

**1) Edith Wharton and Democracy**  
**ALA 2025 May 21-25 Boston**

In *French Ways and Their Meaning*, Wharton wrote: "If French and Americans are both (as their newspapers assure us) 'democratic,' it gives a notion of how much the term covers!" Indeed. How does the concept of democracy or the "democratic" signify in Wharton's own writing? She has been associated, often derisively, with aristocratic origins and sympathies at least since Vernon Louis Parrington smeared the novelist as a "literary aristocrat" in 1921. But in *A Backward Glance*, Wharton herself described her antecedents as "purely middle-class" and pointed proudly to one who was a revolutionary. Attending variously to the subtleties of her commentary on France and the US, her chumminess with imperialists, the snobbish asides in her correspondence, and the insurgent energies of her fiction, scholarship has produced a strikingly divergent set of arguments about Wharton's own political views, not to mention the political ideas her work might convey. What is the relevance of Wharton's biography to her representations of democracy? What relationship does her writing posit between social, political, and cultural democracy? How does Wharton's work help us to better understand democracy now?

The panel organizers invite talks concerning "Wharton and Democracy" for a guaranteed panel sponsored by the Edith Wharton Society. Papers might address Wharton and democratic modernity; Wharton and the technologies of modern democracy; Wharton and democracy in the US; Wharton and democracy in France; Wharton and democratic revolutions; Wharton's democratic Americans in Europe; Wharton and the erotics of democracy; Wharton and the democratization of culture; Wharton and popular forms and audiences; Wharton and Victorian liberalism; Wharton and twentieth-century liberalism; democracy and imperialism (American, British, French); democracy and race; democracy and gender; democracy and feminism. We especially hope to receive submissions for graduate students and emerging scholars as well as more established scholars.

Please submit a 250-word abstract for a 15-20 minute presentation to Emily Coit ([emilycoit@uchicago.edu](mailto:emilycoit@uchicago.edu)) and Arielle Zibrak ([azibrak@uwyo.edu](mailto:azibrak@uwyo.edu)) by Jan 2 2025.

## **2) Edith Wharton and Popular Culture**

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Edith Wharton is regularly the question or answer on Jeopardy! these days. She's also the heroine of a 2024 murder mystery by Mariah Fredericks. The indie band The Magnetic Fields penned a love-letter to the "masterpiece of catastrophic love" that is Wharton's 1911 *Ethan Frome*, and a diverse range of voices cite Wharton as an influence or a favorite: Roxane Gay, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Beth Nguyen, and Francis Ford Coppola—whose adaptation of *The Glimpses of the Moon* is currently underway. A novel that, in fact, also inspired Tavi Gevinson's 2024 audio series.

One of only a few early twentieth-century American women novelists whose work has never been out of print, Wharton's appeal has long stretched beyond the academy and across demographics, but perhaps never more so than in the twenty-first century. From Juliet Sharp reading *The House of Mirth* on the original CW network's *Gossip Girl* in the aughts to Julian Fellowes naming the best dressed couple on HBO's *The Gilded Age* after George and Bertha Dorset from the same novel, Edith Wharton is enjoying a renaissance across 21st-century popular culture even more pronounced than her 1990s revival. This guaranteed panel sponsored by the Edith Wharton Society invites 15-20 minute presentations that address popular culture's engagement with Wharton's capacious body of work.

Papers might theorize why Wharton's work remains such an enduring feature of the public sphere, how adaptations modernize her works (or don't), how Wharton leverages notions of the popular within her work, Wharton in periodical context, Wharton in film studies, or make a case for the influence of Wharton on popular works not explicitly connected to her oeuvre. While we welcome submissions from established scholars, we especially encourage papers from graduate students and emerging critical voices. Please submit a 250-word abstract and abbreviated CV to Emily Orlando (eorlando@fairfield.edu) and Arielle Zibrak (azibrak@uwoyo.edu) by Jan 3, 2025.