

Wharton's *Hudson River Bracketed* and Coleridge's "Kubla Khan": Re-Creating Xanadu in an American Landscape*

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Edith Wharton anchors her 1929 novel *Hudson River Bracketed* in a poem, drawing elaborate attention throughout the narrative to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" (1797-98). In so doing, she employs the two basic types of literary allusion identified by Gregory Machacek in his 2007 historical analysis—indirect reference and phraseological appropriation (see Machacek 526). She draws on wording, images, and concerns from Coleridge's text to develop plot, setting, character, and theme in this *Künstlerroman*, the story of a young writer's maturation. She prepares the way for sustained reprise of the poem by naming it overtly early on, but the intricate role it plays in her cross-genre conception has yet to be adequately analyzed and appreciated.

"Kubla Khan" is introduced at a critical moment in the opening action, and it is recalled or quoted at key points thereafter: it functions as the gateway to the protagonist's romantic, creative, and cultural awakening. That awakening takes place chiefly in the Hudson River Valley, a setting that garners special significance through iteration of the central allusion. Forging suggestive parallels with the dreamscape of Xanadu, Wharton endows the history, culture, architecture, and natural environment of the Mid-Hudson region with creative potency. Magically transformative properties borrowed from Coleridge in particular—and from the world of poetry in the largest sense—help her celebrate it as a place that inspires and nourishes artistic vision.

*For debates inspired by this article, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debsaunders0242.htm>>.

The novel follows protagonist Vance Weston through five to six formative years, from the age of nineteen to twenty-five. Initially a naively aspiring writer fresh out of college, he gains literary and personal sophistication as the novel progresses. By the end of these years of apprenticeship, he has published several critically acclaimed works of fiction. At the same time he has gained the discernment and humility to abandon a number of false starts and inferior manuscripts. Fully in command of his own powers as a writer, he is embarked upon a promising new book project. Wharton's well documented affection for Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* is plainly evident in the design of young Weston's artistic development (cf. Wharton, *A Backward Glance* 71). From the outset, tellingly, she emphasizes the importance of place, indicating that setting will serve not as mere backdrop for action but as subject. As preamble to the parallels she will establish between the Hudson Valley and Khan's kingdom, she contrasts Weston's place of origin with the East Coast region to which he migrates.

Wielding satiric wit, Wharton excoriates the physical and cultural flatness of the Midwestern states in which her protagonist has been reared and educated. The very names of the towns in which he and his family have lived—Hallelujah, Missouri, and Euphoria, Illinois—point toward the worship of materialism, “the religion of business” dominating such “go-ahead” (HRB 43) hives of commercialism.¹ The inhabitants of these architecturally drab, intellectually barren towns take no interest in the cultural achievements of “Historic Times” (HRB 36). They simultaneously scorn and fear their neglected cultural heritage, “the icy draughts of an unknown past” (36). Their attention is focused exclusively on the “prosperous present” in which “industrial development” is regarded as “humanity's supreme achievement” (36, 43).

Wharton makes no attempt to be even-handed in her presentation of the American Midwest. Concentrating on the “thousands of Euphorias” (HRB 13) sprouting into existence by means of artificially engineered booms in real estate and stocks, she ignores the natural

landscapes that might make some claim on readers' aesthetic sensibilities. Her object is to rain ridicule on the complacent anti-intellectualism and "social insipidity" (13) of her protagonist's early environment. Despite his family's prosperity, his background is impoverished in all the ways that matter. Yearning vaguely to "get at [...] something deeper" (13) than what Euphoria offers, young Vance must contend with enormous disadvantages. If he is to make his way to "Parnassus" and "be a writer," he will need to compensate for the many gaps in his education and learn to question "Euphoria values" (25, 33). As the novel moves forward, the shabby values of materialism and technophilia in which Vance has been indoctrinated will be "supplanted by the values of the Hudson River environment" (Wershoven 136).

I

Propelling her young protagonist, all unprepared, into the greater New York City area, including the city itself but emphasizing the Hudson Valley region just north of the metropolis proper, Wharton traces his responses to this wholly different world. Arriving in Paul's Landing, an invented town resembling any number of small settlements along the Hudson (Garrison, Tarrytown, and Cold Spring, for instance), Vance initially is struck by what it lacks. Instead of automobiles, he sees horse-drawn buggies; in place of spanking new buildings and roads, he observes ramshackle houses along a "rutty lane" (HRB 39). The "dingy" (39) home of his relatives lacks electric lighting, running hot water, and a telephone. The people he meets manifest "an absence of initiative" (43); they are not motivated to "hustle [...] around" to acquire the "luxuries" (42) a Euphorian would take for granted. Even as he assesses these apparent deficiencies, however, Vance is impressed by the presence of something new to him: a lushness and fertility in the natural environment. Paul's Landing is "a long crooked sort of town on a high ridge, with gardens full of big

trees, and turfy banks sloping down" to the water (HRB 39). On his first morning, his imagination already fired by the natural properties of the Hudson Valley, he writes a poem inspired by the "taller, fuller and more heavy-branched" tree-growth (46).

Continuing her study in contrasts, Wharton shows Vance opening himself to the positive influence of the past. Curious about the Willows, an "old house" his cousins are hired to air and clean, he accompanies them there (HRB 52). His interest is stirred by the luxuriant foliage of its grounds and strange intricacy of its exterior, "veiled in the showering gold-green foliage of two ancient weeping willows" (57). Vance finds himself fascinated by its architecture, which features balconies, turrets, steep roofs and "elaborately ornamented brackets" (57). Its obvious age impresses him deeply. For the first time in his life, he is moved by the power of the past and motivated to explore it instead of dismissing it. Drawn to its "elusive mystery," he asks himself, "'why wasn't I ever told about the Past before?'" (62). He enters the library, finds an open book upon a table and begins to read, only to be swept away by the "beautiful" and "incredible" opening words of "Kubla Khan" (62). Just as the "hidden chords of his soul" begin to vibrate to the "inner music" (62) of the poem, Halo Spear unexpectedly steps into the room. The poem mediates their first encounter: "'Oh, who wrote this?'" Vance demands, without waiting to introduce himself or explain his presence (64). Naming the poet, and entering without question into the "ecstasy" of his response to Coleridge's famous lines, Halo immediately assumes the role of literary mentor to this clearly receptive, though ignorant, young man. She quotes from memory, "her rich voice" giving "new relief" (65) to the words of the poem.

This scene at the Willows marks the beginning of Vance's new life. He recognizes at a stroke the deficiencies of his literary education. It has been limited, in poetry, to the work of writers such as James Whitcomb Riley and Ella Wheeler Wilcox, along with "hackneyed old 'pieces' from Whittier and Longfellow" and occasional glimpses of Whitman's work and "the new stuff" from "one or two of the 'high-

brow' reviews" (HRB 63). In "Kubla Khan" he encounters something "his soul had been alight for": "this *was* poetry." Hungry for more such deeply satisfying literary experiences, and dismayed by the extent of his newly perceived ignorance, he launches himself into an intense if unsystematic project of self-education that will occupy much of his energy during the next few years of his life. His first fevered attempts "to hack a way through the dense jungle of the past" (126) take place at the Willows, in the private library that serves as a treasure trove for his imaginative explorations. He responds to the literary legacy preserved in this library as eagerly as to the fantastical architecture and overgrown garden of the "old house" containing it.

Bringing together the legacy of "the Past," the power of poetry, and the guidance of Halo Spear, Vance's encounter with "Kubla Khan" lends critical shaping momentum to his vocational and personal energies (see HRB 62). Almost immediately, moreover, the poem plays a prominent role in a second crucially important scene. Following up on their initial meeting, Halo offers to take Vance to a mountain ridge called Thundertop to view the sun rise over the Hudson River. Driving in pre-dawn darkness up "the wooded road to the mountain," Vance again is mesmerized by the profusion of trees, particularly the play of leaves and branches in the illumination of the automobile headlights. He and Halo are travelling, it seems to him, "through an eternity of overarching foliage [...] to unknown distances" (98). At the end of this surreal drive, they hike along "a tree-shadowed trail" up a "rocky spur," from which they see "the outspread earth [...] waiting [...] for the light" (98). For a few suspense-packed moments, they watch "the red edge of sun" move across the horizon and the river begins to shine "bright as steel" (99). At this moment of diurnal transition, Vance looks at Halo, on the brink of speech but unable to articulate his reaction to "the misty splendours below and the pure light above" (100). Meeting his eyes, his companion suggests that they both are thinking of precisely the same thing: "'Kubla Khan'" (99). Vance nods in agreement. The majesty of river, forest, mountain, and valley assumes uncanny properties in the

dawning light, reminding both characters of the magical world of Xanadu. This moment of mutual recognition links the creative power of the sun, which calls "a new world" into being from darkness, to the creative power of the human artificer in Coleridge's poem (cf. HRB 90).

With the evocation of "Kubla Khan," the first portion of the Thundertop scene reaches its climax. Having watched the new day establish itself, Vance and Halo next hike down to a "rocky pool encircled with turf" (HRB 100), a "magical place" (102) in the woods that Halo regards as one of her private "treasures" (88). Over a campfire breakfast, they converse intensely about literature, history, and ideas (see 101). Vance confides his ambitions and doubts, and she assures him of her belief that he has "the gift ... the real gift" (106, Wharton's ellipsis). This shared morning on Thundertop strengthens the connection between Halo and Vance, confirming their essential compatibility and sealing her role as his mentor. Taking him to see a panoramic view of the Hudson River Valley, furthermore, she completes the thematically central web of connections to which "Kubla Khan" serves as key: art and history now are linked to nature.

In the library at the Willows, Vance had realized something his education in the Midwest never taught him, namely, that art is not produced in a cultural vacuum. His arresting encounter there with Coleridge's poem revealed to him, with sudden intensity, that a familiarity with the rich and multifaceted legacy of past generations contributes essentially to the development of both the appreciative and the imaginative faculties. In the follow-up scene at Thundertop, Vance experiences a second, equally intense leap of understanding. Watching dawn break over the larger vista of the Hudson River landscape, he realizes for the first time the creative vigor, the self-renewing beauty, inherent in elemental and organic forces. These vital natural powers work in humbling counterpoint to human activity, nurturing and inspiring the artist.² The naming of "Kubla Khan" at the moment of dawning day underlines the relationship between

human art and natural process: Vance experiences both poem and sunrise as acts of “creative exaltation” (HRB 105).

His encounters with Halo at the Willows and at Thundertop bring Vance into contact with precisely the elements his early background has denied him: cultural history and natural glory. Within days of coming east, he meets people whose experience with the present is imbued with intelligent appreciation of the past; equally important, he finds himself in a natural environment more fertile and luxuriant than that of the Plains states, one more varied in terrain, more majestic in effect. His “perspective” on human history has been “completely altered,” in consequence, “transforming his world” (HRB 95). As the novel proceeds, the natural and cultural environments of New York and the Hudson Valley continue, in combination, to influence his development. The scenes inaugurating that development and launching the references to “Kubla Khan” take place early on, in Book II, and occupy just a few pages: 59-71 (the Willows) and 97-107 (Thundertop). Since the novel is 560 pages in length, with seven Books in all, Wharton employs a number of strategies to sustain the impact of these initial revelatory experiences.

Iteration is a critical tool. Vance and Halo both find themselves haunted by their early encounters: throughout the ensuing narrative, their highly charged recollections surge into the foreground of awareness, spilling repeatedly into the present moment of the text. Vance muses again and again on the moment when Halo “had surprised him over ‘Kubla Khan’ at the Willows” (HRB 88). More than once, Halo recalls the same incident, thinking of the “unknown youth” wild to discover “who had written ‘Kubla Khan’” (499, 91). When Halo allows Vance to help dust books, “her appearance at the Willows, vivid and inspiring, instantly lifted him to the brow of Thundertop” (128). Even while courting another girl, Vance contrasts his feelings for the sweet and childlike Laura Lou with his memory of Halo’s effect on him: “that girl on Thundertop” had “set his brain on fire” with “the shock of new ideas, the stimulus of the words she used, the allusions she made, the sense of an unknown world of

beauty and imagination widening about him as she talked" (212). Consistently Vance pays tribute to "the sunrise from Thundertop" as one of the "imaginative shocks that flung open the gates of wonder" (265). There "he had stood so high that he had seen the new day flood the earth below him [...] and beauty had brimmed his soul with the same splendor" (297). Halo likewise returns in memory to that mountain sunrise "above the Hudson": "they had watched light return to the world [...] a streaming of radiances, like the first breaking of life out of chaos!" (221).

Occasionally they recollect the scenes in conversation together: "I suppose it seems a long time to you since you read your poems to me on Thundertop," Halo suggests at one point, and he responds by thanking her for the literary guidance she has provided: "you taught me a lot that day that I haven't forgotten" (HRB 228). When Vance first recognizes that he is drawn to Halo romantically, he indicates to her that such feelings originated, all unrecognized, in their very first meetings: "You remember Thundertop?" (439) he asks her. Much later, when she has freed herself from her husband, Halo admits that her feelings for Vance similarly can be traced "far back—the day we went up Thundertop" (556). Each of the two scenes highlighting "Kubla Khan" is reintroduced into the narrative on at least six or seven different occasions. With every new mention, their importance to the inner lives of the characters is reinforced: real-time experience is overlaid with the added weight of memory. Selective omniscience, which alternates loosely between Vance and Halo, allows Wharton to demonstrate the importance of the episodes to both participants. Re-entering the storyline with persistently renewed immediacy, these few hours assume a resonance that far exceeds the narrative space allotted to them.

Vance's ongoing preoccupation with Coleridge further attests to the significance of the "beautiful [...] incredible words" of "Kubla Khan" (HRB 62) to his personal life and vocational efforts. He disconcerts his editors at "The Hour," who had expected him to "tackle a contemporary," with an article addressing "Coleridge Today" (270). It becomes

increasingly evident that his appreciative capacities are not engaged by the “modern bluster” (270) he is expected to review: Coleridge represents for him an unequalled standard of excellence. Having familiarized himself with a wide range of that nineteenth-century writer’s oeuvre, he later finds himself quoting from the poem “Love” to describe his growing attachment to Halo. Only Coleridge offers words to articulate the profundity of his feelings: “‘all thoughts, all motions, all delights, whatever stirs this mortal frame—’ the poet whom Elinor Lorburn loved had summed it up long ago” (451).

“Kubla Khan” is reintroduced into the narrative emphatically in Book V, when Vance chooses Elinor Lorburn as the subject of his first extended work of fiction. He projects himself imaginatively into the life of this woman who had “renounced but not repined” (HRB 333). Once “young and eager,” she had been “a creature apt for love, but somehow caught in the cruel taboos and inhibitions of her day” (332, 359). Gradually becoming the “mature, resigned woman” depicted in the portrait that hangs in her library, she found “compensation” for what life denied her in “her books,” that is, in “poetry, dreams, visions” (333, 359). Vance titles his book *Instead* because it conveys “the mysterious substitution of one value for another” (337). Finding himself inspired by the environment of the Willows, a house imbued with “all the shadowy power of the past,” he composes his novella in his subject’s library (“that magical room”), leaving his paper and notebooks on her table “beside her Coleridge,” the book that “still lay open at ‘Kubla Khan’” (330, 336, 333). Halo encourages and assists him, meeting him every day at the Willows and providing the biographical and sociohistorical facts he needs to flesh out his fictionalized version of Elinor’s life story. Their intense collaboration continues through nearly two months of summer, and when it ends Vance finally recognizes the sensuous and erotic components of his feelings for Halo—who now is married, as he is himself, and therefore unavailable.

It is fitting that the writing of his book be overshadowed by the painful discovery of thwarted love, given his theme. Discussing Elinor

Lorburn's life, Halo and Vance acknowledge that her situation is representative of human experience in general: to be human entails having "to give up things" (HRB 358). "Weren't we all like Elinor Lorburn," Vance wonders, "looking out, watching for what never came?" (332). In art, however, "one can recapture [...] sometimes—in another form" the things renounced (358). Reiterated description of "the sad spinster who had leaned on winter evenings on the green velvet table, reading Coleridge" (359) emphasizes the double theme dominating *Instead*: the disappointments of life, on the one hand, and the consolations of art, on the other (529). Halo insists that Elinor's devotion to the author of "Kubla Khan" is evidence that the "compensation" she found in the world of letters was not merely adequate but munificent: "'it was Coleridge: don't forget that!'" (333, 359; Wharton's emphasis). Like the illuminating scenes from earlier in the book, when Vance first discovers "Kubla Khan" and then associates the poem with the dawning of day over the Hudson River, the weeks he spends writing *Instead* in the library at the Willows are mentioned and recalled many times again as the narrative proceeds. Both Vance and Halo remember this period of intense collaboration, when "the Willows became steeped in poetry" (354). Winning critical acclaim, the book confirms his genius, validating his choice of vocation.

A framed tale, *Instead* supports several important themes in the larger narrative containing it. As indicated, the composition process enriches the already important relationship Vance has established with Halo. Her role as his mentor assumes added dimensions. The Willows is her ancestral home and someday will belong to her; she is an indirect descendent of the original Miss Lorburn. From his first glimpse of Halo, Vance perceives that "something about her [...] fitted into the scene, seemed to mark her as a part of it" (HRB 64). Her physical resemblance to her ancestress ("in their features" or "in expression, something about the eyes and hands") makes her seem like a living embodiment, or "reincarnation," of the dead woman (333, 94). Trying to envision "the young Elinor—pale and eager," he finds that "Halo Tarrant's face substituted itself for the other" (332); surely

Elinor “must have” possessed “a sharp austere loveliness like Halo’s” (333). He sometimes feels as if his subject had stepped down out of her portrait and shared her story with him first-hand. Like any good muse, Halo brings the artist’s materials to life; she inspires “creative fervour” and insight (334).

The place in which they work also is crucial to the composition process: *Instead* could not have been written anywhere except at the Willows, a setting that serves as backdrop and key to Elinor Lorburn’s life. The importance of this house to Vance’s personal and vocational development is underlined as it becomes interwoven here with his most substantial literary achievement: he pays tribute in his novella to the place where his own appreciation for the past and for poetry first was ignited. The most immediately prominent feature of the library at the Willows is, of course, the portrait of Miss Lorburn; significantly, it re-creates in crayon the most important elements of the environment in which it is displayed. It depicts its subject leaning “on a table with a heavy velvet cover, bearing an inkstand and some books—the very table and the very inkstand, Vance perceived, on which the picture itself looked down” (HRB 60). Wharton draws repeated attention to the self-replicating effect of the whole: the room contains the portrait, and the portrait, in turn, contains the room it represents. So faithful is the picture to the scene it overlooks that Vance can imagine Miss Lorburn “had just dropped her book and spectacles, and reascended to her frame as he came in” (61). In both the room and the artistic representation of it, the book of poems opened to “Kubla Khan” commands notice as focal point. This is the poem that stands for “the books that had sufficed [Miss Lorburn], after all” (332), touchstone for the intangible wealth she commands. It is also, of course, the poem that precipitates an awakening in the young Vance Weston. Evidently it invites endless re-reading: never to be re-shelved, the book lies “always open” to this perpetually enthralling work (60).

II

Integrating “Kubla Khan” into the framework of her novel so conspicuously, Wharton prepares readers to notice the many indirect evocations of the poem’s language and imagery occurring throughout her text. Unobtrusive but pervasive, these covert borrowings heighten the effect of direct reference, weaving the poem ever more tightly into the fabric of her narrative. From the outset she establishes parallels between the verdant landscape of the Hudson River Valley and the “fertile” scenery of Xanadu (“Kubla Khan” 6).³ The variegated, tree-studded terrain of the mid-Hudson region, with its “mountain masses,” valleys, hills, and “greenery” (HRB 98), recalls details from the Khan’s imaginary kingdom (KK 11). Like the “sacred river” Alph, the Hudson is surrounded by “forests ancient as the hills” (KK 3, 10); it follows a “meandering” course “through wood and dale,” its “lustrous gray waters spreading lake-like to distant hills” (KK 25, 26; HRB 39). Wharton’s description of the “precipitate plunge of many-tinted forest, the great sweep of the Hudson, and the cliffs on its other shore” (HRB 72) recalls the terrific splendor of Xanadu: the Alph flowing through a “deep romantic chasm which slanted / Down the green hill” (KK 12-13). Viewed only from afar by the novel’s characters, the Hudson remains “remote” from everyday concerns (HRB 375). Like “the sacred river” in Coleridge’s poem, significantly, it is estuarial: the Alph flows “down to a sunless sea” (KK 3, 5) and Wharton arranges for Vance to see the ocean for the first time at twilight, “under a sunless sky” (HRB 241).⁴

Centrally located in both imagined and actual riverscapes is an architectural structure of “rare device” (KK 35): the Willows is an idiosyncratically American version of “the stately pleasure-dome” (KK 2) constructed for Kubla Khan. The “walls and towers” of Khan’s estate are echoed in the elaborate, “turreted” design of the Willows, with its “freakish towers” and “queer bracketed [...] balconies” (KK 7; HRB 209, 133, 151-52). The Willows is further identified as an outstanding example of the “indigenous” Hudson River Bracketed architectural style, which features “elements ingeniously combined

from the Chinese and the Tuscan" (HRB 69). The suggestion of kinship with the Chinese setting of Xanadu provides another unobtrusive parallel between Halo's family home and the Khan's enticing pleasure-dome. Indeed, the "arcaded veranda" of the Willows is so "festoon[ed]" with wisteria that the house-front appears to have been decorated "in celebration of some august arrival" (58). Exemplifying a hybrid style of architecture to be found only in the Hudson River Valley, the Willows is a locus of regional genius; manifesting an unexpected conjunction of influences, it testifies to the cultural cosmopolitanism characterizing this part of the country. Wharton even borrows the term *Hudson River Bracketed* for her title, highlighting the special role assigned to the house in the larger design of her novel.⁵

Both dome and house are situated in grand landscapes above mighty rivers. Surrounded by "forests ancient"—in Coleridge's wording, or "ancient woods"—in Wharton's, both estates occupy extensive grounds with cultivated plantings (KK 10; HRB 80). The Khan's gardens are "bright with sinuous rills," and the increasingly elevated land rising beyond the Willows toward Eagletop (another Lorburn property) similarly is "glinting with little streams" (KK 8; HRB 80). Like the Khan's "gardens bright [...] / Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree" (KK 8-9), the Willows is surrounded by a profusion of fragrant flowering shrubs. "Perfumes" of lilac and wisteria, together with a "haunting syringa smell," pervade the air: "a breath of sweetness [...] envelop[s] the old house" (HRB 330). Wharton's description of "ancient trees widening their untrimmed domes" again calls to mind the Khan's palatial dwelling (80). From Paul's Landing Vance observes how the trees "up the hillside [...] domed themselves in great bluish masses, one against the other, like the roofs of some mysterious city built of leaves" (46). Hudson Valley trees, vital and abundant, subtly evoke the "mysterious city" of Xanadu and the amazing "dome of pleasure" constructed there.

In addition to delineating architecture and grounds, Wharton directs attention to interior spaces and furnishings. A copy of "Kubla

Khan"—with its evocation of the pleasure-dome—serves as centerpiece of this interior, so that Wharton's allusion doubles back on itself: containing the poem, the house in effect contains the dome to which it indirectly is compared. In this way the affinity between the two is confirmed. Investing the house with "mystery," "fantasy and secrecy," moreover, Wharton reproduces the atmosphere permeating the poem (HRB 58): "A Vision in a Dream," according to its subtitle. Guardian of "an unknown world" and shelved with "magic carpets," the Willows casts a "spell" on Vance (68, 119, 95). It introduces him to the "illimitable windings of the Past" (154) and fuels his imaginative energies, becoming "a palace of dreams" (71).

Wharton echoes another important feature in Coleridge's poem in the character of Halo, who assumes the muse-like function of the "damsel with a dulcimer" (KK 78). Playing and singing to the poem's speaker "in a vision," the "damsel" clearly is associated with the art of poetry, and she inspires her human listener to "revive," or re-create, that visionary music (KK 37, 42). She is "singing of Mount Achor" (KK 41), and Halo appropriately marks the beginning of her relationship with Vance by taking him up a mountain to marvel at the dawn and talk of poetry. Like "a being born of the sunrise and the forest" (HRB 101), Halo is associated with the generative powers of nature as well as with artistic creation. She serves Vance "as the mysterious vehicle of all the new sensations pouring into his soul," as "custodian of the unknown" (101, 357). Inspiring a yearning both earthly and otherworldly, she is "the woman his arms longed for, but [...] also the goddess, the miracle, the unattainable being who haunted the peaks of his imagination" (439). Not least, she plays an important part in Vance's first ecstatic encounter with "Kubla Khan," explaining its authorship and "chanting" Coleridge's "incredible words" (HRB 96, 62). Here again Wharton's allusion executes a reverse-twist: Halo is compared to a muse-figure in "Kubla Khan," and in that role she helps Vance appreciate more fully the "music" of that very poem (63).

The most striking parallel with Coleridge's "damsel" manifests itself in Halo's assistance, as "monitress and muse" (HRB 231), with the

writing of *Instead*. Like Vance, the speaker in "Kubla Khan" aspires to *make* something. Art is understood as a process of transmutation: empowered by a seemingly mystical influence, the human creator represents, or re-makes, features of the external world in the medium of art, "with music" (KK 45) of his own. What Coleridge's artist-speaker desires to re-create is the Khan's pleasure-dome: "I would build that dome in air" (46), he declares.⁶ Vance is engaged in exactly the same creative task. With Halo's help, he is representing the Willows in fictive form, re-imagining the history of the house, its grounds, and its owner. Persistently described in terms recalling the Khan's "stately" edifice and "bright" gardens, the Willows is, in fact, a Hudson Valley version of "the dome," and Vance is building it in the immaterial realm of art: "in air." The Willows lives again in his book. Without the inspiration and encouragement supplied by Halo, who "plunge[s] into his enchanted world with him," rendering it "accessible and lovely to him," that act of re-creation could not have come to fruition (HRB 357).⁷

The music motif associated with the "damsel with a dulcimer" also plays a conspicuous role in Wharton's novel. Coleridge's poet-speaker yearns to re-create the "symphony and song" he has heard "played" by the singing figure from his "vision" (KK 40, 38). During Vance's initiation into poetry at the Willows he is "enthralled" by the "new music" of Coleridge's poem, which affects him with the force of wave or tide, "his whole being swept away on that mighty current" (HRB 65, 63). As he reads the text of "Kubla Khan," the whole house seems to respond to its rhythms, like "a long-silent bell" which has begun "swinging and clanging all about him now, enveloping him in great undulation of sound" (63). Pointing to the origins of poetry in music, Wharton pays tribute to the particular potency of rhythm and sound in "Kubla Khan".

Mining the poem's details to portray the intangible activities of the human imagination, Wharton echoes its violent, sometimes sinister, imagery in acknowledgement of the "savage" forces of creation, natural and human (KK 14).⁸ The origin of art may be "holy and

enchanted" (14), but it also can prove fierce. Coleridge depicts the river Alph running through extensive underground "caverns" ("measureless to man") and a frighteningly "deep chasm," as well as through gentler scenes of "wood and dale" (KK 12, 26). "Forced" upwards finally, geyser-like, the river emerges as a "mighty fountain," spewing rocks like "chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail" (KK 19, 22).⁹ Wharton employs this image of pent-up, long hidden energies in descriptions of the "secret forces" that "move within" (HRB 333) Vance Weston. He cannot "measure" "the strength of the force that propel[s] him" to write; "his imagination" is driven by "a fierce impetus that would not let him rest" (541). When seized by literary passion, he finds that other concerns are "swept away" recklessly, "like chaff on the wind" (276). Sometimes, too, Vance must descend to "a hidden cave in which he "hoarded his secretest treasures" (272). Blending images from Xanadu with memories of the excursion to Thundertop, Vance comments that the "treasures" of the imagination lie "deep down" and must be "hauled up [...] from some secret pool of being" (177, 176). "With ceaseless turmoil seething," the currents of Vance Weston's creativity must travel, like the River Alph, through "subterranean depths" to "that mysterious Sea of Being of which the dark reaches swayed and rumoured in his soul" (KK 17; HRB 336, 449).¹⁰

The artist must command remarkable inner strength in order to grapple successfully with a realm fraught with contradiction and paradox. Coleridge's Xanadu is dominated by diametric opposition: height and depth, calm and tumult, sun and ice. "Sunny spots" of surface "greenery" present themselves in stark contrast to subterranean "turmoil"; gently "meandering [...] motion" alternates with "seething" violence (KK 10, 17, 25, 17).¹¹ In Wharton's novel this counterpoint is exhibited most conspicuously in the seasonal extremes of the Hudson Valley—a place, like Xanadu, rife with inherent opposition between heat and cold. Visiting Thundertop in winter with Laura Lou, Vance discovers a beauty equivalent to the warm summer dawn he initially experienced there with Halo, but antithetical in

mood and effect: "sparkling tumultuous hours" followed by "twilight with its bleak shadows and the deathlike pallor of unlit snow" (HRB 301). The excruciating cold soon exhibits its sinister potential, doing permanent damage to the fragile health of Vance's wife. Like Thundertop, the ocean proves to be a site of strange contrasts: "in summer [...] the sea had been a gray tumult under a sunless sky; now, on this December day, it flashed with summer fires" (241). The elemental oppositions of night and day, summer and winter, heat and cold point toward the vast array of battling energies human beings must observe and endure: growth and decay, yearning and loss, life and death. Like Coleridge, Wharton indicates that the artist must "build" forms and create "music" adequate to encompass dramatically opposing forces, expressing "the mingled measure" of seemingly irreconcilable realities (KK 33).¹² Vance's first successful work of fiction, "One Day," illustrates this theory of art: he channels rage and pain (having discovered a furtive sexual encounter between his girlfriend and his grandfather) into creative energy. He uses literary form to control psychologically tumultuous materials, reshaping anguish into a tale that transcends the personal.

Because of his special sensitivities and abilities, the artist is to some extent a being apart. Coleridge depicts the poet-creator as a figure inspiring "holy dread" (KK 52) in ordinary members of the human community. Those who hear his music and "see" his vision will be moved to inscribe a ritualistic "circle" around him, in recognition of the unearthly forces at work in him (48, 51). Vance's acute responsiveness to literary art similarly distances him from banalities of ordinary life; he feels at times as "if he had been in the centre of a magnetic circle" (HRB 120). This same separation effect occurs when he is actively engaged in composition: he occupies a "small luminous space" whenever the "mysterious activities" of artistic invention begin "to hum in him" (515, 511).¹³ As the "creatures born" of his imagination take shape, the "outer world vanish[es]," leaving him the "centre of concentrated activity" (515). "Some mysterious transfusion of spirit" occurs in such moments; "no longer himself," he commands a

“unifying power” (515, 249).¹⁴ As “the creator of imaginary beings,” Vance recognizes, he “must always feel alone among the real ones”: a “veil of unreality” will “fall” between him and even “the soul nearest him” (560).

Unsurprisingly, given this conception of the artist’s gifts, Wharton repeatedly borrows the terms “vision” and “dream” from Coleridge’s poem. She employs them to characterize her protagonist’s efforts to plumb the depths of his imagination and, beyond that, to give literary shape to the impalpable stuff of the psyche. Feeding his newly awakened literary hunger in the New York Public Library, for example, Vance finds himself “drifting from dream to dream” and gradually entering into a “state of strange illumination” (HRB 170). At the beginning of his career, his mind is filled with “crowding visions” to which he seeks to give “development”: he must “discover where they led to” (270). Invariably ideas come to him as *visions*: he “had had the vision of a big poem up there on the mountain” (303). Banal interruptions can startle him “out of his dream” (334). Writing *Instead* he creates “a new vision” of the Willows, achieving a “magical evocation” (354) of the place. Historical details supplied by Halo are “absorbed into his vision, woven into his design” (357). As he learns to plumb his imagination and harness its workings effectively, he first “let[s] his visions sweep him away,” then “return[s] with renewed fervour” to the details of shaping his fictional characters (541). There is “something supernatural and compulsory,” he discovers, “in this strange alternation between creating and dreaming” (541). Like the poet-speaker in *Xanadu*, Vance attempts to “revive” (KK 42, 38) in literary form what he has seen in visions of his own.

III

Employing “Kubla Khan” as an essential element in her narrative design, Wharton goes far beyond the usual parameters of literary reference and allusion: her novel *enacts* the poem. A narrative of 560

pages necessarily will contain secondary characters, subplots, events, and descriptive details not anticipated in fifty-four lines of verse, but the skeletal outline of Wharton's book clearly can be discerned in Coleridge's text.¹⁵ She introduces Vance Weston into an environment physically and psychologically reminiscent of Xanadu, where he meets a muse-figure and goes on to pursue artistic ambitions very like those attributed to his counterpart in "Kubla Khan." Intruding itself persistently into the text of her novel, the poem operates as a sustained, controlling metaphor. In this respect, *Hudson River Bracketed* is unique in Wharton's oeuvre.¹⁶ She wields the device of allusion effectively and prolifically in all her fiction, but nowhere else does it play such a structurally central role.¹⁷

Specific mentions of Coleridge in Wharton's other writings, though scattered and brief, invariably are laudatory. She names him as one of the "supremely great English poets," and she quotes a phrase from "Love" (the poem that affects Vance Weston so powerfully) as illustrative conclusion in the preface to her collection of English love poetry (see Preface to *Eternal Passions in English Poetry* 254). She singles out "Kubla Khan" for special mention in the autobiographical fragment, "A Little Girl's New York," explaining that because "external events were few and unexciting" in the New York of her childhood, she relied heavily on the stimulus provided by poetry, and she places "Kubla Khan" on the shortlist of works that offered her entrée into "palaces" fit for the imagination to inhabit (287). Assuming readers' familiarity with the poem, she alludes to it without mention of author or title in *The Writing of Fiction*, discussing tears "distilled from the milk of Paradise" (86). Only in *Hudson River Bracketed* does she disclose the full extent of her appreciative engagement with this work.

Suggestively autobiographical elements in the depiction of Elinor Lorburn attest to Wharton's regard for both the poem and its author. Readers have been quick to notice that the "thwarted lady" (HRB 358) who finds in books abundant recompense for the outward barrenness of her life ("caught in the cruel taboos and inhibitions of her day";

359) resembles Edith Wharton in many respects.¹⁸ Though her personal life was neither as socially isolated nor as romantically empty as the fictive Miss Lorburn's, Wharton reiterates in her autobiographical writings the central, compensatory importance of literature in her life. She reports eloquently on the "music-drunken hours" she spent in "the kingdom of [her] father's library," declaring that books prevented her from feeling "wholly lonely or unhappy" (*A Backward Glance* 70, 43, 71). Given her expressed reliance on the nurturing power of great literature, readers may assume with some confidence that Wharton shares Miss Lorburn's special feelings for Coleridge and for "Kubla Khan." Those feelings are echoed, moreover, in the intensity of Vance Weston's response to the poem. Wharton assigns the actively creative part of her self to the character of Vance, whose personality and background differ in obvious ways from hers. He resembles her, however, in ways Elinor Lorburn does not—namely, in his literary ambition and creative energy.¹⁹ Like Wharton, he is irresistibly drawn to the "enchantment of 'making up'" (*A Backward Glance* 42). The poem provides an ecstatic meeting point for two characters, stand-ins for different aspects of their creator, who cross the boundaries of time to affirm with doubled emphasis the worth of an unusually potent work of art.

The novel constitutes a long meditation on the poem's language and imagery, together with the ideas these suggest to Wharton. In her lifetime, obviously, the poem had not yet been weighed down with the daunting burden of secondary commentary now encrusting it. Like most readers, before and since, she reads it as a statement about artistic inspiration and process, and she indicates strong agreement with Coleridge's ideas on this topic.²⁰ The artist takes materials from the world around him and, fueled by deep interior forces—by turns reassuring and alien, beautiful and terrifying—reworks those materials into art. Wharton makes no comment, direct or indirect, on the potential contribution of opiates (Coleridge's "anodyne") to creative efforts, but she clearly does not regard the poem as merely "a fragment" (KK Preface). The sympathy she engenders for Vance's diffi-

culty getting appropriate remuneration for *Instead*, a work his publishers regard as inconveniently and unfashionably short, must be construed as a defense of supposedly fragmentary compositions. The central structuring role played by the poem in her novel, supported by explicit testimony from Elinor Lorburn, Halo Spear, and Vance Weston, provides overwhelming evidence that Wharton regards Coleridge's poem as a fully realized whole, an indisputable masterpiece.

The interruption of Coleridge's composition process by "business" (the "person from Porlock"; KK Preface) is echoed in Vance's confrontations with economic necessity and marital responsibilities. His wife's illness, along with the financial problems it exacerbates, regularly interferes with his writing. He returns from a winter hike up to Thundertop, for example, with "the vision of a big poem [...] yes, he knew it was big. Line after line had sprung up [...] he had only to lie back and wait" (HRB 303). When Laura Lou's needs claim his attention instead, he can only "watch the crystal splinters of his poem melt away" (304). Such incidents serve to validate the experience Coleridge reports in his preface, illustrating the fragile and ephemeral nature of the artist's visions. Vance's unhappy dealings with New York City editors and artists further illustrate how "business" can frustrate creativity. When the making of literature is commercialized, he quickly discovers, quality is secondary to profit: "the quick turn-over applied to brains as [...] to real estate" (311). Certainly Vance finds the fads and falsities of the literary marketplace antipathetic to the expression of his talents. The mystical depths of inspiration are of no interest to a literary establishment that exploits art as a commodity. The sinister "voices prophesying war" to Kubla Khan (KK 30) are echoed by the gloomy observation that "it's a bad time for a creator of any sort to be born, in this after-war welter" (HRB 392).

Wharton's insistence on the importance of "the Past" to artistic accomplishment reflects another aspect of creativity that is implicit in "Kubla Khan." Informing readers that the "vision" providing the nucleus of his poem originated in the work of "Purchas's Pilgrimage,"

Coleridge acknowledges his debt to an earlier author whose words and images have stimulated the workings of his own imagination (see *KK* Preface). Elaborating on this point, Wharton insists that a writer must be conversant with the collective influence of the past in order to make something new. Works of lasting value, she asserts, are the product of “long training & wide reading, & a saturation in the best that the past has to give” (Wharton to Victor Solberg, October 9, 1918; *Letters* 411),²¹ Vance Weston’s career illustrates the importance of these prerequisites: when he begins to remedy the deficiencies in his literary education, his creativity flourishes. His illuminating encounter with “Kubla Khan,” together with the “old house” in which he first discovers the poem, provides impetus for his plunge into the literary wealth of bygone eras.

The importance of his cultural heritage becomes clear to Vance only when he enters the environment of the Hudson River Valley. From its natural landscape to its human history, for him it represents an unknown world. The region boasts historical roots that pale in contrast to those of Europe or Asia but stand out against the raw immensity of the bulk of the North American continent. Recognized as the “birthplace” of American culture, the Hudson Valley has been an important center of economic, architectural, and literary activity for several hundred years (see Schuyler 1, Killoran 151, Tom Lewis 5). In addition to Hudson River Bracketed architecture, which assumes obvious importance in Vance Weston’s story, Wharton mentions literary figures such as Bryant, Irving and Whitman who celebrated the region and contributed to its fame (see *HRB* 73). Employing invented place names while describing locales that evoke any number of villages, look-out points, and views along the first hundred miles north of the mouth of the Hudson, she renders the region vivid yet avoids the limitations of specifics.²² Invented names serve her better than real ones because she seeks to imbue this geographic area with an aura of mystery commensurate to that of Coleridge’s Xanadu.

In the final portion of the book, Vance is composing a novel he decides to call *Magic*. This title lends impact to Wharton’s central

allusion, since Coleridge attributes “synthetic and magical power” to the workings of the imagination (*Biographia Literaria* 2:12). While working on this project, Vance is living just north of Manhattan “out on the fringes of the Bronx” (HRB 510). Not far off, “the metropolis whirled and rattled and smoked,” but his bungalow is situated in “the remains of an orchard” near “a fragment of woodland” (506, 510). He is drawn to the apple trees and fruit dominating his rural retreat, associating their “hard rare beauty” with the “very Golden Bough he had been reading about” (506). Invoking Frazer’s cross-cultural study of religion and myth, Vance invests a common Hudson Valley phenomenon, an apple orchard, with the weight of ancient symbolism (a sacred quest, the tree of life). More pragmatically, this humble place of residence embodies advantages for which the Hudson Valley long as been heralded: Vance is close enough to Manhattan to take occasional advantage of urban cultural stimulation, including talks with editors and writers, yet far enough removed to refresh himself in “sylvan” beauty and peace (510). The “magic” he intends to celebrate in his novel is two-fold: the “untroubled miracles” of natural process, on the one hand, and the transmutation of “ordinary material” into art, on the other (511, 510).²³ Thus his projected novel harks back to the energies at work in “Kubla Khan.” In the Hudson Valley, as in Xanadu, the creative forces of nature and art are inextricably allied. Enriched by regionally prominent human artifacts such as the Khan’s pleasure-dome and the Lorburn house, nature functions as a catalyst for the imagination in both environments.

Creating parallels between the majestic vistas along the Hudson River and the “enchanted” dominion of Coleridge’s Khan (KK 14), Wharton imbues the setting of her novel with transcendent beauty and power.²⁴ With persistent allusion and evocative description, she pays eloquent tribute to an American landscape for which she claims unique value (see HRB 99, 180, 375). She could count on an audience of readers in her homeland, moreover, who would recognize her setting as “the iconic American landscape” (Schuyler 1-2), a place already associated with “magnetism” and “transformative power”

through more than three centuries of artistic testimony, political action, and economic activity (Dunwell xiii). It had long been known as “the valley where nature’s creation and human creation meet,” a source of “mystery, romance and ineffable beauty” (Tom Lewis 9, 5). Comparison with Xanadu allows Wharton to invest an already special place with heightened impact. The Mid-Hudson region figured significantly in Wharton’s own life, of course: “the setting of my own youth,” in her words (Letter to Elisina Tyler, Sainte-Claire, January 1, 1930; *Letters* 525). Numerous relatives, friends, and acquaintances owned properties, often sumptuous, along the river winding its way northward from Manhattan. By train, and later by motor car, Wharton journeyed to house parties and undertook pleasure-excursions throughout the Mid-Hudson area. In mid-life she often traveled through it on her way to and from her home in the Berkshire Hills just north of the Valley proper.

Wharton further affirms her connection to the region in a number of her fictional works (*The House of Mirth* comes immediately to mind); typically she shows “characters travelling to or through the region, seeking recreational or social opportunities” (Anderson and Saunders 2; see also Lee 669). In no work except *Hudson River Bracketed* does she focus with such sustained intensity on the glories of its landscape and history. In this novel the centrally significant allusion to “Kubla Khan” enables her to present the region in an exalted light. A luminous point of reference, the poem is embedded in house, library, portrait, and framed tale; these, in turn, are set in a real-world riverscape that persistently is likened to the sublimely unreal world of Coleridge’s Xanadu. In this way Wharton claims the Hudson Valley as the worthy equivalent of a famous literary vision. Deft allusive patterns of iteration, echoing, and recursion enable her to celebrate this place as a cornucopia of generative energies, natural and aesthetic, a place sustained by cultural-historical roots that North America otherwise conspicuously lacks. Her brilliant borrowing enables Wharton to carry out an intriguing narrative experiment,

demonstrating how a lyric poem can provide structural and thematic foundation for a work of prose fiction.

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NOTES

¹Citations here and throughout are to the first edition of *Hudson River Bracketed* (HRB), published in New York by Appleton in 1929.

²Comparing Coleridge's conception of the creative imagination with Wharton's, Penelope Vita-Finzi observes that both associate the artist's gift with an ability "to respond to nature" (53).

³Citations here and throughout are to the text of "Kubla Khan" in *English Romantic Writers*.

⁴Flowing seaward, the river is "sacred," appropriately, "because it is the true source of generation and life" (Magnuson 42).

⁵"As a result of the efforts of landscape gardener and tastemaker Andrew Jackson Downing," David Schuyler explains, "the Hudson river aesthetic became an indelible part of the national landscape" (69). Downing introduced "the rural, Gothic, Italianate, and bracketed designs" that dominated mind-nineteenth-century American architecture, particularly along "the hilly banks of the Hudson" (87).

⁶As the use of the subjunctive indicates ("I *would* build"), Coleridge's speaker has not yet achieved his object. He may yet succeed, but the poem ends before this occurs, leaving readers in suspense. Wharton's protagonist, in contrast, reaches his objective, building a new version of his "dome" by means of narrative art.

⁷Secondary comment on *Hudson River Bracketed* includes sharp criticism of the selfless role Halo plays in ministering to Vance's talent and career, which readers from recent generations are apt to find "gratuitous" (McGowan 74). Less inclined than Wharton or her contemporaries to take serious interest in the mythological idea of a Muse, they offer a variety of explanations for what now may appear to be an unequal and gender-biased relationship. See also discussions by Werlock; McDowell; Olin-Ammentorp.

⁸Readers have long observed that the landscape of Coleridge's poem "does suggest the mind and its activities" (Milne 19). As K. M. Wheeler observes, the preface to the poem certainly "encourages such a procedure of internalizing the landscape, or making it a topographical metaphor of mental processes" (34). Irene H. Chayes explores these metaphoric correspondences, together with their

implications, in detail; she points out, for instance, that Coleridge portrays creativity “as a powerful and impersonal, even nonhuman force” (9). Tellingly, she observes that “the operation of the mind is expressed by the action peculiar to nature, and the two sides of the analogy are interchangeable, so that an image or event in nature may actually enter the mind and take part in the intricate processes of perception and creation that it represents” (6).

⁹Suggesting that the river “represents the sources of the unconscious,” Magnuson notes “the explosive force with which the river erupts.” Evidently “the water provides the materials upon which the imagination must work, materials which, while they are necessary to fertility and generation, are also dangerous if they are not properly controlled” (45). “Whenever thoughts become too prolific and/or too powerful to be kept private, they burst into creative expressions. As the river is contained within the banks, the excess of individual inspiration is contained within the rules that govern the genre” (Chatha 49). Following a similar line of thought, Wheeler observes that “the image of the earth’s labouring ‘fast thick pants’ suggests childbirth, the birth of ideas or works of art” as well as of “natural production” (34).

¹⁰There is some overlap between the subterranean images from “Kubla Khan” and those in Goethe’s *Faust*. Reading Goethe confirms Vance’s intuition that “the real stuff is way down, not on the surface” (HRB 336). His fascination with “the mysterious Mothers, moving in subterranean depths among the primal forms of life,” will become an important leitmotif in *The Gods Arrive*, which continues the story of Halo and Vance (HRB 336). Appropriately, Vance is indebted to Miss Lorburn’s library for his discovery of *Faust*, one of the many life-changing books he first “got hold of [...] at the Willows” (336). James W. Tuttleton suggests that “Edith Wharton’s developing conception of the artistic process” represents “a fusion” of three different elements, all examples of “the romantic aesthetic”: “Coleridge’s idea of imagination as the reconciler of contraries, the vital unifying and recreating power,” together with “Goethe’s *Faust* (particularly the symbol of ‘The Mothers’) as expressing the infinite depth of the imagination the artist must plumb,” and “Whitman’s organism, with its vital union of form and content” (344).

¹¹Milne discusses this “basic dichotomy,” together with the artist’s ability to address it (see 20, 23). Kenneth Burke describes the structure of the poem in these terms: Stanza One presents a “beatific vision,” Stanza Two “introduces and develops the sinister, turbulent countertheme,” and Stanza Three “fuses the two motives in terms off a beatific vision [...] seen by a poetic ‘I’” (33).

¹²Coleridge explains that the poet can achieve “balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities” (*Biographia Literaria* 2:12; see also Milne 23). Alan C. Purves discusses the dome itself as “the momentary reconciliation of fire and ice, of birth and death” (190). Elizabeth Schneider argues that “oscillation,” or “ambivalence”—rather than reconciliation—predominates: “the whole poem oscillates between giving and taking away, bright affirmation and sunless negation” (287, 286).

¹³Some readers question the designation of Vance Weston as an artist of high caliber. Wershoven finds, for instance, that his character displays “naïve [...] self-absorption” rather than “genius”; “it is difficult to take him seriously as a writer” (139). David Holbrook discusses Vance’s shortcomings at length, arguing that he seems “seriously deficient in intelligence and understanding”: he “avoids his work” and “shows no sign of being driven by a daemon” (141).

¹⁴Discussing and defining the secondary imagination, Coleridge explains that “it struggles to idealize and to unify” (*Biographia Literaria* 1: 202). Wielding this imaginative power, as Burke points out, the artist embodies a “principle of inspiration” that elicits ambivalent reactions: it is “simultaneously welcomed and feared” (52).

¹⁵Jack Stillinger suggests that the poet-speaker be regarded as “the main protagonist” of the poem and “his desire as the encompassing interest of the plot” (219). The speaker’s motives include a “desire to recover something (‘Her symphony and song’), a desire to sustain something (‘music loud and long’), and a desire to complete something (‘build that dome in air’)” (219).

¹⁶Readers might well expect continued reference to “Kubla Khan” in Wharton’s sequel, *The Gods Arrive*, but this does not occur. Set chiefly in Europe, *Gods* brings the two-novel sequence to a fitting end when the estranged Halo and Vance meet at the Willows for reconciliation, in “the old house where [Vance’s] real life had begun” (*The Gods Arrive* 416).

¹⁷Helen Killoran has examined Wharton’s allusions in great detail, tracing patterns of covert reference throughout most of her major works of fiction in *Edith Wharton: Art and Allusion*.

¹⁸For discussion of resemblances between Miss Lorburn and Edith Wharton, see Werlock (193-94) and Lee (669-70).

¹⁹Hermione Lee notes that Wharton “splits herself in the novel between the figure of the cultured woman alone with her books and the raw, ambitious American writer” (670). Louis Auchincloss similarly reads Vance Weston as “an extension of Edith’s vision of herself, freed from the impediments of her sex, generation, and background” (177).

²⁰John Livingston Lowes early identified “the creative process” as Coleridge’s major preoccupation in the poem (395). Irene H. Chayes, another important early commentator, similarly has pointed out that the poem is “concerned quite specifically with the composition of poetry, both as experience and as mechanism” (6). Most readers concur with this formulation of the poem’s subject matter.

²¹Tuttleton points out that Wharton addresses herself in this novel to “an aesthetic problem” of longstanding interest to her, namely, the essence and the operation of artistic imagination: “How is the shifting raw material of the actual world translated into the forms of art?” One of her aims, consequently, “is to show that if the artistic imagination is to grow it must have nourishment and that only a complex, deeply rooted, traditional society is capable of providing that nourishment” (334-35).

²²Even the designation of the Willows as “one of the most successful instances” of Hudson River Bracketed architectural style is a fabrication (HRB 69). The source Halo cites—A. J. Downing’s book on *Landscape Gardening in America*—does exist, but it makes no mention of the Willows (see Killoran 150).

²³In *The Gods Arrive* readers learn that Vance never finishes *Magic*. However sobering in retrospect, this information does not dispel the creative exhilaration and confidence Vance brings to this writing project nor deflect the upward-moving trajectory of his artistic development presented in *Hudson River Bracketed*.

²⁴Calling “Kubla Khan” a “fleeting, shining stream of blending images [...] from books of travel and discovery,” Lowes identifies Bartram’s *Travels* as the source of much of the imagery in the opening portion of the poem (394, 333). The descriptions seizing Coleridge’s imagination stem from Bartram’s journey through north-central Florida, as John K. Wright confirms (see 76). Applying these borrowed descriptions to the Hudson Valley, Wharton brings Coleridge’s imagery back home, as it were, to the Americas but to a region with very different geographical and climatic features.

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