The Next 150 Years: Wharton Goes Digital
Donna Campbell
Washington State University

In thinking about the digital future of Wharton studies, I want to turn backward to Italian Backgrounds (1905), a series of travel essays, mostly previously published, that came out six months before The House of Mirth (1905). Drawn from Wharton’s travels over the previous decade, the essays follow Wharton as she makes her way from Switzerland to Syracuse by train and carriage (for these were pre-“motor flight” days), seeking out rare sights and attempting at every turn, as she put it, “circumvent the compiler of [her] guide-book” (Italian Backgrounds 85). The most celebrated piece in the book is the previously published “A Tuscan Shrine,” which describes Wharton’s discovery that the terra cotta figures at San Vivaldo were not from “the mid-seventeenth century” (100) but were modeled by the hand of “an artist of the school of the Robbias” (105) a century earlier. “A Tuscan Shrine” displays some of the characteristic features of Wharton’s travel writing, including its quest for out-of-the-way experiences, and further provides logically argued art criticism and narrative elements of suspense and detection.

But another piece newly written for the same volume, “What the Hermits Saw,” takes a different approach. Instead of the restless movement, place-specific description, and suspenseful narrative that characterize “A Tuscan Shrine” and most of the other essays, the tone of “What the Hermits Saw” is dreamy and contemplative, situated in an unspecific middle ground composed of the backgrounds of paintings. The stories it tells are not simply allusions to an impressive array of past legends, as in the other essays, but a full-scale evocation of the past. It conjures up the legends of saints’ and hermits’ retreat from “the incredible vices and treacheries of civilized life” (66) to live instead “the life apart,” a phrase that Wharton would later use in her diary of her relationship with Morton Fullerton (68). Within this “life apart” exists a lost space of contemplation when pagan and Christian elements did not war with one another but existed in “a tangle of classic and medieval traditions, Greek, Etruscan, and German!” (74-75) in which all through the Middle Ages “the marvellous did not fail from the earth” (78). “The gentle furred creature of the Death of Procris might have been the very faun who showed St. Anthony the way” (80-81), Wharton muses, in a tone very different from the brisk, forceful, and scientific voice of the rest.

Yet this magical space comes at a price, for it exists, Wharton argues, only in the works of the lesser painters, who, by painting the lesser gods and staying “nearer the soil and closer to the past by the very limitations of their genius” (81), preserved an intimacy with the past that modern experience can only approximate. In other words, only by ignoring change, remaining in place, and staying within, rather than going beyond, the “limitations of [one’s] genius” is it possible to avoid the...

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trials of modernity and the extinction of the magical middle ground that the past provides. The unspoken question that Wharton poses here and elsewhere in the volume, however, is this: without the distanced perspective that modernity brings to this middle ground, is it possible to appreciate or even recognize the beauties of the past?

Readers of Wharton will recognize the terms of this dilemma as part of the balancing act with the past that features in all her works. In novel after novel, she asks how we can preserve the best of the past without permitting it to strangle the present, placing tradition in a delicate balance with innovation. It is this quandary that stymies Newland Archer and traps Ethan Frome, and it’s a lack of this balancing sensibility that marks Wharton’s most memorably intransigent characters, from hidebound, tradition-loving figures like Madame de Chantelle of *The Reef* (1912) to futurists like Undine Spragg and Pauline Manford, who ride roughshod over tradition without recognizing its value. Wharton revered the authenticity of the past but refused to sentimentalize it or to reconstruct its ruins. As Sarah Bird Wright claims, key themes in her travel writings include a disdain for architectural restorations and an insistence on observing objects through fresh eyes unmediated by—or even in opposition to—the standard tropes of the guidebooks. “What the Hermits Saw” is revealing because it strikes a balance between past and future that Wharton’s characters cannot always achieve. Like the “backgrounds” of religious paintings that are the subject of the chapter, the “middle ground” of the hermit comprises a “way in” to the life of the past, in which the “real picture” of life in the past is found not in the portraits of the saints but in the “middle distance” (174). In writing about it, however, Wharton suggests that although we cannot live in the world of the past or see what the hermits saw, we can train our eyes to see differently, to look beyond the surface and into a middle distance that reveals its truths to us only if we understand how to look.

Seeing the past from the perspective of the future is the subject of my discussion of Wharton and the digital humanities. As *Italian Backgrounds* and the rest of her work shows, Wharton respected, even revered, the past. Yet as all of her biographers attest, Wharton was an early adopter of technologies that would make her life or the lives of those around her more comfortable and efficient. Accounts of her life abound with examples of this interest: the “hydraulic elevator for moving luggage” that she had installed at The Mount, her commanding notes about train schedules, and her insistence on stopping only at hotels with a private bath (Lee 149). This interest manifests itself particularly in transportation and communications technologies: her delight in the speed of her “motor-flights” attests to this, as do the 20-mile bicycle rides that she describes enthusiastically to Anna Bahlmann (Goldman-Price 150), just as her irritation that Stocks, the English house she rented from Mrs. Humphry Ward, had no telephone indicates that she regarded it as essential (Lee 467).

Wharton’s fiction, too, is filled with references to cables, letters, telephone calls, newspapers, and magazines, especially in relation to future-oriented characters; Undine Spragg constructs her sense of self in *The Custom of the Country* (1913), for example, primarily through Mrs. Heeny’s clippings, much as Pauline Mansford creates a modern identity in *Twilight Sleep* (1927) through the lens of the daily paper calendar she keeps. Although Wharton was not necessarily a tech user herself—for example, Emlyn Washburn claimed that Wharton refused to practice typing enough to become proficient at it when both girls learned to type in their adolescence—she obviously appreciated its benefits in business and in the preparation of manuscripts. In short, she valued the technologies available to her for two primary reasons: first, they allowed her to do her work more swiftly and efficiently; and second, they brought her literally or figuratively to a place where she could see the world in a different light. Working efficiently and seeing differently: these are two areas where digital humanities can contribute to Wharton studies.

With these ideas in mind, we can look briefly at the field of digital humanities from the perspective of a recent MLA panel and think about addressing three questions for the future:

- What’s here? What current resources exist for Wharton studies?
- What’s needed? What might we think about as important projects for the immediate future?
- What’s next? What kinds of digital projects might prove useful in the longer term?

What is the digital humanities, and why is it important for the study of Edith Wharton?

What is (or are) the digital humanities? The term “digital humanities” has been around for less than a decade; before that, the field was called “humanities computing,” and even now the question of what exactly comprises “digital humanities” is the subject of debate. I want to offer three definitions, each of which gets at a different component of this term.

The first is the widely-cited definition offered by Kathleen Fitzpatrick, author of the blog (and now book) *Planned Obsolescence*. Fitzpatrick defines digital humanities as “a nexus of fields within which scholars use computing technologies to investigate the kinds of questions that are traditional to the humanities . . . [Digital humanities projects] “focus on computing methods applicable to textual materials . . . often editorial and

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archival in nature” (13).

But digital humanities implies more than the use of digital tools. A second definition and one that expands on Fitzpatrick’s is that of Julia Flanders, the head of the Brown Women Writers Project. Flanders defines “digital humanities” as “a critical investigation and practice of the methods of humanities research in the digital medium” (“Day of DH” 69). What’s noteworthy about Flanders’s definition is that she puts the “practice” of using digital tools in humanities research as secondary to the “critical investigation” of them. Brown warns against seeing digital humanities as simply building the next new digital application, arguing instead for the primacy of critical investigation and reflective practice in the process of archiving, grouping, marking up, and digitizing texts.

A third, and perhaps the most informal definition, is one that Miles Kimball posted to the listserv TechRhet in December 2011. According to Kimball, who cites scholars from Martha Nell Smith to Jerome McGann, the practice of digital humanities breaks down into three broad areas:

1. “Digitization: Translating “cultural” texts (read: literature, art, history) into digital media by creating digital scholarly editions or presentations,” which is the starting point for most digital humanists.
2. “Access: Building broad public access to digitized texts,” which often involves collaboration with librarians.
3. “Analysis: Using computers to analyze those texts,” which is “where computer scientists and statisticians get involved.”

In addition to differentiating among different types of activities in the digital humanities, this definition points toward its values and the types of scholarship that it produces. Besides producing tools and texts, scholars in the digital humanities are intensely committed to a collaborative framework that builds interdisciplinary connections; indeed, because of the costs for some of these projects and the necessity for large grants to support them, a team approach and skills in large project management are vital. The “scholarly” portion of the definition reflects a commitment to archive standards that preserve as much information about the original document—or, in the case of “born digital” materials, project—as possible, and the “access” portion addresses the high value placed on projects open to the public and on “open source, community-driven tools,” according to Matthew Kirschenbaum, a leading digital humanities scholar.

The kinds of scholarship included in the term “digital humanities” vary from the concerns of literary studies, such as the recovery and presentation of understudied texts, to the editorial work of comparing and analyzing texts, as in the 2009 issue of Digital Humanities Quarterly devoted to “Digital Textual Studies: Past, Present, and Future” to broader theoretical and technical concerns addressed in journals such as Digital Humanities Now and Literary and Linguistic Computing. Other forms of scholarship include theorizing the human-computer interface; analyzing the logic and rhetoric of archives and online texts; using computer-assisted imaging to recover the features of paper materials in archives, as in the Emily Dickinson Electronic Archives and The David Livingstone Spectral Imaging Project; analyzing new forms of narrative, such as graphic novels and video games; and studying the dissemination of literature and its adaptations through contemporary social media such as Twitter and Facebook.

For example, at this very moment a digital humanist is probably analyzing the number of times and the specific Edith Wharton quotations that are being posted to Twitter: if anyone’s keeping track, I can tell you that in a two-day span there were 96 mentions of “There are two ways to light the darkness”: 16 of “If we’d only stop trying to be happy, we could have a pretty good time,” six of “My Little dog, a heartbeat at my feet,” and a number of miscellaneous ones.

Wharton and the Digital Humanities

Understanding the principles of digital scholarship is important for the future of Wharton studies because those principles, as well as the traditional scholarly criteria, are the terms by which projects on Wharton will be judged. What does the digital humanities then mean for the study of Wharton? We can look at this through the categories previously mentioned: what’s here, what’s needed, and what’s next.

What’s Here?

No one who wants to read an Edith Wharton novel, look at a picture of Edith Wharton, or find questions on and summaries of Wharton’s works will have any problem finding these resources online. Plain text versions of Wharton’s public domain novels (pre-1923) have been available from Project Gutenberg for at least 15 years, with the post-1923 work available legally to those outside the US from Project Gutenberg Australia. Wharton’s poetry and her magazine stories were digitized in the mid-1990s by the University of Virginia; other texts, such as Fighting France, are part of Mary Mark Ockerbloom’s A Celebration of Women Writers. The Making of America Project contains the page images of some of Wharton’s magazine writings, as does the Modernist Journals Project. Google Books contains page images of a number of public domain Wharton novels and magazine pieces. Most of these sites provide the work in multiple formats, including

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epub and html, for ease of reading, although the machine-generated uncorrected text from some of the page images is unreliable. Although these sites cannot substitute for a scholarly edition of Wharton's texts, they make some portion of Wharton's works freely available.

Wharton scholars also have the benefit of online search features and finding aids as well as useful narrative descriptions from the main archives with Wharton materials, including the Beinecke Library, the Lilly Library, and the Harry Ransom Center. In addition to subscription-only databases of scholarly books and articles, useful resources include online exhibits or collections, such as Edith Wharton's World at the Smithsonian and Edith Wharton and the American Renaissance. Other resources include online interviews with scholars (Hermione Lee, Katherine Joslin, Irene Goldman-Price, and Meredith Goldsmith). The Wharton Society site includes some resources as well, such as back issues of the *Edith Wharton Review*, bibliographies, and dates of publication for Wharton's short stories, all of which are searchable with the new Google searchbox at the site. The site also hosts Sarah Kogan's valuable spreadsheet on materials in Wharton archives.

In short, quite a bit is already available online, but currently there are some obvious restrictions to the kinds of digital materials that could be available. Not surprisingly, they include issues of copyright, access, and funding. Copyright is probably the most difficult issue to resolve, since a goodly number of Wharton's novels and stories were published after 1923 and getting the rights to publish some of them, let alone getting permission to make them available online, could be cost-prohibitive. Some of Wharton's works may be online, but if they are in a subscription database, they will be inaccessible to many scholars whose libraries have cut back on funding. Copyright also touches on the issue of access. As scholars have pointed out, it's one thing to scan a text and post it online but quite another to do so according to standard editorial conventions. Even if copyright permission has been granted to make access to the texts available, institutional or library funding may not be sufficient to cover the cost of digitizing, editing, and mounting materials in an online edition. Still, with NEH funding, collaborative projects for digital work on Wharton could have a good chance, so keeping these challenges in mind, let's turn to thinking about what's needed.

What's needed (and is possible right now)?
Edition of Wharton's Works

One of the key needs for the study of Wharton would be a standardized edition of her work, available in print and digital form. Perhaps building on the excellent editions now available if collaboration and rights issues could be worked out, the print edition could contain the usual kinds of editorial apparatus, but the online edition would also provide a foundation for future scholarship by using the best practices of digital editing, which would include using standard coding developed through the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) or Extensible Markup Language (XML). As with texts on web pages, the coding would not interfere with normal reading but would be readable by text comparison software such as Versioning, CollateX, or Juxta.

Jerome McGann's description of Juxta suggests some of the possibilities for a Wharton edition: "Juxta is a text comparison and collation tool for XML files and the image files that stand behind the XML transcriptions. It allows a scholar to locate for comparison equivalent textual passages, and to display both the equivalent image files as well as the transcriptions. It also allows comparisons between comparable pictorial objects" (for example, the magazine and book versions of *The Custom of the Country* "or comparable textual and pictorial objects" (for example, illustrations of passages in *The House of Mirth*). "All such comparisons can also be annotated" (http://www.iath.virginia.edu/tools.html). Creating such an edition would be the baseline in planning for a possible future edition, one that could expand to include additional features such as page images of manuscripts. It would also allow comparisons of a word or phrase across several books.

Calendar of Letters

In her assessment of Wharton materials in her 2008 biography, Hermione Lee noted that "Unlike James, Wharton is not (yet) benefiting from a large-scale, multi-volume annotated edition of her complete letters" (758). This was not a new observation in 2008, for at the Edith Wharton at Yale conference in 1995, a consistent topic of discussion was the lack of a comprehensive collection of Wharton's letters and the possibility of a more comprehensive edition on CD-ROM. R. W. B. Lewis and Nancy Lewis's *The Letters of Edith Wharton*, the most comprehensive edition, was and is an indispensable resource, yet it is nearly 25 years old. Moreover, although it covers all phases of Wharton's life, it is a selected edition containing about 400 letters, or roughly 10% of the letters known to be extant. Collections of Wharton's letters to individuals have appeared since the Lewis edition, including those appearing in *Henry James and Edith Wharton* (1990), edited by Lyall Powers; letters to Louis Bromfield in Daniel Bratton's *Yrs. Ever Affectionately* (2000); "Edith Wharton's Correspondence with Zona Gale" (Resources for American Literary Studies, 1998), edited by Elsa Nettels; *Lettres à l'ami français*, the

Yet a collected edition of letters is still the consummation devoutly to be wished. The most desirable solution would include an online as well as a printed version, for an online enhanced edition could be hyperlinked to include additional extended notes, informational footnotes identifying allusions with links to the original passages from books Wharton is known to have read, maps, sound files, and other features that would not be possible in a paper edition.

Until such an edition is prepared, however, a practical alternative involves smaller-scale resources, including an archive list and a calendar of letters. Sarah Kogan at The Mount has already compiled an excellent archive list and has posted it at the Wharton Society site. Her Excel spreadsheet provides information on the library, collection name, Wharton content, reference number, and other items. Kogan’s resource goes far toward alerting scholars about the materials in other collections: the Clyde Fitch papers at Amherst College, for example, or the incidental letters to other authors such as Owen Wister (Library of Congress), John Hay (Brown), and Hamlin Garland (University of Southern California).

Kogan’s resource, if digitized, could be expanded into a formal calendar of letters. As with the University of Nebraska’s Calendar of the Letters of Henry James or the Willa Cather Foundation’s Calendar of Letters, a calendar of Wharton’s letters would include information about the original format, publication source, date, place, and repository, and would be searchable by any of these variables. In addition to overall descriptions, such a resource could include information about or keywords for individual letters, cross-referenced with biographical information about the correspondents. It could find, for example, all the letters that Wharton wrote in a given period of time and coordinate those with relevant dates from her own diary annotations about daily events: visitors, the completion of a book, a dinner party, or a night at the theater, even if the passages themselves could not be reproduced due to copyright restrictions.

**Edith Wharton Bibliography or Toolkit**

A third useful resource would be an integrated, searchable Edith Wharton Bibliography, patterned after the project that EWS President Gary Totten created for the Dreiser Bibliography. At present, someone who wanted to write about the events surrounding Wharton’s writing of a story—say, “The Path of Least Resistance”—would first need to consult Wharton biographies to find out the events, then track down the exact publication date using print sources such as Kristin O. Lauer and Margaret Murray’s *Edith Wharton: An Annotated Secondary Bibliography*, Stephen Garrison’s *Edith Wharton: A Descriptive Bibliography*, or the Wharton Society site, and finally search the various archive sites to see where the manuscript is held and the MLA bibliography to find secondary sources on the story. If the researcher wanted to see whether any of Wharton’s unpublished works might furnish a parallel to this one, he or she would have to search out references to the unpublished works to find out their subject matter. The Edith Wharton Bibliography, or perhaps we should call it the Edith Wharton Toolkit, would help researchers to find this information in one place. The Toolkit could be one resource or a linked, searchable set of resources that included several features—chronology, bibliography, archive list, and letter calendar among them—but if built over in pieces and over time, it could be a manageable project.

**What’s Needed: A Wish List for the Future**

The “What’s Needed” projects mentioned above (basic online editions, calendar of letters, and bibliography or “toolkit”) are manageable in the sense that they would not intrude into issues of copyright or the reproduction of materials now held in archives. If we’re truly thinking in terms of the future, however, a wish list might include the following two items: an annotated edition or editions, and a virtual library.

If rights issues could be worked out, a Wharton online edition could include true scholarly texts or be a variorum edition. It could include page images, versions, and corrections as well as transcriptions. Further enhancements could include allusions to and quotations from source texts, with links to editions of the original online; references to scholarship on the passage; and Wharton’s comments from letters on the work. Other possibilities would include sound, image, and film clips; information on material culture, performances, and history; and perhaps a comment space for scholarly annotations to the edition. Since this would probably result in a page too thick with links to actually read, perhaps the edition could be tabbed so that readers could click on scholarly, classroom, or media editions, depending on their interests. The Walt Whitman Archive is a model of the way to present scholarly edition information through transcriptions, links, and page images. Other peer-reviewed sites listed at the NINES project, the major site for evaluating and disseminating information about nineteenth-century digital projects, could also provide such a model.

An enriched online edition would obviously benefit teaching as well as scholarship, and it would, in a
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Recently, as the humanities are struggling for recognition at many universities and indeed with the general public and legislators, help to demonstrate the richness of Wharton’s work. Imagine an online, freely available resource for students that could link to or display the following:

- Pictures of the images alluded to in a passage, such as Reynolds’s painting of Mrs. Lloyd, archival pictures of the Benedick, or short films from the Library of Congress showing street life in 1905.
- Sound files from the 1910s of the music that might have played at the Old Home Days in Summer.
- Explanations of allusions accompanied by passages clipped from page images of the original sources.
- And, as mentioned before, annotations that provide Wharton’s comments on the passage or story and links to or brief quotations from what critics have said.

All but the last could be done without infringing on Wharton’s copyrights. At least two publishing platforms could accommodate this kind of text: Omeka, which can combine pictures, texts, geographical visualizations, and comments; and CommentPress, an application that works with WordPress and focuses more on annotations.

“Edith Wharton Virtual Library”

An annotated virtual library of works that Wharton read could be a valuable resource for researchers and students alike, and, if it could be “crowsourced” as a collaborative project, not an overwhelming task for any one person. A simple version could be created for free using links to Google Books that Wharton is known to have read, perhaps with passages that she quoted listed beside the work.

A more extensive and complicated project, and one that would rest on collaboration with The Mount and with copyright holders, could be created using additional quotations from her Commonplace Book, quotations from her letters, and markings from books in her library at The Mount. Models for this would include the Melville’s Marginalia site, which uses actual page images with Melville’s notes and markings from a selection of the books he read. The site also uses image enhancement technology to recover previously erased markings, which would add another level of complexity in analyzing what was erased. Other models would include the Newton project, which combines Newton’s drafts with annotations in his library; and the Darwin’s Library project, which focuses solely on the annotations in his books.

Visualization Tools

Finally, we come to visualization tools, or what one skeptical critic has called the “shock and awe” component of digital humanities (Crymble). Visualization tools track patterns—of word frequencies, of geographic movement, and of letters—over time, and they map the data in visual form so that trends become visible. The simplest forms of visualization tools are freely available and are often used in the classroom, such as Google maps, Google’s n-gram viewer, and simple word frequency visualizations like Wordle and its more sophisticated counterpart Voyant Tools.

Wordle is a word-frequency visualization tool that shows, by the relative size of the words, their prominence in the text that has been analyzed. It is useful for starting class discussions, but it also allows scholars to “see differently” on occasion. In a diagram from Chapter I of The House of Mirth, for example, the prominence of “one” emphasizes the impersonal way in which Selden and Lily speak to one another. The prominence of “know” over “see” and “eyes,” both of which are important in the scene, is a little surprising and might be worth further investigation. In this diagram of “Roman Fever,” the prominence of “Mrs.” and the women’s names makes sense, but the prevalence of “know” over “think” or “thought” in the whole “think-know-thought-remember” cluster may indicate all the things that Mrs. Slade thinks she knows—but doesn’t (Fig. 1).

Figure 1: Wordle highlighting key words in “Roman Fever.”

Another popular tool for analyzing words and phrases in their use over time is Google’s n-gram viewer. The n-gram viewer searches Google books for the incidence of certain words and maps the comparisons on a graph that displays their relative incidence. In addition, it generates a list of texts, divided by decade, that shows the books in which the phrase occurs. This quick visual index of the incidence of these words may either confirm conventional wisdom or suggest new directions.

For example, in this diagram of four of Wharton’s best-known works—The House of Mirth, Ethan Frome (1911), The Custom of the Country, and The Age of
acquaintance and Cather, Edna Ferber, and Booth Tarkington, the virtually course, all of these graphs are compromised by rough and outstrips that of the next immediate five prizewinners, Pulitzer Prize, values among texts and authors, they provide a visual reference point.

First, to Wharton’s probable dismay, interest in her 1921 Pulitzer Prize. Similarly, the bump in interest in the early 1990s corresponds to the spate of movies that came out at about that time: John Madden’s Ethan Frome and Martin Scorsese’s Age of Innocence (both 1993), and Terence Davies’s The House of Mirth (2000).

Graphing Wharton in relation to other Pulitzer prizewinners reveals a similar bump in interest following the award, although two things are immediately apparent: first, to Wharton’s probable dismay, interest in her acquaintance and admirer Sinclair Lewis’s Arrowsmith far outstrips that of the next immediate five prizewinners, Wharton included; and second, unlike the books by Willa Cather, Edna Ferber, and Booth Tarkington, the virtually unknown Margaret Wilson, who won in 1924 for The Able Mclaughlins, remained virtually unknown after the Pulitzer Prize, a permanent flatline of literary history. Of course, all of these graphs are compromised by rough and imperfect data, but as a means of seeing relative popularity values among texts and authors, they provide a visual reference point.

More sophisticated tools, such as the Wordseer Visualization Project at Berkeley, can provide different and more powerful visualizations for analysis. Although at present the Wordseer project contains a limited corpus of texts, including slave narratives from Documenting the American South and the works of Stephen Crane, it has the capability to produce a “heatmap” of word incidence within a text. “Heatmaps” are visualizations that show the relative frequency of items within a particular data set, and they typically do so by rendering the numbers in shades of darker or lighter intensity. In the writings of Stephen Crane, the example on the text page shows the grammatical incidence of a word in Crane’s work, and the chart with “purple” at the center shows all the sentences in which that word appears, along with notes about context. It’s possible to find information about all Crane’s uses of words, including his famous use of colors.

The last two visualization tools that we might think about for Wharton track connections among individuals and places: Crowded Page, a social network map that displays the relationships, travel patterns, and letters between literary contemporaries; and Mapping the Republic of Letters, tracking the progress or transmission of information or texts over time. Crowded Page, a site being developed as a part of The Vault at Pfaff’s, offers the ability to trace the relationships among the mid-nineteenth-century authors who knew Whitman or were otherwise linked to New York’s Bohemia. In this example, it’s possible to see the variety of relationships between William Dean Howells and Whitman, despite Howells’s well-known disappointment with Whitman when he met the man in person. Mapping the Republic of Letters is an animation that traces the progress of letters between cities or groups of correspondents over two centuries, using a large database of letters traveling to the countries on the map. Among the surprises for its researchers was the discovery of a paucity of letters going to England during a certain period of time, a piece of evidence that they had not anticipated.

How might such technologies affect our study of Wharton? Here are just four immediate possibilities. First, what would happen if we could visualize and track the use of Wharton’s allusions over time to confirm whether she uses a particular quotation or author more at particular times in her life? Does she talk more about Whitman at one time than another, for example? Second, it is a dizzying task to keep up with Wharton’s travels, writing, letters, and relationships at any given point. What kinds of discoveries could we make if, for example, we could map her relationships, especially her friendships with European literary figures, as is done in Crowded Page? Third, what information might emerge if we could create a “Wharton’s Republic of Letters” that could identify all the letters and writing that Wharton sent from a particular place at a
particular time? What if we could link that to events happening at the time, as in Mapping the Lakes: A Coleridge GIS? Finally, and perhaps most usefully, what benefits would a comparative edition of Wharton’s manuscripts, typescripts, and final publications bring to the study of Wharton?

Will digital technologies change the way we read Edith Wharton (Fig. 3)? And will they turn us all into that dreaded figure from “The Vice of Reading,” the “mechanical reader” (100)? Will we become so obsessed with literary detective work like tracking her movements or counting the incidence of words that we forget to see the work as a whole? I’ll leave that question up to you but would like to return to the “middle ground” that Wharton found in Italian paintings in “What the Hermits Saw.” Her point was that the showy central figure of the saint too often obscured the quotidian background, and that attending to the everyday life shown in that background allowed the observant viewer to intuit something of the past world that has now been lost. To recover the details of that past life, she argued, it was necessary to look at the paintings differently. Focused as they are on the biographical, textual, and geographic sides of Wharton studies, the possibilities I have outlined here cannot substitute for the innovative forms of critical reading, book history, and other work, including the papers at this conference, that continue to invigorate each generation of Wharton scholarship. What they can do is to help us do our work more efficiently, by creating resources like online editions and letters calendars, and to see differently, by giving us new ways to look at the patterns in Wharton’s work, life, and culture. If digital scholarship on Wharton allows us to work more efficiently and see differently, it will have earned a place in the next 150 years of Wharton studies.

Notes

1 All URLs referenced in this article may be found immediately below the Works Cited.
2 Please refer to the Edith Wharton Society web site (http://www.edithwharton society.org/DigitalWharton2.pptx) for a slideshow including all on-line images cited in this article.

Works Cited


Kimball, Miles. Post to Techrhet Discussion List. 19 December 2011.


Figure 3: Edith Wharton, early adopter of new technologies.

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Edith Wharton wrote her Guide to Domestic Interiors during an important period in her life. Her novel, *The Decoration of Houses*, published in 1905, reflects her own experiences and the contemporary culture of her time. The book is not only a guide to domestic decoration but also a literary artifact that reveals the author's evolving identity.

In *The Decoration of Houses*, Wharton explores the relationship between interiors and exteriors, the private and the public, and the tension between Wharton's private life as an author and her public persona as a published writer. The book discusses the relationship between the works of other authors and her own, and the influence of her own life experiences on her writing.

As an early nonfiction text in a long career that produced mostly—and most famously—fiction, *The Decoration of Houses* sets up the central dialectic between Wharton's public persona as an author and her private world of creativity, what she called her "secret garden" (A Backward Glance 197). Essentially her entrance into the marketplace as a published writer, *The Decoration of Houses* is not meant to be autobiographical, and yet it metaphorically outlines Wharton's nascent creation of an authorial self by mapping not only the respective jurisdictions of public and private spaces and the ways these spaces should be decorated, but also the social and personal business that Wharton believed should take place in those spaces.

By establishing links in *The Decoration of Houses* among texts, spaces, and, ultimately, self, Wharton is able to portray her version of what it means to be a published author: to encompass the seemingly contradictory need for both the shelter of a private space and the performance tinged with danger that is afforded and encouraged by a public space.

In spite of the book's objective of creating separations among the rooms and other spaces within a private house, it also sets out to collapse the division between interiors and exteriors. Wharton refers to "those architectural features which are part of the organism of every house, inside as well as out" and laments the fact that "various influences have combined to sever the natural connection between the outside of the modern house and its interior" (Introduction n.p.). The purposeful mending of