

EDITH WHARTON AT THE CINEMA

In 1921 Edith Wharton sold the film rights to her Pulitzer Prize winning novel, “THE AGE OF INNOCENCE”, for \$15,000. Seventy-two years later, Martin Scorsese has filmed Edith Wharton’s novel at a reputed cost of \$30 million.

In 1920 Edith Wharton was paid \$18,000 by the New York monthly “PICTORIAL REVIEW”, a popular journal of the day, for the rights to publish her next serial. She was at this time an established literary figure, a writer of travelogues, novels, novellas and short stories (particularly ghost stories) - even pornography and a manual on interior design. The first instalment of what was to become “THE AGE OF INNOCENCE” was published in the “PICTORIAL REVIEW” in July 1920 in between advertisements for soapflakes and lavatory cleaners.

Task

What evidence can you detect in the novel that it was written as a serial story?

In writing “THE AGE OF INNOCENCE” Edith Wharton was following the advice given to her in 1902 by her friend, the novelist Henry James: “DO NEW YORK!” Though by 1920 Edith Wharton was a successful novelist she wrote “THE AGE OF INNOCENCE” rapidly, for money, since despite her own wealth she had developed tastes that exceeded her income.

There has been a great deal of interest in the works of Edith Wharton recently. Liam Neeson has starred in a film of “ETHAN FROME”, “THE CHILDREN”, starring Ben Kingsley, has been released on video, and various Wharton based projects are underway; “THE GLIMPSES OF THE MOON” at Warner Bros, Wharton’s unfinished novel (recently completed by critic and biographer Marion Mainwaring) is being produced by 20th Century Fox and Michelle Pfeiffer is reported to be interested in “THE CUSTOM OF THE COUNTRY” with TriStar. As one literary agent observed: “Anything by Wharton is gold right now”.

However, this is not the first time that Hollywood has discovered Edith Wharton. A six-reeler was made of “THE HOUSE OF MIRTH”, and a successful version of “THE GLIMPSES OF THE MOON” was shown in the 1920’s. Though Edith Wharton commented on stage adaptations of her work she never commented on the film versions of her novels and it is likely that she was an extremely infrequent visitor to the cinema.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Though she did not publish her first novel until she was forty, Edith Wharton had been a compulsive storyteller for most of her life, both revelling in the “ecstasy of making up” yet disturbed by the excessive demands of creativity: “The call came regularly and imperiously and I ... would struggle against it conscientiously.” She used to entertain her family by inventing stories which she pretended to read from books, sometimes, alas, upside-down. Her early stories were simple romances in which women’s dreams and ambitions were fulfilled by marriage. However, this apparently complacent view of marriage as the culmination of a woman’s aspiration is off-set by the savage reviews that the young Edith Wharton wrote to accompany her literary outpourings.

Even when she was an established writer, Edith Wharton tended to be rather furtive about her writing. She referred to her work as “my secret garden”, rarely discussed her writings and wrote secretly in bed every morning, dropping pages onto the bedroom floor for her secretary to retrieve and then type. She would rise at noon in order to carry out the “public” duties expected of her as a perfect hostess. However, publicity photographs show Edith Wharton fully dressed and seated at a writing desk; like many of her characters, Wharton was unable to shed the notion that appearance was everything so she played up the correct image of a serious writer cherished by the general public.

SCORSESE AND WHARTON

At first “THE AGE OF INNOCENCE” may seem an unusual choice for Martin Scorsese to film. Scorsese is clear about his suitability for filming a book that might have been seen as a more likely venture for the Merchant-Ivory team. Scorsese compares the Merchant-Ivory method of working to the “old studio system, where there’s a body of work built up” and he believes that he can offer a fresh approach to the period genre to which he brings “very different sensibility”. Audiences familiar with the rough, enclosed “masculine” world of “MEAN STREETS”, “RAGING BULL”, “TAXI DRIVER” and “GOODFELLAS” might be forgiven for expecting a less sedate and respectable/respectful film than “THE AGE OF INNOCENCE”.

“What really attracted me to the book,” says Scorsese, “was the sense of poignancy - the sense of loss. This is a love story, and a love between two people, whether successful or unsuccessful, is common to everybody.” Certainly the idea that the novel, “THE AGE OF INNOCENCE”, is above all a love story makes it, perhaps, a commercial proposition but Scorsese's interest in the story surely goes beyond the “boy meets girl” aspect of the novel.

The link between “THE AGE OF INNOCENCE” and Scorsese films is summed up by the director: “It’s all tribal ritual.” Noted Wharton biographer R. W. B. Lewis was an advisor on the film and he believes that the director of “TAXI DRIVER” and “GOODFELLAS” relished the idea of people being “cur” by society, “the old New York way of taking life without the effusion of blood”. “I think that must have intrigued him,” conjectures Lewis, “A mannered mode of destruction.”

Task Can you suggest other aspects of the novel that may have appealed to Scorsese? What examples does the novel offer of the “taking of life without the effusion of blood”? What does Lewis mean when he refers to “A mannered form of destruction” and is this form of destruction preferable to the modes of “destruction” we observe in other Scorsese films?

Authorities on “family” and “form” like Sillerton Jackson and Larry Lefferts exercise power within the world of “THE AGE OF INNOCENCE” in the same way in which the Mafia dons controlled their criminal territory. The van der Luydens, the ultimate conferrers of social acceptability, are the equivalent of a godfather ... and a godmother.

Task How do you think Sillerton Jackson or Larry Lefferts are able to exert so much influence? Where or what is their “power base”?

THE WORLD OF “THE AGE OF INNOCENCE”

The world of “THE AGE OF INNOCENCE” is highly complex, completely insular and concerned with maintaining a rigid social order and keeping up appearances at all costs. At first glance it might have appeared a supremely masculine world since it was the men who dealt with financial matters; they took care of business. Newland Archer has a job but in the film we gain the impression that it is almost a hobby rather than a full-time occupation.

Edith Wharton drew on her own vivid recollections of the exclusive affluent world she had been born into, a world in which a person’s attendance at fashionable balls and lavish dinner parties might be their sole occupation. Wharton refers to this society which she knew so well as “a hieroglyphic world where the real thing was never said, or done, or even thought”.

Task Give some examples from the film of the “hieroglyphics” used by characters to communicate. Select a brief scene from the novel which is not included in the film involving the communication of emotions and suggest how you would film this, relying entirely on visual

communication -semaphore is not permitted.

In this world, a woman's life revolved around the home, a more important realm than the shadowy masculine domain of "business". A woman had to maintain the family, the supreme component of this snug, secure and exclusive world, in which one displayed "scrupulous probity in business and private affairs." (Edith Wharton in "A Backward Glance"). Julius Beaufort and his wife are excluded from this society when it seems possible that they may taint it and May Welland is prepared to be utterly ruthless in the defence of her home and family.

Task

To what extent do you believe that Julius Beaufort is viewed by Newland Archer as a corrupting influence? How is he depicted in the film?

WHARTON AND F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

Though the literary figure Edith Wharton is most associated with is Henry James - indeed for a long time her reputation as a writer languished alongside his - Wharton has interesting connections with Scott Fitzgerald.

His "THE GREAT GATSBY" is as much a chronicle - albeit a contemporary one - of the Jazz Age as "THE AGE OF INNOCENCE" is of the closing decades of the 19th Century.

In the summer of 1925, Scott Fitzgerald sent Edith Wharton a copy of "THE GREAT GATSBY" in which he had written a friendly message. Edith Wharton was delighted that a young author should have sought her out for attention and wrote to him: "I am touched at your sending me a copy, for I feel that to your generation, which has taken such a flying leap into the future, I must represent the literary equivalent of tufted furniture and gas chandeliers."

She offered an appreciative criticism of "THE GREAT GATSBY":

"...let me say at once how much I liked Gatsby or rather His Book, and how great a leap I think you have taken this time - an advance upon your previous work. My present quarrel with you is only this: that to make Gatsby really Great, you ought to have given us his early career (nor from the cradle - but from his visit to the yacht, if not before) instead of a short resume of it. That would have situated him and made his final tragedy a tragedy instead of a 'fair divers' for the morning papers." Edith Wharton ended her letter by inviting the author and his wife to call on her some time.

A few days later Scott Fitzgerald arrived at Wharton's home, with his friend Theodore Chanler; both were a little drunk and determined not to be overawed by Edith Wharton's "grand old lady of American letters" reputation; they wished to cut a dash and show themselves to be thoroughly modern. During an awkward pause in the conversation Fitzgerald decided to relate "a couple of - er - rather rough stories". With Edith Wharton's guarded approval, he launched into what was intended to be a shocking account of an American couple who mistake a Paris brothel for an hotel. Edith Wharton listened politely and carefully, observing with chilly austerity that his confused and off-colour narrative lacked "data".

Edith Wharton noted in her diary that evening: "To tea, Teddy Chanler and Scott Fitzgerald, the novelist (awful)."

Back at home the despondent Fitzgerald clutched his head in his hands and said to Zelda Fitzgerald, "They beat me, they beat me!" The old literary order represented by Edith Wharton had put the young literary lion firmly in his place, as surely as Newland Archer is brought back into the fold in "THE AGE OF INNOCENCE".

Scorsese appears to have had "THE GREAT GATSBY" in mind when filming at least one scene in "THE AGE OF INNOCENCE". In his novel, Fitzgerald offers us our first sight of Daisy and Jordan:

"A breeze blew through the room, blew curtains in at one end and out the other like pale flags, twisting them up towards the frosted wedding cake of the ceiling, and then rippled over the wine coloured rug, making a shadow on it as wind does on the sea.

The only completely stationary object in the room was an enormous couch on which two young women were buoyed up as though upon an anchored balloon. They were both in white, and their dresses were rippling and fluttering as if they had just been blown back in after a short flight around the house."

The passage emphasises their insubstantiality and lightness; they are two rather languid and superficial young women, so insubstantial in this description that they could easily be blown away. Martin Scorsese offers us a similar view of Newland Archer's family in his film. The sequence is virtually an homage to the famous scene from Fitzgerald's novel since again the windows are open and white dresses billow emptily in the breeze. Scorsese offers us briefly and simply a view of "a family of substance" who - certainly in visual terms - seem as light as air. We see the family from Newland's viewpoint and to him they seem intangible and without consequence since they embody all the values he believes in but which he can no longer abide by.

Task

Can you find a similar sequence in the film in which the location or setting shape our response to or judgment of characters?

FILM AND LITERATURE

In a 136 minute film Scorsese can make little use of the literary reference points which Wharton scatters through her novel and which help us to recognise to what extent Newland's imagination is dominated by his reading. When Mrs Mingott astonishes Newland by sending him to fetch Ellen - he had no idea that Ellen was staying with May's grandmother - Newland sees Ellen gazing out to sea and he is reminded of "the scene in "THE SHAUGHRAUN" (a romantic melodrama), and Montague lifting Ada Dyas's ribbon to his lips without her knowing that he was in the room". "She doesn't know - she hasn't guessed. Shouldn't I know if she came up behind me, I wonder?" he muses. It is this romantic notion taken from a play as well as his reluctance to confront both Ellen and his feelings about her that prevent Newland from speaking to the woman he loves.

Instead of the literary reference, Scorsese gives us a luminous turquoise sea, shimmering in the sun. This glorious, almost mystical image recurs in the film's final reel when Scorsese has to deal with the novel's ending:

"Then he tried to see the persons already in the room - for probably at that sociable hour there would be more than one - and among them a lady, pale and dark, who would look up quickly, half rise, and hold out a long thin hand with three rings on it ... He thought she would be sitting in a sofa-corner near the fire, with azaleas banked behind her on a table.

'It's more real to me here than if I went up,' he suddenly heard himself say; and the fear lest that last shadow of reality should lose its edge kept him rooted to his seat as the minutes succeeded each other.

He sat for a long time on the bench in the thickening dusk, his eyes never turning from the balcony. At length a light shone through the windows, and a moment a man-servant came out through the windows, drew up the awnings, and closed the shutters.

At that, as if it had been the signal he waited for, Newland Archer got up slowly and walked back alone to his hotel."

Scorsese offers us a sequence of flashback recollections by Newland Archer of Ellen, centring upon his memory of the Countess looking out to sea, unaware that she was being watched by Newland. To the accompaniment of Elmer Bernstein's romantic score, the audience is invited to share Newland's view that the life of the imagination is more important, more "real" than reality. And of course, as a cinema audience, we must share this view to a certain extent - otherwise we would not be in the cinema.

Task What do you believe are the strengths and/or weaknesses of Scorsese's conclusion to "THE AGE OF INNOCENCE" compared to Edith Wharton's ending?

THE "LOOK" OF THE FILM

Edith Wharton was anxious that her novel should not be viewed merely as a sort of lavish costume drama in which the settings, costumes and accessories dominate the narrative to the exclusion of any concern for character development. She wrote about her concerns to her friend, Bernard Berenson, after he had praised what she viewed as the more important elements of the novel: "I did so want "THE AGE" to be taken not as a costume piece' but as a 'simple and grave' story of two people trying to live up to something that was still 'felt in the blood' at that time; and the few other people whose opinion I care about, have made me feel that perhaps I have. Thank you so much for taking the trouble to tell me your impressions of the book."

Task To what extent has Scorsese succeeded in avoiding turning “THE AGE OF INNOCENCE” into a “costume piece”?

Many of Edith Wharton’s readers in 1921 would still be able to recall the world of “THE AGE OF INNOCENCE” but for contemporary readers/viewers the imaginative gap is vast. Robin Standefer, the visual research consultant on the film, spent eighteen months researching background material for “THE AGE OF INNOCENCE”: “My job was to provide the social and historical context for the film. The stage had to be set exactly right so you believe what happens.”

She endeavoured to discover all she could about the behaviour of the New York upper classes in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Edith Wharton would have approved of this quest for authenticity. When writing to Mary Cadwalader Jones in 1921 about a proposed theatre adaptation of “THE AGE OF INNOCENCE” she remarks that, “I am very anxious about the staging and dressing. I could do every stick of furniture and every rag of clothing myself, for every detail of that far-off scene was indelibly stamped on my infant brain.”

Robin Standefer consulted the Frick Collection and the New York Historical Society as well as the Library of Congress and Christie’s for information about such diverse topics as formal place settings, flower arranging or the etiquette of gloves and calling cards. She discovered that dinner would invariably consist of thirteen courses and that oysters were kept fresh using flower and fruit-shaped ices.

Task Are the “authentic” sets and costumes an integral aspect of the film?

Production designer Dante Ferrerri took similar pains in his attempts to differentiate between characters in a society that was extremely conformist. Paintings by Whistler, Tissot and Sargent were used as reference points and colours were used to reflect character. The rigid and conservative Mrs Archer’s home is predominantly blue because, says Ferrerri, “Her house is boring, cold and bourgeois because she is rigid and joyless.” This contrasts with the warm rose hues of Mrs Mignort’s drawing room. Mrs Archer even has pastoral paintings of sheep and cows on her walls to emphasise her conformist nature.

How much does this meticulous attention to detail contribute to the film’s success? This visual accuracy has a high price. The average Hollywood feature film costs between \$25 and \$27 million (“GOODFELLAS” cost \$26 million) but “THE AGE OF INNOCENCE” cost \$30 million because of the pains taken to capture a world in many ways as alien as that of “STAR WARS” or “2001”. “Where that extra three or four million went was for the structure and the anthropology of the scenes,” explains

Scorsese. “In other words, the look of the dishes has to be a certain way, and that’s what I thought would give it the extra love and care. And maybe the audience can feel that, get a sense of sumptuousness. Is that inordinate, to have costumes and horse and carriages? Is that an inordinate amount extra?”

What do you believe Scorsese means when he refers to “the anthropology of the scenes”? Write a brief “memo” on behalf of the director to the producer in which you justify your high production costs, making particular reference to a need for the audience to experience a “sense of sumptuousness

CAST

Edith Wharton had firm ideas about the actors who should play her characters: “I am so much afraid that the young actors will be “Summit Collar” athletes (i.e. clean-cut young men), with stern jaws and shaven lips, instead of gentlemen. Of course they ought all to have moustaches, and not toothbrush ones, but curved and slightly twisted at the ends. They should wear dark grey frock-coats and tall hats, and always buttonhole-violets by day, a gardenia in evening dress. White waistcoats with their evening clothes, and pumps, I think

Task To what extent does Daniel Day-Lewis fit this description? Edith Wharton’s recollection is of a society in which the majority of men had moustaches. Why do you think Scorsese gives us a clean-shaven hero? (And why is Newland’s son’s name changed from Dallas to Ted, the name by which Edith Wharton’s husband was commonly known?)

The majority of the cast of this American film are British. Edith Wharton would approve of this since she tells her friend to advise Miss Atkins, the proposed adapter of the stage version of “THE AGE OF INNOCENCE”, about the actors: “As for their ‘facons’ and their language, since you say Miss Atkins knows European society, please tell her that a N.Y. drawing-room of my childhood was far more like a London one -a du Maurier (George du Maurier - novelist and illustrator - the epitome of an elegant and fashionable Victorian) one of old-fashioned gentlefolk - than anything that modern N.Y. can give her. Above all, beg her to avoid slang and Americanisms, and tell her that English was then the language spoken by American ladies and gentlemen ... Few people nowadays know that many of the young men of our day (in N.Y.) were educated in English Universities, and that no girl went to a school!”

Michelle Pfeiffer’s (slight) American accent accentuates her “foreignness” since she is surrounded by a largely British cast. The remark about girls’ education is a telling one since May’s only education would revolve around her ability to win and keep a husband. This she does with ferocious, Machiavellian efficiency.

Task How “well-cast” are the three leading actors? If Daniel Day-Lewis, Michelle Pfeiffer and Winona Ryder had not been available to appear in “THE AGE OF INNOCENCE” which three actors would you select to play their parts? In your answer you should make close reference to the novel and to the parts and/or established screen personae of the actors you have selected.

ETIQUETTE

“Etiquette is what we call it today, but then it was simply the way of life,” says Lily Lodge, the etiquette consultant on the film. Women had to be instructed in the precise use of their props. Daniel Day-Lewis had to be taught how to walk naturally with a cane: “These people were proud of their behaviour, proud not to be show-offs,” observes Lodge. The women had to learn how to use a fan in a discreet fashion that would not incite undue attention. This was a world in which the inclination of one’s head or a sideways glance might carry a wealth of meaning. People simply did not/could not move as much as they do now so that when someone did move “then that movement became very meaningful ... When, for example, Ellen crosses a room to speak with Newland, she is making a very powerful statement,” says Lodge. “And in the context of everyone being still around her, this speaks volumes.”

Task Can you think of other occasions in the film in which gesture communicates as much - perhaps more than - words do?

We talk of people nowadays as being “straight-laced”; in those days they actually were! The clothing which the actors had to learn to be at ease in was stiff and uncomfortable. But great store was set upon a person’s dress at that time: “Dress is the second self, ... a most eloquent expositor of the person.” (“THE ART OF BEAUTY” 1879).

Clothing is used to reveal more than the Countess's exotic non-conformity in "THE AGE OF INNOCENCE". The scene in which Newland, after an unresolved meeting with Ellen, confronts a crowd of bowler-hatred men moving in slow motion is an image that brilliantly shows us what Newland must face: he will become one of these conformists who keep their true feelings "under their hats"!

Newland's almost fetishistic kissing of the handle of the parasol handle he mistakenly believes to have been touched by his beloved shows his absurd yet touching romanticism. Nowhere is clothing more important in the film than in the scene in the carriage where Newland's unbuttoning of Ellen's glove becomes an act of highly charged eroticism that lives up to the lush imagery of Saril Bass's opening credits, arguably the most overtly sexual aspect of a film that otherwise relies almost entirely on subtle glances and gestures.

Task Bass uses a mixture of fabrics and time lapse sequences of opening flowers in his credit sequence. How effective/suitable do you think Saul Bass's credits are as an introduction to the film? Storyboard an alternative opening credit sequence using a combination of live actors and graphics. You should accompany your storyboard with a short explanatory essay justifying your selection of images and commenting on their effectiveness as an introduction to the film.

SEX AND REPRESSION

The emotional and sexual repression which runs through both the novel and the film undoubtedly originates in Wharton's own experiences. When Edith Wharton was brought up sex was a taboo subject and there was an extraordinary obsession with purity. A gentleman could never offer a lady his chair since it might still be warm from his buttocks; he would have to bring a fresh chair for her; the terms "dark meat" and "white meat" were used to avoid the impropriety of referring to a chicken's breast and a male chicken became "a rooster" because it would be rude to utter the word ... ! The covered legs of chairs and pianos may seem ridiculous to us, but the attitudes behind these excesses of prudery could have a disastrously damaging effect on the emotional and sexual lives of men and women.

In 1885 Edith was to be married to Edward Wharton. She asked her mother what would happen to her on her wedding night; her apprehensive fears were not allayed by her mother's reply: "You've seen enough pictures and statues in your life. Haven't you noticed that men are made differently from women?" Unsurprisingly, and probably not unusually for those times, the marriage was not successful; Edith Wharton was frequently depressed and anorexic until she found an outlet for her emotions with the first publication of some of her short stories. For most of the marriage, Edward and Edith Wharton slept in separate bedrooms, too well-bred, well-educated and repressed to discuss their differences.

Their divorce in 1913 was precipitated by a lengthy Greek cruise which opened up a new world of European culture for Edith. Soon she spent more time in Europe than America and there is a great deal of the “European” Elizabeth Wharton in the Countess Olenska. Though she has to sacrifice her love for Newland Archer, Ellen is at least able to escape the immutable, Philistine world of old New York; poor Newland remains trapped forever, with only his recollections of a lost love to comfort himself with.

We learn nothing in the film of Newland Archer’s experiences of women. He appears at ease with women of his social class but is disconcerted when the countess offers her hand to be kissed. In the novel it is clear that Newland is very much a “man of the world” who has been involved with a “married lady whose charms had held his fancy through two mildly agitated years; without a hint of the frailty which had so nearly marred that unhappy being’s life, and had disarranged his own plans for a whole winter”. However, his image is somewhat “cleaned up” for the film. How does this alter our attitude to his relationship with Ellen and May?

We do know about Newland’s degree of physical intimacy with May: “It was the only time that he had kissed her on the lips except for their fugitive embrace in the Beaufort conservatory.” Newland refuses to admit to himself for a long time that what he feels for Ellen is not pity but desire.

Our first view of the Countess Olenska is, as always, through Newland’s eyes and he sees “... a slim young woman ... with brown hair growing in curls about her temples and held in place with a narrow band of diamonds. The suggestion of this head-dress, which gave her what was then called a “Josephine look, was carried out in the cut of the dark blue velvet gown rather theatrically caught up under her bosom by a girdle with a large old-fashioned clasp ... Madame Olenska’s pale and serious face appealed to his fancy as suited to the occasion and to her unhappy situation; but the way her dress (which had no tucker) sloped away from her thin shoulders shocked and troubled him.”

Archer's distress - he believes - is caused by the fact that his fiancée is being seen in public with a woman to whom a certain notoriety attaches and who is showing "a little more shoulder and bosom than New York was accustomed to seeing". The reader senses immediately the powerful attraction that the countess exerts - an attraction Newland cannot and will not acknowledge.

Martin Scorsese avoids the eroticism of this reference in the same way that Newland Archer avoids confronting it. Scorsese could not possibly offer the modern viewer a visual equivalent of this description since an expanse of bosom and shoulder would probably not be shocking/erotic to an audience familiar with actual nudity on film. However, as an actress, Michelle Pfeiffer brings to the role her filmic "past" which carries into the film the "sexy" resonance of her leather-clad Catwoman and the sultry songstress of "THE FABULOUS BAKER BOYS"

Task

Consider Daniel Day-Lewis's filmic past. What does he bring to the role of Newland Archer?

THE NARRATIVE VOICE

Joanne Woodward's voice-overs are cool, unjudgemental and serve only to inform the audience of facts that could not be communicated without intrusive explanatory dialogue which would have slowed down the film. A great burden falls upon Daniel Day-Lewis to portray Newland Archer as both a dashing romantic hero and as a man who deludes himself and allows himself to be sucked into a soul-destroying world of stifling conformity.

Task

Though we are offered occasional "guidance" from Joanne Woodward's authorial voice we view events in the film almost exclusively from Newland Archer's point of view. This is very much the view we are given in the novel, too. Select what you believe to be a "key" scene from the novel and write it from the Countess's point of view. How would you go about filming this sequence?

One of the greatest difficulties Scorsese faced in making the film was how to deal with the voice of the narrator. Though we view the world of "THE AGE OF INNOCENCE" exclusively through the eyes of Newland we are constantly aware of the novelist commenting on Newland's ideas and opinions, often quite sarcastically.

Scorsese is able to retain much of the novel's humour but its bitter satire is considerably muted. Since

Wharton's sarcasm was directed at an age she recalled (the novel's title is cruelly ironic) there is little to be gained by struggling to retain the author's satiric tone for a modern audience. Edith Wharton was anxious to avoid her novel being regarded as a costume drama. It is to the audience's advantage that Scorsese is not embarrassed about this supremely enjoyable aspect of the film, but is able to combine extravagant spectacle with an attack on the society that took such opulent displays for granted.

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

"EDITH WHARTON - A BIOGRAPHY" (1975) by R. W. B. Lewis. [The definitive biography, insightful and entertainingly stylishly written].

"EDITH WHARTON - A WOMAN IN HER TIME" (1972) by Louis Auchincloss.

"HENRY JAMES AND EDITH WHARTON: LETTERS 1900-1915" (1990) edited by Lyall H. Powers. "THE LETTERS OF EDITH WHARTON" (1988) edited by R. W. B. and Nancy Lewis.

"THE WRITING OF FICTION" (1925) by Edith Wharton.

Amy Taubin's excellent article ("Dread and Desire") on the film in the December 1993 edition of "SIGHT AND SOUND" (Volume 3/Issue 12).

Daphne Merkin's article ("The Last of the Innocents") on the film in the November 1993 edition of "PREMIERE", which includes revealing interviews with both Scorsese and Daniel Day-Lewis.

"BEYOND POWER: ON WOMEN, MEN AND MORALS" (1985) and "THE WAR AGAINST WOMEN" (1992) by Marilyn French.

SUGGESTED FURTHER VIEWING

"PINK STRING AND SEALING WAX" (1945) directed by Robert Hamer. [A Victorian crime drama, starring James Mason, which Scorsese watched to help him with certain shots in "THE AGE OF INNOCENCE"].

"LETTER FROM AN UNKNOWN WOMAN" (1948) directed by Max Ophuls. [A tale of tragic love with much to relate it to themes and ideas in "THE AGE OF INNOCENCE" and a film which Scorsese acknowledges as an influence on his work on the Wharton film].

“THE HEIRESS” (1949) directed by William Wyler.

[Based on the plays by Ruth and Augustus Goetz:, which is in turn an adaptation of the Henry James novel, “WASHINGTON SQUARE”. The film inhabits the same milieu as "THE AGE OF INNOCENCE" and Scorsese also acknowledges “THE HEIRESS" as having made a great impression on him. The film deals with wealth and sexual repression and its star, Montgomery Clift, is curiously reminiscent of Daniel Day Lewis].