

# Conclusion

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Edith Wharton turned the cultural dislocations of the passage between nineteenth and twentieth centuries to her advantage as a writer; her re-orientation of the social world, in fiction and in travelogue, advanced both understanding and possibility for the artist. Her whole output – the novels and guidebooks, novellas and critical writings, to say nothing of the considerable number and range of her short stories – inter-penetrate and inform each other, making clear thematic or geographical difference yet illustrating and extending the overall coherence of her creative achievement.

In recent years there has been a resurgence of interest in Wharton's work; not one which equals the interest of her contemporary audience but one which nevertheless grows and flourishes as a new generation of readers gain access to her novels and stories. Her work not only describes national differences, it transcends them; the concerns which give cogency to her fiction are universal at the same time as specific. Wharton's vision combines the qualities which she laid as the foundations for a harmonious existence – a respect for the past and its practices in conjunction with a confident embracing of the future. It is essentially a vision that demonstrates how the necessary balancing of forces between apparently opposite elements – male and female, old and new, hope and disillusion – may be achieved; a vision that offers each reader a sense of the possibilities of place and a place from which to judge the possible.