collected according to limited budgets and available wall space.

Control of objects demands regulation of space and the application of categories. At the end of *The Custom of the Country*, Elmer Moffatt builds a house for Undine Spragg on Fifth Avenue in New York that is “an exact copy of the Pitti Palace, Florence” (330), and furnishes a second mansion in Paris to hold his treasures. Elmer jests that he doesn’t want to spend the rest of his life “reading art magazines in a pink villa” (323). He doesn’t. But he comes close. The anxiety that modern American capitalists felt about acquired taste expresses itself architecturally, as a desire to live in copies of Italian piles. In *The Great Gatsby*, Nick Carraway jokes that Gatsby’s mansion is “a factual imitation of some H otel de Ville in Normandy” with a library “probably transported complete from some ruin overseas” (5, 45). Isabella Stewart Gardner’s house in Boston replicates elements of Italian Renaissance palaces. Bertha Honor  Palmer built a “battlemented monstrosity” in Chicago, which she called her “castle” (Saarinen 3–24). Undine, from the midwestern town of Apex, bears some passing resemblance to Palmer, who went on buying sprees in Europe to cover the walls of her Chicago castle with

paintings. Palmer, credited with exposing the midwest to impressionism, owned such notable works as Renoir's *The Canoeist's Luncheon*, Monet's *Argenteuil sur Seine*, and Pissarro's *Café au Lait* (Watson 126). By contrast, Louisine Havemeyer built a daring, Frenchified house in New York, with décor by Louis Comfort Tiffany designed to show the Havemeyer collections to advantage. Bernard Berenson and his wife Mary visited the Havemeyer house on Fifth Avenue in November 1903; Mary pronounced it "awful," with "no real taste" (Weitzenhoffer 145).

Women's collections and homes express a different sense of modernity that implies continuity and style, not possession and control. For Rothschild, Palmer and Gardner, a palace—however imitative and got-up—connects the *châtelaine* with the virtues of the Renaissance past. The discourse of modern American taste based itself in appreciation of Italian Renaissance art and architecture. In their advice on design in *The Decoration of Houses* (1897) Wharton and Ogden Codman advocated "styles especially suited to modern life . . . prevailing in Italy since 1500, in France from the time of Louis XIV," and in England after Inigo Jones imported the Italian manner (13). This, however, is a paradoxical lineage. Judith Fryer argues that reconstituted Renaissance styles were *passé* by the first decade of the twentieth century. Wharton's conception of the American home evolving along lines set down during the Renaissance had been challenged by progressive, affordable house plans published in women's magazines and kitchenless communities set forth by Charlotte Perkins Gilman and by the skyscraping towers springing up in Chicago and New York (35, 61).

When Newland Archer drops savvy allusions to Ruskin and Pater in *The Age of Innocence*, he displays a taste for the Renaissance that "was soon to be superseded by an interest in Italian primitives" (Fryer 124–25). Wharton's own association with collectors and connoisseurs allowed her to discriminate a Titian from a Giorgione; she always maintained a rather haughty self-regard about her knowledge of the history of art. She lists herself among those who smile at the "literary" appreciations of art represented by Symonds and Pater, and sides with "those who wished to banish sentiment from the study of painting and sculpture." In particular she singles out Bernard Berenson, who combined "aesthetic sensibility" with "the sternest scientific accuracy" in his analysis of Renaissance art (*Backward* 141).

Charged with this high artistic sense, she dismisses the dilettantes

and the untutored. Conversations with Berenson would have kept Wharton informed about shifts in taste and aesthetic assumptions in Renaissance history. In addition to Berenson's, Pater's and Ruskin's versions of the Renaissance, Jacob Burckhardt's *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, which appeared in 1860, emphasizes the emergence of the individual in the early modern period. Burckhardt grants individuals autonomy from materials; Renaissance "man became a spiritual individual, and recognized himself as such" (143). Experiential and spiritual identity have more validity, in this definition, than material identity.¹ The Renaissance served as a touchstone for the nineteenth-century connoisseur because, as an era, it signified the superiority of feeling and "inwardness" over materials and commodities. Wharton's own construction of private spaces at The Mount in Lenox, Massachusetts, at the Pavillon Colombe outside Paris, and at Ste. Claire near Hyères, display no architectural indebtedness to Renaissance styles. Wharton admired Renaissance proportion, order, and ornament without slavishly copying Renaissance buildings as other Americans did. On the other hand, her preoccupation with interior space indicates concern for privacy where dimensions of spiritual individuality may be put on display as examples of taste. Griselda Pollock has argued that the spaces of modernity, rigidly divided according to male and female spheres, were "powerfully operative in the construction of a specifically bourgeois way of life" (68). Pollock does not account, however, for a woman like Wharton who created her own spaces, and who, in the representation of collectors, treats male figures in private, bourgeois retreats. As Benjamin says about the mid-nineteenth century: "The interior was the refuge of Art. The collector was the true inhabitant of the interior" (168).

Wharton's representations of collectors were inspired by diverse literary and historical examples that converged with changing ideas of taste. To list possible sources points to the surplus of such influences in the Edwardian decade. For instance, Wharton attended the 1903 New Year's opening of Gardner's *palazzo* in the Boston fens and had seen the Old Masters' paintings in her newly installed collection, chosen by Berenson. In the same decade, Henry James, residing in England, wrote about the figure of the collector in *The Golden Bowl* (1904) and *The Outcry* (1910). Among French influences, Wharton probably knew, in

detail, Paul Bourget's stories in *Voyageuses* (1897) and *La Dame qui a perdu son peintre* (1910), which concern art collectors.

Bourget's influence on Wharton has not been the subject of any critical inquiry.² Bourget and Wharton met in 1893, Wharton dedicated her first novel to him, and they socialized incessantly for decades. In a eulogy for Bourget, Wharton calls him an "avid collector" of personalities. Although she confesses "the keenest admiration for his *Essais de psychologie contemporaine*," Wharton's and Bourget's writerly techniques are utterly opposed, according to Wharton. They silently resolved not to discuss their works, but did confer over subjects of future works (*Uncollected* 216, 213, 224). Ellen Olenska, in *The Age of Innocence*, proves her up-to-date taste by reading Bourget, as well as Huysmans and the Goncourt Brothers, whereas the banal dilettante Newland Archer pictures himself mingling with Thackeray, Browning and William Morris in drawing rooms, but is, in truth, bored by bohemian writers (102–3).

Given the intimate rapport between Wharton and Bourget, it is possible they shared opinions about the psychology of art collectors. In particular, Bourget's lengthy story "La Dame Qui a Perdu son Peintre," completed in August 1906, dramatizes the charlatanism of a cicerone-critic and is related to Wharton's own conception of connoisseurs.³ The belligerent art-gobbling millionaire Ralph Kennedy in "La Dame qui a perdu son peintre" embodies the industrialist's lust for art as a lust for public recognition and decontamination of money's industrial origins. As Bourget writes of the American Kennedy, "il n'y a guère de milieu, dans cette étrange coterie des magnats du dollar. Ils se raffinent ou ils se brutalisent à l'excès" (63).⁴ Millions of dollars might be acquired in a lifetime, but culture is not got so speedily. Those millionaires who behave with excessive refinement or brutality play the roles of connoisseur or dilettante. Wharton's short story, "The Daunt Diana," published in *Tales of Men and Ghosts* in 1910, expresses parallel ideas about connoisseurs and guides. There the relationship of art-guide to collector mirrors the relationship of story-teller to listener. The double circulation of art objects and stories in "The Daunt Diana" conveys Wharton's acute sense that stories serve as goods for sale on the market. Like finely carved statues, the finely wrought story has value only when it circulates. In "The Eyes," "The Daunt Diana," and other stories concerning connoisseurs written prior to *The Custom of the Country*, transmission

of a tale from man to man, and from male teller to reader, imitates the value-enhancement of fine objects that Bourget's stories also foreground. Taste becomes a form of rivalry among men who confirm their fineness of sensibility by converting acts of merchandising into tales of taste.

"The Daunt Diana" concerns a Pons-like collector named Humphrey Neave.⁵ The narrator, Ringham Finney, acts as a cicerone for the third-party listener, who also knows Neave. The trio of men all hail from America, though, as Finney specifies, Neave "worried" his way through Harvard "with shifts and shavings that you and I can't imagine." Poverty forces Neave to take up a job as tutor to shiftless youths who have failed their examinations. He works his way through Europe until, eventually, he lands "the more congenial task of expounding 'the antiquities' to cultured travelers" (*Tales* 105). The exact definition of "cicerone" is one who shows and explains antiquities and curiosities to foreign visitors; adapted from the name of the Roman orator Cicero because of his learning and eloquence, the term implies acquaintance with, if not connoisseurship of, the objects displayed. Although "cicerone" initially referred to a guide in Italy, the word entered the English language long before it entered Italian. As it acquired currency, it came to mean a learned escort in museums and private collections. As such, it suggests someone who has access to hidden domains of art and treasures. In the capacity of disseminating arcane knowledge and gaining access where none is thought possible, the cicerone regulates the act of spectating. By doing so, such a guide enhances his or her own value at the same time as the value of the art objects increases through explanation. Information, once sold, cannot be sold again to the same buyer, and the cicerone has to market himself or herself as an arbiter of taste, not just as a possessor of facts.

Wharton's tale is unusual for its compassionate treatment of the cicerone's aspiration to become a collector, to move from informed guide to purchaser. Neave buys the celebrated and rarely seen "Daunt Collection" when he suddenly comes into an inheritance and the collector Daunt just as suddenly loses money and has to put his rarities up for sale. In literary precedents, the cicerone often appears in tandem with a collector, but the roles are kept separate. In 1904, Bourget published "La Seconde Mort de Broggi-Mezzastris," a story about a smart, impoverished cicerone-purchaser. Re-issued in *La Dame Qui a Perdu Son Pein-*

tre in 1910, Bourget's story precedes "The Daunt Diana" by a narrow chronological margin. Read side by side, Bourget's and Wharton's stories help explain the relationship of cicerone to modern collectors, and the practices of authentication and deceit that dealers fob off on willing buyers. In Bourget's story, the cicerone, Gambara, saves Broggi-Mezzastris from buying fakes; as a reward, Broggi-Mezzastris takes on Gambara as his conservationist and general counsel. "Me voyant si pauvre," Gambara explains to the nephew of Broggi-Mezzastris, "il me donna du travail. J'eus à restaurer pour lui quelques toiles. Il s'en trouvait quatre de fausses sur six, dans le nombre. Je le lui prouvai. Frappé de mes connaissances techniques, il m'offrit un traitement fixe, si je voulais l'aider dorénavant dans ses achats . . . J'acceptai" (159).⁶ Like Neave, Gambara is poor yet knowledgeable. As guide to genuine artworks, Gambara quickly learns that his rich employer cannot distinguish a Mantegna from a Raphaël. Public perception of Broggi-Mezzastris' taste is the result of Gambara's assiduous collecting on his behalf; those pieces of art and furniture purchased by the rich man lack taste and Gambara hides them because they are so ugly. "Hideusement vulgaires" and "barbarement prétentieux," Gambara calls the ornate, plush-upholstered furniture of his employer's domicile (163). If the cicerone disappears from public view behind the figure of the collector, he leaves his taste finger-printed everywhere in the articles of culture he selects for his patron. The cicerone as connoisseur is, in the final analysis, responsible for the reputation of the collector just as Mary Cassatt's taste ultimately informs and improves the taste of the moneyed Havemeyers.

The cicerone appears elsewhere in literature prior to Bourget. Robert Browning's Duke of Ferrara, lifting the curtain to reveal the portrait of his last duchess, is a cicerone qua bluebeard. In James's *The Portrait of a Lady*, Isabel Archer traipses through Europe with several volunteers guiding her. In a tête-à-tête, Madame Merle persuades Gilbert Osmond to show Isabel his medallions. Osmond replies, "I don't object to showing my things—when people are not idiots." Madame Merle answers, "You do it delightfully. As cicerone of your museum you appear to particular advantage." A few pages later, Ralph Touchett escorts Isabel through Florentine treasure-houses: "Ralph found it a joy that renewed his own early passion to act as cicerone to his eager young kinswoman" (242, 246). The genuine cicerone has contacts in unusual places and

understands casual clues about the provenance and authenticity of artworks. Like Ralph Touchett, he imparts his enthusiasm and subtle understanding to a willing listener.

In "The Daunt Diana," the anonymous auditor calls himself "a good listener" (*Tales* 103) who plies Finney with a humidor full of cigars and dinner at a restaurant so that he'll hear the story of Neave. The *ficelles* in James's novels—those characters who hash over events with other characters and string together the action with commentary—are, more often than not, narrative cicerones. The sympathy displayed by Maria Gostrey in *The Ambassadors*, as she helps Lambert Strether muddle through his complex embassy, makes her acquire, in James's words, "something of the dignity of a prime idea." The cicerone who guides Strether becomes his confidante; furthermore, she helps the reader as "an enrolled, a direct, aid to lucidity" (*Art* 324, 322). In the same way, Neave is the connoisseur of the "The Daunt Diana," but Finney is the cicerone who brings a more objective, more lucid understanding to Neave's behavior.

Narrators guide just as cicerones do. Full of cultural information, acquainted with local customs, invisible behind characters, tactful, impersonal, glad to be of use, the story-teller pauses at points of interest to expound. Although the third-party listener in "The Daunt Diana" doesn't think much of Finney's "snuffboxes," he admires his flair for collecting specimens of human nature: "He's a psychologist astray among *bibelots*, and the best bits he brings back from his raids on Christie's and the Hotel Drouot are the fragments of human nature he picks up on those historic battlefields" (*Tales* 103). The best cicerone is the one who gives insight into character and unspoken motives that lie behind actions, just as a story-teller must do.

In the end, the role of the cicerone in Wharton's story untethers itself from any particular teller of the tale. Finney is cicerone to "I" who becomes, in turn, cicerone to the reader. Privy to a few random thoughts by "I" at the beginning of the tale, the reader sees him disappear into the artful rendering of the story by Finney. The real cicerone remains hidden, his motives unspoken. He shares his knowledge while imparting nothing about himself. The story is crowded with insight into character, but none of it concerns the unnamed narrator, except for the little facts of his Harvard education and generosity with cigars. Invisibility, cunning and refined knowledge define the connoisseur as

much as the cicerone. The unspoken interest of the connoisseur is to see the best piece first, to recognize what others have missed, to seize a bargain, to dicker with dealers, to establish pre-eminence. In order to gain credibility, the connoisseur must make his rivals appear dilettantes, though it would be unrefined and ungentlemanly to do that in a direct fashion.

Wharton's 1903 story "The Dilettante" presents such a dilemma: a dilettante attempts to improve, Henry Higgins-like, a woman whom he treats as "a work of art that was passing out of his possession" (*Descent* 141). The dilettante does not understand that his female friend has more sophistication than he. Dilettantism is a form of misapprehension, a pretense of appreciation. As Bourget says about dilettantism in *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* (the critical tome admired by Wharton), "Le dilettante philosophe considère tous ces systèmes [des idées] successivement avec une curiosité à la fois dédaigneuse—car elle procède du sentiment de l'impuissance des doctrines—et sympathique" (60).⁷ Confused about the difference between conviction and truth in art, the dilettante errs by trying to hide ignorance beneath simultaneous disdain and sympathy. The dilettante flattens differences. By contrast, the connoisseur observes differences and establishes authority slyly, through the mediation of tales of victorious bargaining in the art-market. Although the identity of "I" remains indistinct in "The Daunt Diana," the aspersion cast on Finney's snuff-boxes hints at the superiority of the nameless narrator's taste, giving him an edge as a connoisseur over Finney, a possible dilettante.

The cicerone's insistence on anonymity and his veneration of subtler artists jeopardizes his existence. Bourget's cicerone, Gambara, loses his identity behind the figure of his employer, Broggi-Mezzastris, whose name lives on in the museum he creates. By nature humble, the cicerone authenticates then disappears, just as James's *ficelles* go over ideas with main characters then withdraw once they have fulfilled their purpose. Ultimately, the cicerone conveys culture, embodies culture, enacts culture for the tourist, and the person who is guided by the cicerone must learn to appreciate the cicerone as more than chaperon. He becomes, as a storyteller, the cipher of culture itself. When the cicerone vanishes, the public recognizes his skill and contribution to the creation of collections; he is most needed when no longer present, the awkward moment when the collector or tourist must account for taste

independently. Not only do hapless tourists need a guide, the cicerone depends on tourists who need instruction, for his knowledge is useless unless he can impart it. The relationship is reciprocal to the point that one cannot escape the other and, as happens when a pupil takes on the knowledge of a tutor, the relationship induces envy, mistrust and hostility. As in Mary McCarthy's story "The Cicerone," which ends with the realization that "the relation between pursuer and pursued had been confounded," the tourists suspect that the guide is showing them aspects of culture that exceed their comprehension (129).⁸ In this sense, the cicerone feeds on the doubts of those who don't know European culture, yet hope to acquire it. They grow resentful and want to reject the cicerone on whom they rely.

The frame narrative in "The Daunt Diana" draws attention to the cicerone's role. Preferring omniscient, third-person voices, Wharton almost never uses a frame narrative and rarely a first-person one. Because she attaches a frame narrative to the tale, Wharton ensures that the "I" narrator guides the adventures of Humphrey Neave equally with Ringham Finney. The interplay between "I" and Finney—their voices fuse through the majority of the tale—permits confusion about who possesses the facts. After all, both Finney and "I" know Neave; neither lays prior claim to possession of the story. The cicerone thus courts disaster at all times by sharing what he knows about antiquities or curious personalities. Ideas and expertise, once carefully explained and understood, become the property of the listener. The neophyte graduates to connoisseur, and the cicerone becomes redundant. We notice symptoms of this ambition to dismiss the original cicerone in "I" when he pooh-poohs Finney's collection of snuffboxes and enamels.

The double narration dramatizes the fact of ownership—in this case, of a story—that is borne out by the tale itself, for Neave purchases the Daunt collection, then resells it, in order to buy it back again. Possession of the story mirrors the exchange of the art collection. Neave's astonishing act of selling the collection that he had coveted above all others is necessary to the logic of exchange, not only because it allows dealers and other buyers to know the wondrous value of the collection, which had been relegated to obscurity in Daunt's hands, but also because it allows the question of who controls art, in its selling and its telling, to surface. Neave's relinquishing of the Daunt collection raises suspicions. It causes the price to drop out of the auctioned-off lots. Re-

purchasing it at astronomical sums, far in excess of what each piece sold for, Neave reaffirms his connoisseurship. The activities of exchange and double-dealing, for which one needs professional opinions, force Wharton to add a frame that, in effect, allows us to imagine that the tale is told twice. The frame adds an element of tension to an otherwise straightforward story of connoisseurship; the frame keeps the story in circulation, for rumor and hearsay are as important to the price of art as they are to the value of a good story. It must be heard to be valued. The exchange mechanism that governs the art-market controls the story, too, for the frame never returns, allowing the story to drift into the hands of the next person like an item in a sales-bin, available to any browser or buyer. Because Finney's "I" fuses with the unidentified "I" of the frame narrative, the distinction between connoisseur and cicerone is blurred.

In 1909, Wharton met Bernard Berenson for the second time.⁹ By 1912, they were fast friends. Within Wharton's wide and influential circle, Berenson had pride of place as an intellectual companion, advisor and connoisseur.¹⁰ He undoubtedly exerted an influence on the conception of collectors and cicerones in Wharton's fiction and her ideas about the Renaissance in particular. Ardent conversationalists, they spent weeks on the road in motor-flights through Europe to look at art. In *A Backward Glance*, Wharton recalls a delirious *randonnée* they took through Europe in 1913: "In Berlin we spent eight crowded days, during which I trotted about the great Museums after my learned companion (who has always accused me of not properly appreciating the privilege), and was rewarded by a holiday in Dresden, and a day's dash to the picturesque heights of Saxon Switzerland" (332). As the foremost expert on Renaissance painting of his day, Berenson was the best cicerone anyone could hope for as a guide to museums of Berlin and Europe. In his several works on Venetian, Florentine, Central and North Italian Renaissance painters published by 1907, Berenson had established his credentials as a connoisseur of unimpeachable standards. The contribution of these works was chiefly to catalogue and certify art-works. However, Berenson permits, in these catalogues, a glimpse of the mind of the connoisseur, who aims to understand "what is permanent in the work of art" and to recognize that art inspires "enhanced pleasure" because it provokes "accelerated psychical processes" (*Italian Painters* 85, 42). Not concerned with the beautiful or the true *per se*, Berenson

reveals the discrimination of the connoisseur's mind only through casual asides.

Wharton's meeting Berenson coincides with composition of *The Custom of the Country* and *The Reef* between 1911 and 1913. When composition stalled on one novel, she turned to the other. Therefore, the creation of Leath, a collector of snuffboxes in *The Reef*, overlaps with the creation of Elmer Moffatt, "the greatest collector in America" in *The Custom of the Country* (328).¹¹ Leath, who has already died when *The Reef* begins, resembles Neave, except that he prefers the slightly unbalanced, the slightly imperfect, to enhance his collection, as if the flaws in priceless things are the birthmarks on art that prove their beauty and excellence. "He exacted a rigid conformity to his rules of non-conformity," but, in the end, he perceives life as "a walk through a carefully classified museum, where, in moments of doubt, one had only to look at the number and refer to one's catalogue" (89, 91). Anna Leath, mistaking the beauty of artifacts for beauty in Fraser Leath's character, marries him. However, the frigid perfection of his château, Givré, bodes forth his perfectly frigid personality. A museum is not habitable, she discovers, and a curator is not a suitable husband.

An analysis of the collector's skeptical conformism and frozen personality cannot go further in *The Reef* since the collector's death drives the plot from its first pages. As in James's *The Spoils of Poynton*, the aesthetic problem of the novel is what to do with the collector's accumulated loot after his death. Things impose a terrible burden for inheritors. In *The Custom of the Country*, Wharton offers a more discerning sense of the collector's character. Protean, rootless, midwestern Elmer reveals his collecting instinct bit by bit, signaled first by the way his eyes caress an "oriental toy" of pink crystal (255). As Elmer increasingly desires heterogeneous objects for his collections—Chinese porcelains, Persian rugs (258), lapis lazuli bowls, Renaissance enamels, Phoenician glass, Greek marble statues (319), rare books (320), Vandyck paintings (329), jewels (329), and Boucher tapestries—he distances himself from his former admiration of Undine as a woman. Elmer, who begins with nothing and gets on the wrong side of the stock market several times, ends up one of the five richest men east of the Rockies, capable of buying whatever his heart desires. Undine may feel frowsy or diminished to the status of "a woman of wax in a show-case" under Elmer's gaze (324), but his attention has moved to concrete objects, not

the unpredictable and uncapturable spirit of Undine. To woo her, he buys her things. Ralph Marvell and Raymond de Chelles never understand her essentially possessive nature. Elmer does.

Wharton uses the figure of the collector to embody the complex ties that bind spirit to things and the way men and women manipulate each other through chattels. The novel represents gradual shifts, for both Undine and Elmer, in their sense of capital, objects and value. The problem is posed differently for Elmer than for Undine since women's control of objects and art is subject to the vicissitudes of their fortunes, won and lost through the generosity of parents or husbands. One of the dramatic turning points in *The Custom of the Country* is Undine's realization that she can sell a string of pearls given to her by Peter Van Degen. Undine sees "for the first time" what pearls "might be converted into" (214). The conversion of jewels into cash may not seem that surprising, but it comes as a revelation to Undine that she has the power to finance her wants, whereas earlier she discards gowns as "rubbish" (108) or uses heirlooms as "an appropriate setting" (308) without considering their exchange value. Material goods circulate back into the economy to fetch money, which opens up the possibility of limitless trade. In the parable of the pearls, Undine understands that capital brings escape or freedom; cash can be transformed into tangible equivalences, like a berth to Europe. When she advises Raymond to sell the Boucher tapestries, she merely applies a basic principle of exchange, though she does so out of selfishness. Wharton's other heroines spend money on furs, tiaras, necklaces, dresses—things they can pack in a steamer-trunk and carry away. They rarely think of selling a bracelet or dress when they fall on hard times. Undine initially dresses herself for display, but alters her passion for things as *The Custom of the Country* progresses. She is an antidote to the economy that traffics in women and to the collector, like Leath, who lives so thoroughly in things that he forgets to live at all.

Undine Spragg understands the male need to possess things, even as she treats commodities as ornamental and dispensable. Her sense of economics is not sophisticated, but she uses men as possessions to buy and trade. Her prodigal marrying and divorcing, her getting and spending, mirror the ups and downs of men's fortunes on Wall Street. Sometimes the market is bullish, sometimes bearish. Paradoxically, the one male who cannot be fully collected is Elmer, her first and fourth hus-

band, who is often compared to some genie-like “monster released from a magician’s bottle,” or an “Asiatic conqueror” who cannot be fended off (264, 303). Critics routinely censure Undine because she connives and because she exploits her son “like a bale of goods” (249) after abandoning him. Janet Malcolm says that Wharton’s dislike of women in *The Custom of the Country* achieves “a height of venomousness previously unknown in American letters, and probably never surpassed” (11). Louis Auchincloss castigates Undine as an “evil force” of “mindless materialism” (101). Sympathetic to the predicament of American women, Elizabeth Ammons calls Undine a “compelling but in some ways vicious character” (99). Peter Hays calls her “rapacious,” “unthinking” and “unscrupulous” (22, 29). Undine is selfish, but she cannot be condemned for behaving by the same economic principles as the men in the novel. The mechanism of market growth and shrinkage underlies the cycles of poverty and wealth that Undine experiences, along with the fortunes of Elmer and Abner who equally go through tight spots and times of excess. Condemnation of Undine amounts to a double standard. Elmer and Abner are approved for “getting on the right side of the market” and Undine is taken to task for abiding by the same principle. The purchase and resale of commodities determines the space of narration itself; the narrative of *The Custom of the Country* springs from the trauma of market fluctuations that force one to sell goods in order to survive.

Liquidation of objects, however, brings the liquidation of history. It is symptomatic of Undine’s modernity and her arrivisme that she treats the past as a set of commodities once she learns that old things bring money. She has no scruples about the sentimental value of heirlooms the way the de Chelles family does. As she looks around her drawing room in Paris, she sees ready money: “Even in that one small room there were enough things of price to buy a release from her most pressing cares; and the great house, in which the room was a mere cell, and the other greater house in Burgundy, held treasures to deplete even such a purse as Moffatt’s” (308–9). As a *parvenue*, Undine acquires the external forms and manners of the American and French aristocracy but nothing of their content. Raymond delights in making fine discriminations about human nature, a pursuit that can “give the finest bloom to pleasure” (158), a pleasure that Undine cannot feel herself. In the tasteful appreciation of objects, the novel offers alternatives to the

world of magazines and gussied-up appearances inhabited by Undine. Both Ralph and Raymond, whatever their shortcomings as husbands, have a sense of culture and nuance that Undine never fathoms. However, it is not Undine's lack of taste that Wharton is mocking, but Ralph's and Raymond's surplus of taste that causes them to treat objects as the manifestation of history and feeling. Sensitivity to art and material things is a gendered concern, in which men make an emotional over-investment in things.

Wharton had a keen sense of women's relation to objects, as "The Daunt Diana" testifies. The story is full of sexual innuendo: Diana, chaste goddess, is touched by the electric, sensitive, connoisseurial Neave, after she has been caressed by the short, stubby, philistine fingers of Daunt. Neave sublimates his sexual desire by placing a marble Diana in his bedroom after the statue calls out to him to be rescued. In *The Custom of the Country*, Wharton makes Undine—as character, not statue—more active in the control of her wants than marble Diana. Her desire to own objects without becoming one gives her relationship to Moffatt, the collector, an edge of threat that neither Raymond nor Ralph brought. Whereas Ralph and Raymond want to possess her, Moffatt, married to her a second time, is indifferent, or feigns indifference.

Elmer and Undine resemble each other in their shifting status and shifty behavior. Each seizes opportunities that present themselves. However, Undine sees that "some of his enjoyments were beyond her range, but even these appealed to her because of the money that was required to gratify them. When she took him to see some inaccessible picture, or went with him to inspect the treasures of a famous dealer, she saw that the things he looked at moved him in a way she could not understand, and that the actual touching of rare textures—bronze or marble, or velvets flushed with the bloom of age—gave him sensations like those her own beauty had once roused in him" (317). The collector doesn't speak his passion; he gazes his fill as Undine looks on. What arouses the collector's admiration—nuance, texture, sensation, color—is not within his prerogative to utter. That remains the province of the connoisseur whose business it is to dissect the reverential, deeply private day-dreams of the collector. As Elmer transfers his passion from people to things, Undine risks losing him, or at least Elmer leads her to believe that is the case. Accustomed to being observed as an object, Undine theatricalizes Elmer's possessiveness by setting it in a theater of emotions where

she is, uncharacteristically, the watcher and he, the actor. That she decides to change her personality to serve his collecting habits, even though she doesn't understand the nature of Elmer's worshipful caress of textures, betrays her fundamental distance from real taste, and a desire to preserve herself from the commodities market.

Elmer's admiration of things jeopardizes Undine's hold over him, since it might entail marketing herself as a collectible. She knows Elmer's passion for things is stronger than his passion for people. Because the two midwesterners are so much alike, Undine might be purged in Elmer's next ebb of capital. More disturbing, Undine has no money of her own, and her only career option is to marry in order to secure her future. If marriage is her only option, then she is entitled to treat it as an opportunity. As Beth Kowaleski-Wallace points out, the novel forces readers to question their wilful desire to see Undine as "mother" instead of "independent subject" who can determine her own future, both marital and economic. Undine "neither cedes to becoming fixed as the object of desire, nor yields her fierce otherness to the merging that is demanded of her by husband and child" (52, 49). To avoid becoming the projection of her husbands' and child's desires, Undine uses those desires to her own ends, namely, to rise in status without becoming an object of others' passions. Wharton's representational coup in *The Custom of the Country* is not to show a woman as a collector, but rather to show that a woman can manipulate the taste of others in order to benefit herself.

Alert to the advantages that knowledge of private collections can bring, and alert to Elmer's desire for access to private collections, Undine becomes a cicerone. She shows "a surprising quickness in picking up 'tips,' ferreting out rare things and getting a sight of hidden treasures" (316) for Elmer's sake. Even if art does not belong to her, she controls the viewing of it. She doesn't know whether Ingres was a recent painter or an Old Master, but she can secure entry to many private collections because of her marriage to the aristocratic Raymond de Chelles. Undine is not, like Berenson or even the narrator Finney, a cicerone of any discrimination. She stampedes where they would linger. In *The Custom of the Country*, the cicerone-collector duo desire to break, seize, take, buy, rise. What unites Undine and Elmer, aside from their murky Apex past, is not erotic desire, but acquisitiveness. They are perfectly matched because they don't desire each other so much as

they desire things, position, and acclaim. As Elmer insinuates, each of them wants nothing but the best. Their mutual attraction is not at all sexual; Elmer explicitly rules out Undine's gauche reference to physical seduction. Laying her hands on Elmer's shoulders, Undine declares, "I've always felt, all through everything, that I belonged to you" (321). Elmer walks to the end of the room to repudiate her contrived offer of being his belonging. The desire to collect art and bibelots may compensate for the original slight that Undine inflicted by divorcing Elmer once. Consequently, he has no desire to manipulate Undine as if she were an object among other objects.¹² He can, however, possess her through the mediation of objects.

The modernist collector's legitimacy stems from his ability to bring back objects from Europe that give him currency in New York, a legitimacy conferred by the traditions and history behind objects denied or intercepted by Elmer and Undine elsewhere in the novel. Without regard for its provenance, Undine owns, at the end of *The Custom of the Country*, a tiara of pigeon's blood pearls, a rare treasure that once belonged to Marie Antoinette. The ersatz portrait of Marie Antoinette that hangs in the hotel in the opening pages of the novel suggests that symbolic replicas can substitute for the real thing in Undine's mind. The connection with royalty through the portrait or the tiara scarcely matters; what matters is the assertion of identity through the ability to outbid everyone else. Undine displays blitheness towards material possession and resistance to being possessed. This doesn't make her a good cicerone but it does show that she understands the monetary value of things. If her role as a cicerone is not convincing, it is because she adopts it, as she adopts all roles, temporarily. Her life centers on asceticism and replenishment, a boom-and-bust personality constantly remaking itself. For Undine, dispossession, the emptying out of value in commodities and in herself, may lead to something more triumphant, another role, the possibility of being a diplomat's wife, or something even grander.

Wharton's representation of collectors and cicerones differs from other modernists', such as Stein in Conrad's *Lord Jim*, or Swann in Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. Whereas Stein and Swann invest objects with sentimental value (the triumph of taste over adversity), Wharton uses her female characters to question precisely this tendency to fetishize art as something other than a commodity. The satire of *The*

Custom of the Country is directed against the sentimentalization of material objects by men. Undine refuses to see aesthetic value—or taste—in material objects as something apart from exchange value. Undine's clear-sightedness about things allows her to avoid the fate of becoming an object for sale on the marriage market and to manipulate the sentimental taste of others. Whereas male collectors, like Adam Verver in *The Golden Bowl* or Soames in *The Forsyte Saga*, view art as the cornerstone of prestige and invest it with near magical powers as the embodiment of taste, Undine repudiates the material world except when it is useful to her. Soames, for instance, complains that "it was the fashion for a picture to be anything except a picture" (Galsworthy 764). For Undine, a picture is just a picture. Jonathan Freedman argues that modernism is formed out of the conflicting claims of aestheticism and commercialization at the turn of the century (254). Wharton, however, does not use "high art" in the way that other modernists do, to assert independence from the marketplace and its so-called taints. Artists who cater to clients' taste, like Popple in *The Custom of the Country* or Mungold in "The Pot-Boiler," succeed. As Wharton's novels about art and its consumption constantly prove, art is created in order to be bought. Furthermore, her interest lies in the possibilities for women to move away from being the subjects of art and to move into the economy as creators and dealers.

Bernard Berenson, who courted exquisiteness and subtlety in art, was not a collector insofar as he could live without certain art works even if he admired them. He says he could have bought Cézanne paintings for a few coppers, but "could not see myself living with masterpieces so little in harmony with an Italian dwelling." He collected only those things that complemented his villa and that displayed his "acquired knowledge and exercised taste" (*Sketch* 132). We approach here the profound gulf that divides connoisseur from cicerone. Ultimately, the cicerone appreciates without collecting whereas the collector gathers without necessarily appreciating. Connoisseurs like Berenson and Wharton understand that fineness exists first in the mind as sensitivity, taste, and subtlety of response. Objects can only amplify that fineness, not replace it.

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NOTES

1. Burckhardt could not detach selfhood easily from material objects. He expresses the paradoxical relation of self to object in *Der Cicerone*, a guided tour of the antique and modern art of Italy in the form of a Baedeker. The Baedeker, which Wharton disdains, replaces the human cicerone for bourgeois travelers at the turn of the century.

2. By contrast, the literary and personal relationship between Wharton and James is so well analyzed that it forbids further comment. For an extensive and parallel discussion of Bourget's and James's fiction, see Tintner 159–232.

3. Wharton's early stories, such as "The Rembrandt" and "The Moving Finger," also concern painting and art transactions. The influence of Bourget on these and Wharton's other works of fiction is not restricted to the tales in *La Dame Qui a Perdu Son Peintre*. In Bourget's 1897 tale "La Pia," for example, a connoisseur with a collection of *bibelots* named Bernard de la Nauve, might be another source story for Wharton's connoisseurs. Nauve "ne vend ses bibelots, tous très authentiques, qu'à des millionnaires en train de s'improviser une installation parisienne: enrichis de la coulisse, grands seigneurs russes ou polonais, potentats du pétrole ou du porc salé, débarqués de New-York ou de San-Francisco" (*Voyageuses* 292). Nauve "sold his trinkets, all of them quite authentic, only to millionaires who were in the process of improvising décor for a Paris apartment: stock-brokers, Russian or Polish aristocrats, potentates of petroleum or salted pork who had arrived from New York or San Francisco" (my translation). La Nauve closely resembles Neave in "The Daunt Diana." Nauve sells selectively to *nouveau riche* buyers because he loses his ancestral fortune. As Rémy Saisselin says about this story, "the line between trade and a disinterested love of art was entirely blurred" by cosmopolitan dealers (135).

4. "There is no middle course for these American millionaires. They either refine themselves or debase themselves to the extreme" (my translation).

5. Tracing sources for Wharton's fiction, Shari Benstock notices in passing that "The Daunt Diana" permits "glimpses" of Egerton Winthrop, Ogden Codman, and Bernard Berenson (244).

6. "Seeing me so poor, he gave me work. I had to restore several paintings for him. Four out of the six were fake. I proved it to him. Struck by my technical knowledge, he offered me a fixed salary if I were to help him henceforth with his purchases of art . . . I accepted" (my translation).

7. "The philosophical dilettante considers each system of ideas in turn with a curiosity that is, at one and the same time, disdainful—because his curiosity stems from the sense that all doctrines are ultimately powerless—and agreeable" (my translation).

8. "The Cicerone" contains an acid-chiseled portrait of Peggy Guggenheim, who appears as Miss Grabbe. For further information on McCarthy's fictionalized treatment of Guggenheim, see Weld 351–54.

9. By all accounts, the first meeting was a disaster. Berenson gives a dramatic and inaccurate account of meeting Wharton in *Sketch for a Self-Portrait*, 26. For a

more reasonable account based on Berenson's letters and not his memory, see Lewis 270.

10. In *Edith Wharton's Inner Circle*, Goodman notes that Bourget and Berenson both belonged to Wharton's wider circle, not inner circle (ix). The point is debatable. Their closeness with Wharton's other friends does not obviate their closeness to and influence on Wharton's art and intellectual pursuits.

11. Wharton told Charles Scribner she had set aside *Custom* for *The Reef* on 27 November 1911. In sending Berenson a published copy of *The Reef* on 23 November 1912, she called it a "poor miserable lifeless lump." Berenson, despite Wharton's protests, acclaimed the novel. See *Letters*, 263, 284.

12. MacComb argues that Wharton, in *The Custom of the Country*, satirizes the system of American divorce, "the profitable and increasingly notorious western states' divorce industry" (767) in particular, in which advertising creates and corrects public perceptions of the divorcée. Undine's remarriage to Elmer is complicated by the theatricality of both parties, and by Undine's refined sense of her cultural capital.

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