Studia Anglica Posnaniensia 61(s.1) (2026): 77–90
doi: 10.14746/stap.2026.61.16

EDITH WHARTON'S LETTERS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF HER TRAVEL WRITINGS

"I don't dare to write to you
except when I am scaling
heights or exploring trenches".
Letter from Edith Wharton to
Henry James, May 14, 1915
(Lewis 1988: 354).

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ABSTRACT

Edith Wharton, the turn-of-the-century US novelist, was a devout producer and consumer of letters. Her 570-page *Letters* (1988) offers only a slim selection of her output, most of which still lies in various US archives. The paper investigates the relationship between Wharton's travel writing and selected correspondence in order to reflect on the use of affect in these two marginal non-fiction genres in cultural studies. Wharton travelled widely and regularly, and she not only wrote travelogues about her Italian, French, Moroccan, Aegean, and Spanish journeys, but she was also wont to write letters about her experiences to friends. The paper looks into the emotional investment the letter format and the travelogue format provide to Wharton's travel experience. After an overview of Wharton's travel writing and letter productions, the paper focuses on three examples in which correspondence intersects with travel writing from 1904, 1915, and 1926. The paper compares the points of interest the letters and the travelogue entries provide, and it argues that the correspondence from 1904 offers invaluable clues for the interpretation of the highly stylized, edited, and objectivized travel entries, while by 1926 this relation turns around, and then the travel entries carry emotional weight that the letters refer to implicitly.

Keywords: correspondence, travel writing, Edith Wharton, Henry James, affect

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Introduction

Letter writing in the 19th century acquired the personal function of self-exploration and moved into the intimate realm of the private space (Rybicka 2016: 53). Belonging to a generation of late nineteenth-century authors with prolific correspondence, Edith Wharton (1862–1937) wrote and received several letters connected to her activities every day: she would write to her literary friends, relatives, society ladies, and later to editors and fans as well. No wonder that Paul Ohler claims that "Wharton left one of the most important correspondences on American literature" (Ohler 2019: 17) in his discussion of Wharton materials in the archives.

It is difficult to measure the exact extent of Wharton's correspondence reliably, as many of her letters did not survive. For instance, Henry James burnt much of his private correspondence in bouts of depression before he died in 1916, among them hundreds of Wharton's letters. We also know that Wharton herself retrieved her letters to Walter Berry, her lifelong intimate friend, from Berry's Paris flat after his death and destroyed them all. In contrast, a cache of love letters surfaced between Wharton and her lover, Morton Fullerton, in 1980 and was purchased by the University of Texas. Another set of letters appeared between Wharton and her governess (later secretary), Anna Bahlmann, which was auctioned in 2009 (Meed 2009) and purchased by Yale.

As of today, there are about four thousand letters by Wharton scattered in different archives that researchers can access. The bulk of these are located at the Beinecke Library of Yale University. Wharton's literary executor, Gaillard Lapsley, sold the author's materials to Yale in 1938, where they were kept under lock and key for thirty years (Lee 2008: 750), as specified by Lapsley. In the 1970s, the opening of the Wharton papers at Yale initiated a revival of Wharton criticism: the first explorer, R. W. B. Lewis, published his scholarly biography of Wharton in 1975, and feminist scholars started to focus their attention on Wharton as a professional American female author. Other archives that hold collections of Wharton's letters include the Firestone Library of Princeton (professional correspondence with Scribner's editors), the Berenson Library at Villa I Tatti, the Harvard Center for the Study of the Italian Renaissance (letters to Bernard & Mary Berenson, and Nicky Mariani), the Lilly Library (materials from Wharton's other executor, Elisina Tyler), and the University of Texas (mainly letters, but an unknown Wharton drama has been discovered there, too [Meed 2017]). In addition, many other libraries house letters by Wharton as part of their collections.

Selections of Wharton's letters have been published in several separate volumes up to now, suggesting that the publication of archival materials has gathered momentum in the past decades. Roughly four hundred letters out of the estimated four thousand by Wharton were published in the collection *The Letters of Edith Wharton* (1988), edited by R. W. B. Lewis and Nancy Lewis, who selected the most informative ten per cent of the material (Lewis 1988: 3) and arranged them chronologically in the volume, which remains a main reference point to this day. In 1990, Lyall Harris Powers edited *Henry James and Edith Wharton: Letters: 1900–1915* (1990) to draw focus to the literary friendship of the two famous American authors. In 2000, Daniel Bratton and Carol Williams edited the correspondence between Wharton and another American novelist, Louis Bromfield, titled *Yrs, Ever Affly: The Correspondence of Edith Wharton and Louis Bromfield* (2000). Bromfield was thirty-five years Wharton's junior, but the two corresponded fervently between 1931 and 1937 on topics as varied as gardening, politics, literary markets, art and travel. In 2007, Shafquat Towheed selected and edited roughly four hundred letters between Edith Wharton and her main London publisher, Macmillan. The publication revealed Wharton's understanding of the literary marketplace and showed her working practices (Towheed 2007). A cache of letters between Wharton and Anna Bahlmann that came to auction in 2009 (Meed 2009) contained one hundred and thirty-five letters between Wharton and her tutor and later secretary, Bahlmann; these were edited and introduced by Irene Goldman-Price in 2012, titled *My Dear Governess* (2012). It is a volume that sheds new light on Wharton's early years: "the myth of self-making that Edith Wharton created in *A Backward Glance* will bear scrutiny in light of what we learn from her correspondence with Anna Bahlmann", Goldman-Price writes (2012: 2). Most recently, Anna Girling's (2016) article discusses the correspondence between Wharton and her Scottish publisher, John Murray, and Julie Olin-Ammentorp (2019) surveys the shifting boundaries between private and public discourse in various editions and manuscript sets of Wharton's letters.

In recent Wharton criticism, two major publications have maneuvered around a reassessment of Wharton's correspondence. One is the forthcoming Oxford University Press project titled *The Complete Works of Edith Wharton*, led by Carol Singley, the eminent Wharton scholar (Singley et al. 2022). The new scholarly editions of Wharton's work will draw on the most recent Wharton scholarship, and the associate editors represent the interdisciplinary range of Wharton's work. In addition to well-known titles, Wharton's unpublished plays and other archival material also form part of the published texts, so the boundaries of the Wharton canon will have been redrawn when the project is completed. However, there is no new volume on Wharton's correspondence in the series – the editors must have decided that the Lewises and the series of recent

publications have done a definitive job in this area. Similarly, Laura Rattray's *Edith Wharton and Genre: Beyond Fiction* (2020) is based on the premise that Wharton's work goes well beyond the writing of fiction that readers normally identify the author with. The volume shows that Wharton was not only a novelist but also a poet, a playwright, an essayist and theorist, a travel writer, and a versatile author on architecture and design as well. Nevertheless, Wharton's letters lie beyond the scope of Wharton's work defined in Rattray's (2020) book, although as an editor, she had included the topic of correspondence in the volume *New Wharton Studies* (see Olin-Ammentorp 2019: 35).

The question of how correspondence can be approached by the humanities scholars in the wake of the linguistic turn continues to engage researchers today. In France, several research groups are devoted to epistolography, reflecting the growing interdisciplinary interest in letters among scholars of history, sociology, and literature alike, as Elżbieta Rybicka (2016: 47) observes. Correspondence has often been simply read as a contextual source of information (or has been disregarded as such), but it can be put to much better use in the framework of more socially oriented studies. Rybicka (2016: 62–63) explains the contemporary academic interest in letters as part of the affective turn, a growing interest in emotions in communicative practices. She draws up a sociological model of epistolography in which letters form part of an act of communication: letters are understood to "communicate emotions in cultural code" (Rybicka 2016: 62). This means that the emotional load letters carry raises scholarly interest not as emotions produced by *individuals* but rather as part of a cultural study of emotions and the languages of emotions (Rybicka 2016: 62; Chamayou 1999).

This article makes no attempt at theorizing the place of Wharton's correspondence in the Wharton canon. More modestly, it investigates the problem of how Wharton's letters, as communicative acts, contribute to the reading of another non-fiction genre of hers, travel writing. Apart from the obvious biographical interest, the question is what one can learn about Wharton's work at the intersection of her correspondence and her travel writings. A glimpse into the composition of letters and related travel texts shows core discursive strategies at work in both genres: at first sight, the letters seem to be personalized sketches for the more elaborate and literary travel pieces. My inquiry concerns two points in connection with cultural codes of communication: what is chosen to be represented in correspondence and in the travel texts, and what rhetorical differences there are. I argue that an inquiry into these points in select letters/travel texts leads to an account of emotions in Wharton's letters.

Three of Wharton's travel texts are discussed here in relation to her correspondence, and these provide views of Wharton's work at different points of her career. Her first travel book, *Italian Villas* (1976 [1904]), is contextualized by her professional correspondence on illustrations. This story showcases the

frustrating constraints of the literary marketplace for female authors at the time. Secondly, a section of *Fighting France* (1918 [1915]) is compared to its parallel letter version, which allows for considering specific rhetorical differences between a chronologically oriented letter and a well-composed travel text. Eventually, Wharton's recently published fragmented travel writing, *Osprey Notes* (2021 [1926]), is compared to its letter version to show the lack of emotion in the letter and the presence of emotion in the travel fragment. Based on these examples, Wharton's correspondence can offer not only biographical background but also draw attention to cultural debates on the place of the personal in travel writing.

1. Objectivity vs. picturesque impressions: Wharton's argument with her editors about *Italian Villas and Their Gardens* (1904)

Edith Wharton was commissioned to write articles on Italian villas and gardens by the editor of *The Century* magazine, Richard W. Gilder, in 1902. *The Century* was an illustrated monthly magazine that Gilder and his contributors dedicated to the elevation of US culture by educating readers to higher cultural standards according to genteel tradition ideals (Tomsich 1973). The correspondence between Wharton and Gilder about the planned articles relates to questions of professional authorship; it includes Wharton's fee, the organization of the volume, the number of villas to cover, and the style of the reports. One of the most important elements of the professional discussion is the issue of the illustrations for the volume in unpublished letters. Gilder and Robert Underwood Johnson, the associate editor of the magazine, took a different position on the matter than Wharton. The disagreement reflects different expectations concerning the readers and the market of Wharton's text.

Gilder and Johnson envisioned the project of illustrated articles on Italian villas in terms of the genteel or belletristic tradition of travel writing. The belletristic tradition dominated travel writing in the early 19th century with authors like Washington Irving (his *Alhambra* on Spain from 1832) and Nathaniel Hawthorne (his *The Marble Faun* on Italy from 1860 and *Our Old Home* on England from 1863). Authors of the belletristic tradition sought the picturesque effect in historic and ruinous sites, in curious or scenic places. Gilder expected Wharton to produce a genteel account of picturesque Italian villas for readers of *The Century* (Wright 1997: 36). As part of this, he also commissioned the painter Maxfield Parrish to procure "colour watercolours" to illustrate Wharton's text (Peel 2016: 289).

In contrast, Wharton considered the work of amateur travellers "naïve and uninformed" (Wright 1997: 38), and she thought picturesque impressions needed explication. The reason for this opinion was that Wharton had become an admirer of John Ruskin's views on painting and architecture. She acquired Ruskin's

method of "precise observation" by following Ruskin's routes in Italy: she explored Italy with Ruskin in hand as a girl (Wharton 1990: 851) and returned there for annual trips with her husband for almost twenty years. In addition, Wharton was aware of the latest scientific trend of writing art history objectively, which offered criticism of even Ruskin's precise observations. Wharton's descriptions of Italian villas lacked the picturesque impressionistic quality her editors were seeking (and later demanding), because she tried to perform precise observation at her sites, following Ruskin. She even insisted on including practical layouts for the gardens as illustrations instead of the picturesque watercolours commissioned by her editors.

Several letters in the Beinecke collection at Yale are relevant to the discussion on illustrations. The first relevant letter is to Gilder, sent from New York, dated December 20, 1902. Here Wharton offers to include a scientifically arranged inventory of Italian villas in the book, together with sketches in scale and layouts. She writes that she had met Frederick Olmsted, who

> said that one or more of his students would be in Italy and would make me as many scale drawings & plans as I wanted, simply for the love of the work. If I have some of these drawings, at least for the book, they will add immensely to its value, as thoughtful people are growing tired of pretty pictures of Italian gardens, unless they are accompanied by practical details.
>
> (Wharton 1902)

However, Gilder is not interested in such a venture, as he thinks readers of *The Century* would not be the proper market for such a book. In another letter to Gilder from March 18, 1903, also sent from New York, Wharton emphasizes the importance of a systematic, comprehensive, and careful study again:

> You may think such investigations are unnecessary for the magazine articles, you will appreciate, I am sure, how much they will add to the value & importance of the book, & to its selling capacity. I think Mr. Johnson fully realizes the importance of a careful study of old plans & and the inspection of the greatest number possible of gardens, in order to write with some sort of system & comprehensiveness on a subject which, hitherto, has been treated in English only in the most amateurish fashion.
>
> (Lewis 1988: 82–83)

The amateurish fashion she tries to resist is exactly the belletristic tradition of writing travel that Gilder would welcome. It comes as no surprise that Gilder refuses to acknowledge repeated pleas from Wharton to include the layout of the gardens in the book. Wharton complains about Maxwell Parrish's delay in producing his sketches. She proposes "the inclusion of a few strictly architectural drawings of a kind he would probably not care to do" by an "architectural

draughtsman" instead. This way she would be able to write a general handbook on Italian villas as she did on interior decoration in *The Decoration of Houses* (1899) (Wharton 1903). In this letter, she is quite open about her annoyance with Parrish (Lewis 1988: 82–83, see also Wright 1997: 39 and Peel 2012).

This professional correspondence reflects a serious conflict of interest between the editors of *The Century* and Wharton. In 1902, US editorial and readerly expectations were centered around the belletristic tradition of travel writing, while Wharton herself was self-consciously trying to pursue a more scientifically oriented course. Unfortunately, the story had no happy ending for Wharton. Although she never rewrote her own passages in the style requested of her, the volume came out with Parrish's pictures instead of the architectural drawings and layouts she had proposed.

In the travel book *Italian Villas* there is no reference to the need for further drawings or layouts. Instead, one finds only a criticism of art critics "bred in the Ruskinian code of art ethics" (Wharton 1976: 231) in the introductory part of the final chapter. Wharton points out that the generation of Anglo-Saxon critics influenced by Ruskin appreciated Italian art only up to the sixteenth century. They saw sixteenth-century masters like Vignola and Palladio "as examples of degeneracy" (Wharton 1976: 231). In contrast, German art historians address the sixteenth-century late Renaissance and the Italian Baroque in "careful and sympathetic study" (Wharton 1976: 232), even if their masterly work remains sketchy or lacks minor ramifications. Following the lead of German critics, Wharton performs a historical survey of Italian villas from early Florentine (Tuscan) basic types through the Baroque wonders of the Veneto, integrating Baroque villa architecture into a sustained critical discussion of art history.

In terms of the communication of emotion, Wharton's letters to Richard Gilder provide clear evidence of her frustration with her editor's dated expectations about travel writing, which also shows through her annoyance with Parrish and his work. In *Italian Villas*, a similar sense of frustration is perceivable in her comments on John Ruskin and art historians influenced by him, who have no eye for the beauty of the Italian Baroque. Wharton presents a concise and elegant argument against Ruskin in her book, which is paralleled by her heated conflict with Gilder's plans and Parrish's sketches in her letters.

2. Parallel accounts in authorial correspondence: *Fighting France* (1915)

After her two Italian travel books, Wharton published two collections of travel essays on France. The first volume on France, *A Motor-Flight Through France* (1908), celebrates the possibilities of travel opened up by the motor car: the motion, the speed, and the efficiency of collecting observations (Bentley 2005:

226–227; Schriber 1991: 141). Wharton collects observations about historical continuity through watching architectural treasures of the French countryside (Kovács 2017). The second volume on France, *Fighting France: From Dunquerke to Belfort* (1918 [1915]), laments the loss of the very same historical continuity due to the destruction of the Great War. At this point, Wharton's motor car is used for charity-related visits to the front, and behind the lines she has first-hand experience of the destruction and wreckage of war (see Price 1995 and Olin-Ammentorp 2004) that she communicates in the language of travel writing.

A key experience of the shock of wartime motor-flights for Wharton is connected to what she refers to as "the sense of unreality" (Wharton 1918: 89). It seems clear to her that the war has brought a new sense of pointlessness and lack of connection to the past, which to her is a new sense of the "real" (Wharton 1918: 89) to be experienced by the perceiver/traveller. Yet at certain points in the reports, she seems undecided about whether this new sense of reality has replaced old ways of experiencing the world altogether or there is still a possibility for perceiving the world in the old way occasionally. In *A Motor-Flight*, "the sense of unreality" is related to episodes when the possibility of returning to the old way of experiencing the world in terms of historical continuity returns for a short time. One such scene is Wharton's meeting of an old acquaintance from Paris in uniform after curfew at Châlons, who helps her out in a sensitive situation. This experience is described both in a letter to Henry James and in a travel essay. A comparison of the two representations reveals rhetorical differences between the friendly letter and the observant travel essay.

Wharton wrote to Henry James about her travels to the front repeatedly. She thought James would be as interested in her impressions of the war and the world of the trenches as he was in travel notes, as she writes in a letter from Nancy on May 14, 1915 (Lewis 1988: 354). Wharton's experience of the sense of unreality at Châlons appears in one of her letters to James. In a letter from Paris dated March 11, 1915, Wharton describes her second trip to the front, where "big summing-up impressions meet one at every turn" (Lewis 1988: 351). One of these impressions is the maze of military rules that left the travellers stranded without a room for the night after curfew. They met a friend from before the war, Jean Louis Vaudoyer, who was on duty that night and saw how Wharton's attempts at securing lodgings failed at every turn. He suggested that the travellers spend the night at a civilian house he rented in town, and out on the dark street he even gave the password for getting to the house. So, an active old-time connection helped in a possibly dangerous war situation, and this incongruous meeting of the old world of continuity with the new world of the present war disruption made Wharton comment:

> I suddenly refused to believe that *any* of it was true, or happening to *me*, or that a nice boy who dines with me & sends me chocolates for Nouvel An, was whispering a *pass-word* to me, & adding: "Quand vous le dites au chauffeur, prenez garde qu'une sentinelle ne vous entende pas" – It was no use trying to keep up the pretense of reality any longer!
>
> (Lewis 1988: 353)

In the passage, the new reality of the war is called the "pretense of reality," which, during this late-hour incident, disappeared. Instead of the new reality of the war, old ways and customs prevailed in the night. The reappearance of pre-war ways contributed to a successful resolution of the situation.

In *Fighting France*, the incident at Châlons is recounted in the section entitled "In Argonne". The "sense of unreality" (Wharton 1918: 89) is foregrounded and explicitly named in this passage. The events and unexpected turns of the day are narrated in great detail. The Châlons episode is introduced through a description of the intense military activity in the town and the difficulty of finding accommodation, as all the beds have already been taken for the night. The successive attempts to secure lodging result in a series of tribulations, culminating in the travellers being left to fend for themselves, at the mercy of chance. "And just then, chance took pity on us", Wharton (1918: 87–88) writes. After this turning point, the unnamed friend helps them out: "he told us how to find our way through the maze of little unlit streets about the Cathedral" (Wharton 1918: 88); he gave Wharton the password and disappeared. What follows this account is a summing-up impression about the sense of unreality conveyed by the incident:

> I stood there in the pitch-black night, suddenly unable to believe that I was I, or Châlons Châlons, or that a young man who in Paris drops in to dine with me and talk over new books and plays, had been whispering a password in my ear to carry me unchallenged to a house a few streets away! *The sense of unreality* produced by that one word was so overwhelming that for a blissful moment the whole fabric of what I had been experiencing, the whole huge and oppressive and unescapable fact of the war, slipped away like a torn cobweb, and I seemed to see behind it the reassuring face of things as they used to be. The next morning dispelled that vision.
>
> (Wharton 1918: 89, emph. added)

The final point of the passage has shifted from the incongruity of the two senses of reality to an explication of the sense of unreality. In the opposition between the sense of reality of the war and the sense of unreality of the past, the reality of the war is presented as an oppressive, unescapable "fact". As opposed to this, the unreality of the past is blissful and reassuring, a background to the foreground of unescapable "facts". The blissful moment when the problem of where to spend the night is resolved enables the movement of vision from a focus on

the foreground, the present, to a focus on the background, the past, and for a night this view provides a happy escape from the reality and the fact of war. The next passage readjusts the focus, and the reality of the present returns.

The letter and the chapter represent the same incident in diverse ways. For James, the fellow author, the actual events of the trip are listed punctually, complete with names, times, and miles. The events related to the field hospital and to the password are relayed as impressions to be developed later. In the travel text, there is less specificity of detail and more explication of the impression. In *Fighting France*, the events at Châlons are arranged in a plot of repeated tribulations and final mercy, as a result of which a glimpse of the past eventually happens at the climactic endpoint. This is reversed again in the morning. Within this plot structure, the experience of war is juxtaposed with the experience of peace – to use Wharton's terms: (the sense of) reality is juxtaposed with the sense of unreality. The fleeting, positive, happy, and dreamlike quality of this ephemeral glimpse of the past is contrasted with the daytime reality of the war. Wharton, the wartime traveller, takes the trouble to explicate her anxieties of the war in the war zone as a dramatic opposition that is much more expressive than the earlier anecdotal letter form was.

3. Parallel accounts in personal correspondence: *Osprey Notes* (1926)

Osprey Notes (2021 [1926]) is a fragmented travel account of Wharton's 1926 cruise to the Aegean. It contains ten entries about ten destinations from the first part of the actual trip, each entry becoming sparser than the previous. One of the entries describes the ascent to Delphi and a final blissful moment of viewing the sea from the heights beside the ruins of the shrine. Wharton described the same event in a letter to his longtime friend Gaillard Lapsley. It is challenging to compare the personal letter that discloses a seemingly trivial element of the excursion to Delphi to the flamboyant and elevated language of the travel note because the comparison implies the presence of a concern with tourists that the heightened rhetorical focus in the travel note blots out.

Wharton's letter to Lapsley is dated April 11, 1926, from the Gulf of Corinth / Osprey, and it describes the outing the cruisers made to Delphi. After proclaiming that "[n]o words can express Delphi, nor tell you the beauty of the approach by the bay of Itea, with the snowy Acrocoraunian mountains in our rear, across the gulf, & ahead of us, over frowning Delphi, Parnassus all white with snow" (Lewis 1988: 489), true to its word, it attempts to say nothing about that beauty. Rather, it focuses on meeting about two hundred members of the (British) Hellenic Association, who came by steamer and were taking lunch at a local hotel, while Wharton and company had a picnic under olive trees from their lunch basket. Wharton eventually talked to some members of the party and learnt they

had seen Venice ten days before and in between visited Athens, Crete, Rhodes, Nauplia, Argos, Sparta, Aegina, Olympia, Eleusis, Spalato and Traü, Ragusa. Now they were on the way back (Lewis 1988: 490).

Wharton gives details of her own itinerary that is somewhat similar to that of the Hellenic Association (her stops are Palermo, Cephalonia, Zante, Olympia, Delphi, New Phalerum, Sunium, Marathon, Chalcis, Naupila, Argos, Epidaurus, Mycenae, Tyrins, perhaps Sparta, Rhodes, Cyprus, and Crete). Yet Wharton's itinerary is to be "done" in six weeks, not ten days; she travels on a cruiser, not on a steamer, she spends her time in the company of five friends, not two hundred unknown others, and she always sleeps on the site and takes leisurely excursions. This contrast is heightened even more through Wharton's description of Robert Norton's reaction to the British tourists, his compatriots. The majority of them were women dressed in daring grass-green travelling costumes. Grouped around the Castalian Fount, they looked remarkably like "brawny nymphs" (Lewis 1988: 490). Wharton's fellow traveller, the British Robert Norton, jokingly contemplated obtaining Greek or American naturalization papers to distinguish himself from the British ladies. The passage establishes a comic contrast between tourists, who travel en masse at speed along predetermined itineraries, and cruisers, who select their destinations at will and take their time appreciating the vistas afforded by ancient sites and monuments.

Wharton's entry about Delphi in *Osprey Notes* provides a very focused account of a scene of wonder. The passage describes an ascent both geographically and aesthetically. Geographically, the account begins with the view of Delphi and its surroundings from the sea. The approach to Delphi starts at the bay, crosses the olive orchards of Apollo next to the bay, and then climbs the slopes to the entrance of the complex and then further to the shrine. Moving closer, the ruins and elements of the scenery are named, until a climax is reached: "All was beauty, serenity, and awe. A matchless landscape" (Wharton 2021: 41). The afternoon stroll repeats the geographical overview but does not end in an evaluative commentary (Wharton 2021: 41).

In the travel note, the ascent to Delphi culminates in an aesthetic climax. The note challenges the assertion made in the letter that "no words can express Delphi" (Lewis 1988: 489), demonstrating instead an attempt to articulate in words the possible meanings of Delphi: "beauty, serenity, and awe" (Wharton 2021: 41). Interestingly, this is not a very analytical account of the traveller's experience at the site, but rather a list of nouns that communicate the emotional experience of the beauty of the site created for Wharton the traveller: she sees the beauty, she feels peaceful because of it and she also feels reverence and wonder towards it. So, in this specific case, the fragmented travel piece is more expressive of the emotional experience of travel than the letter.

Conclusion

In terms of the communication of emotions, the letters and the travel texts relate to each other differently at the three intersections this essay has looked at. In the early 1900s, Wharton's letters to her editor provided clear evidence of her annoyance with Maxwell Parrish's illustrations and her distance from Gilder's dated expectations about travel writing. In the travel piece she was writing at the time – *Italian Villas* – a similar sense of frustration is perceptible, but that frustration is directed at John Ruskin and art historians influenced by him, who have no eye for the beauty of the Italian Baroque. Wharton's book develops an elegant argument for the beauty and value of Italian Baroque garden architecture, which is paralleled by her dislike of Gilder's ideas and her heated conflict with Parrish's ways.

In 1915, a wartime incident is recounted both in a letter and in a travel passage. Wharton develops the anecdote first related in an earlier letter, reworking it for her travel article. In the travel text, the wartime experience is identified as "the sense of unreality," and the entire section is structured to bring this sensation to a climax. The incident thus becomes an illuminating representation of the experience of war, charged with the emotional weight of wartime anxiety. Similar moments of "unreality" recur several times throughout *Fighting France*.

In 1926, a letter and the travel note present two different experiences of the visit to Delphi. The letter denies the expressive value of words for conveying the experience of visiting the ancient ruins of Delphi. Instead, it relates a funny anecdote about hasty tourists who do not have the chance to go through the experience that leisurely travellers do. In the passage from *Osprey Notes*, the emphasis falls on the emotional impact of the site's beauty rather than on its physical features alone. The passage captures the tranquillity and reverence experienced by the travellers as they contemplate the setting, conveying the profound emotional resonance of the encounter.

The intersection of letters and travel texts indicates that the drive for scientific accuracy Wharton sought as a fledgling travel author seems much less pronounced in her later travel pieces. In the first comparison, it was the letter that served to communicate emotions. In the next two instances, the travel texts were used for coding the emotional experience of Wharton the traveller at memorable sites. So much so that in the last *Osprey* example, communication of emotions appears to be the most significant element of travelling, an aspect unsuited even for private correspondence. Between 1904 and 1926, discursive contexts seem to have shifted considerably, by which time Wharton's need for an emotional response did appear in the travel notes. This dramatic shift in Wharton's attitude to emotions in travel writing may be the reason why the notes from 1926 were never published in Wharton's lifetime.

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