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Meredith Goldsmith

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MEREDITH GOLDSMITH

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in *The House of Mirth*

During the serial publication of *The House of Mirth* (1905), Edith Wharton received two letters regarding the novel's reference to Orangeine, a headache cure that was offered Lily Bart by a fellow worker during her brief career in Madame Regina's millinery shop. The first letter, from Albert B. Hale, suggested that Wharton had unwittingly engaged in an act of product placement: "there is an unintentional advertisement of a copyrighted or patented medicine which is working incalculable harm to our nostrum swallowing public. Could it not read a *headache powder*." Hale warns Wharton that she might be manipulated by greedy merchandisers: "the agents or manufacturers of this stuff may make use of your innocent reference to their commodity and thereby swell the sum of their illy gotten wealth."¹

The second letter corroborates Hale's anxieties. Charles Bartlett, president of the Orangeine Chemical Co., thanked Wharton for her reference to his "pet prescription" and offered a complimentary year's subscription in the "Orangeine Good Health and Good Spirits Club," which would send her the medication at a discount in exchange for a testimonial. Bartlett included several pages of advertising with numerous statements from other members of the club and noted that "a suggestive allusion" to the medication by "a most prominent author, in the most prominent serial of a prominent monthly magazine, is a rare tribute to Orangeine, and of great value."² Bartlett and Hale agree that Wharton's novel advertised Bartlett's product, perhaps in spite of itself; in Bartlett's view, Wharton needed only lend her name to one of Orangeine's ads to formalize the arrangement.

Wharton might well have viewed Bartlett's request for ad copy with disdain; however, she kept the allusion to Orangeine when the novel was

printed in book form and saved both pieces of correspondence. Although archival material can only hint at an author's motivations, Wharton's decision to preserve the letters points toward her concern about addictive behaviors and practices as American culture moved into the consumerist mode of the early-twentieth century. The burgeoning commodity culture of the period accompanied a growing anxiety around the concept of addiction, which, according to Timothy Hickman, was soon perceived as "a spiraling national problem."³ Along with a number of other historians, Hickman documents a growing addiction crisis in the late-nineteenth century, spurred by the use of morphine in wartime and increasingly frequent diagnoses of neurasthenia. However, innovations in medical and commercial technology were also central: the invention of the hypodermic needle afforded an easy delivery system for intravenous drugs, just as James B. Duke's patenting of the Bonsack Roller facilitated the mass production and consumption of cigarettes. By the late-nineteenth century, legal drugs like cigarettes, patent medicines, and alcohol were widely available, and illegal drugs like heroin and cocaine were often accessible in patent medicines in distilled form.⁴ When Bartlett asked Wharton for a testimonial, his inquiry does more than indicate how her persona could serve as advertising. It also suggests how the consumption of drugs was no longer seen as the provenance of either the demi-monde or the avant-garde, but rather the public who read bestselling novels and the authors who wrote them.

The House of Mirth links addiction to the rise of consumer capitalism. As much as seemingly innocuous consumer practices as smoking and tea-drinking by Wharton's characters represent an endpoint of leisure-class indolence, they provide the stimulus necessary for working- and middle-class productivity. Similarly, behaviors like gambling drive the characters' forays into the consumer economy and compensate for losses and disappointments in the marketplace. In Wharton's fiction, addictive commodities and behaviors destabilize the autonomous self, making users dependent on objects they cannot control; habitual dependency drives individuals into the marketplace, as they continue to work, spend, and use in cyclical repetition. Wharton binds her elite and working-class characters together not simply through the shared experience of labor, as classic feminist analyses of *The House of Mirth* have claimed, but through the shared experience of consumption of ephemeral, disposable products like cigarettes and drugs.⁵

Through this nexus of desire and dependency, *The House of Mirth* offers a turn-of-century response to some of the conventions of temperance discourse, in which gambling, alcoholism, tobacco, and medical products were often clustered.⁶ Most temperance fiction rested on strict gender binaries, in which female moral superiority could sway the male user from

self-degradation.⁷ However, as the late-nineteenth century added morphine and other medications to the catalogue of addictions, the female morphine addict became the prototypical substance abuser, upsetting gender norms in the process. As Susan Zieger has noted, by the 1870s fiction dealing with addicts had begun to portray both male and female inebriates in a manner that threatened the gender distinctions of early-nineteenth-century fiction: “Within temperance and mainstream discourses, women were supposed to help manage men’s morals, especially when it came to the promotion of sobriety. For women themselves to appear susceptible to tipping or—more horrifying—the uncharted territory of drug-taking was to render them unfit for that important role as well.”⁸ Lily Bart’s susceptibility to addictive behavior offers a threatening image of femininity undone by appetite: through consumption of addictive commodities, formerly genteel and middle-class women might be transformed into need-driven creatures, unsettling the system dedicated to their control. Similarly, men without means could be feminized through addictive habits, occupying roles distressingly similar to those of women as users and consumers in the marketplace.

Readers who encountered Lily Bart in 1905 would have found her cigarette smoking conspicuously modern, decadent, and only marginally acceptable for white women of her class. As the reviewer of *The House of Mirth* for *Outlook* noted, “the young woman, whatever her training and standing, who drinks cocktails, smokes, plays cards for money, and indulges in an occasional oath, may not go the bad, but she cannot escape becoming coarse and vulgar.”⁹ Smoking allows the leisure-class women of *The House of Mirth* to approximate male power, as this quip from the midpoint of the novel suggests: Lily’s cousin Ned Van Alstyne notes that since “women have taken to tobacco we live in a bath of nicotine. It would be a curious thing to study the effect of cigarettes on the relation of the sexes. Smoke is almost as great a solvent as divorce: both tend to obscure the moral issue.”¹⁰ Lily’s cousin implies that when women adopt a male consumer practice they do so excessively, questioning the stability of gender hierarchies by acquiescing too fully to their own appetites. Such behavior, as Thorstein Veblen asserts in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), must be rigorously policed to keep the boundaries of patriarchal culture intact, for “the consumption of luxuries, in the true sense, is a consumption directed to the comfort of the consumer himself, and is therefore, a mark of the master.”¹¹ Women’s addictive consumption, in contrast to other forms of female consumption in the novel such as Judy Trenor’s clothing and jewelry, fails to signify a man’s money or power. Unmoored from male economic authority, it harbors both a threatening form of agency and the possibility of self-destabilization.

In the early chapters of the novel, smoking serves as a barometer to the elite characters' vacillations between self-indulgence and restraint. This dangerous form of self-gratification questioned the class and racial status of leisure-class women, even as it emphasized their consumer prowess. While women such as Lily, Wharton, and socialites whose activities were described in newspapers clearly did smoke, Van Alstyne's remark suggests that they did not do so with complete impunity. Popular resistance to smoking stemmed from a temperance argument in which cigarettes, like alcohol, violated standards of female purity; middle-class women of the period, in Cassandra Tate's words, "shunned any link to cigarettes."¹² Female smoking was symbolized by Merimée's *Carmen*, whose habit was scandalous enough that in one production of the Bizet opera, her occupation was changed from a cigarette-roller to a milkmaid.¹³ However, the rise of mass-produced cigarettes in the 1880s made this commodity suddenly more accessible for all women, no longer restricted to a decadent avant-garde or the working classes.¹⁴ By endowing Lily with the smoking habit early in the novel, the text establishes the precariousness of her class status; while the middle classes cordoned themselves off from behavior that might unsettle their position, the elites could afford, or so they believed, to dabble in behavior considered more appropriate to immigrants and prostitutes.¹⁵ Despite the freedom of experimentation granted the leisure class, the novel makes clear that for Lily to indulge *too* conspicuously would be to endanger her class position.

In the novel's early juxtaposition of Lily and Bertha as female smokers, Wharton marks the contrast between management of and acquiescence to one's desires. Similarly, she gestures toward how economic power can trump the dangers of feminine self-exposure. Lily declines Selden's suggestion of tea at a hotel, preferring to smoke in private; public spaces like hotels and restaurants served as sites in which female agency, of which cigarette smoking was a symbol, was negotiated.¹⁶ Lily's subsequent encounter with Bertha and Percy Gryce makes clear that only in the intimacy of Selden's apartment can Lily experience her own pleasure: after claiming not to smoke, she "blush[es] at the thought of the store she had laid in at Lawrence Selden's" (22). In contrast with Lily, Bertha's marital status and wealth give her the license to flaunt her habit: her "brute of a husband," the narrator tells us in Wharton's characteristic free-indirect style, had "neglected to replenish her case before they parted that morning" (22). As Bertha treats her husband as a butler or a valet, responsible for catering to her needs, Wharton reveals the power of the woman who would flaunt her own consumption of luxury—she can declass and racialize men, making them subject to her will. Bertha's wealth gives her a kind of phallic prowess, allowing her to engage in public behavior that Lily's ambiguous class status denies her.

It is no accident that Bertha shames Lily before Percy Gryce, whose “own lips were never defiled with tobacco” (22). Otherwise a minor character in Wharton’s catalogue of the elites, Gryce represents the middle-class attitudes Wharton is likely to have associated with the temperance movement. Gryce’s abstinence differentiates him from virtually all the men in the novel, evoking mid-nineteenth-century notions of bodily purity. Shocked by Lily’s gambling and pledged against divorce, he engages in a more serious version of Van Alstyne’s moral censoriousness, believing, perhaps, that divorce and smoking “obscure the moral issue” (126) of gender hierarchies. As Gryce’s moral censoriousness works to control potentially transgressive women like Lily, it rewards women who embrace a conservative social ethos.

The novel’s sophisticated social milieu seems worlds apart from the moral certitudes of temperance rhetoric. Gryce, Gerty Farish, and Lady Cressida Raith, who does missionary work in London’s East End (35–36), are the novel’s sole representatives of an abstinence position. However, the predatory behavior of Gus Trenor, the character least capable of managing his impulses, evokes the debauched male type of temperance fiction.¹⁷ Gus is coded as a heavy drinker early in the novel: at Gerty Van Osburgh’s wedding, he speaks more loudly than usual and appears “unbecomingly flushed by the bridal libations” (72–73). Even at the Opera, Lily notes his heavy drinking, indicated in the “significant aroma” that “explained the dark flush on his face and the glistening dampness of his forehead” (92). Gus’s drinking peaks the night after the *tableaux vivants* when he lures Lily to his house in Judy’s absence: when Gus urges Selden to join him at the club Selden is disgusted by the presence of the “beast at the bottom of the glass” (122), a metaphor reminiscent of the temperance movement’s “serpent in the cup.” When Gus invites Lily to the Trenors’ New York home with the intent of seducing her, Lily finds him in “a cloud of cigar smoke” (111), obviously drunk and obstreperous. Gus attempts to press Lily into drinking and imbibes quickly himself, emptying one glass during their brief conversation despite his already “prolonged propinquity with the decanters” (111). Gus’ obvious inebriation stands in stark contrast to Lily’s naïveté, heightening her vulnerability.

While Gus’ advances on Lily degrade her sexually, the addictive consumables in the backdrop of this scene also compromise her whiteness. Gus offers Lily “some of [his] new Egyptians” (111), cigarettes that signified cost and rarity at the turn of the century, in contrast to those made in U.S. factories. These Orientalized commodities held both sexual and racial connotations, linked through their advertising to harem women and opium.¹⁸ Middle Eastern cigarettes signified a blurred perceptual boundary between consumable product and addictive drug, a boundary that Kate

Chopin also evokes in the *Vogue* sketch “An Egyptian Cigarette” (1900), whose disaffected heroine smokes the eponymous cigarette only to learn it is laced with opium.¹⁹ While Chopin’s heroine revels in her freedom from restraint, Lily’s potential intake represents an encroachment on her already vulnerable status. Gus’ cigarettes, given to him by a “little chap at the Turkish embassy” (111), situate him in a homosocial economy in which cigarettes, like other goods, can be exchanged on the open market and addictive objects can be consumed with no threat to the user’s reputation; as Wharton reveals, however, women without economic clout do not share Gus’ immunity from scrutiny.

While the repeated consumption of cigarettes serves as a sign of the user’s compulsive consumerism, the addicted gambler becomes the figure for those who would participate in the economy without the capital to solidify their position. The gaming tables serve as the midpoint of *The House of Mirth*, emphasizing the centrality of gambling—both in practice and as metaphor—to Lily’s maintenance of white leisure-class femininity. At the moment of *The House of Mirth*, American anti-gambling fervor had reached its peak. Anxieties around gambling during this era reflect, as T. J. Jackson Lears argues, a historic tension between beliefs in control and chance: in the late-nineteenth century, where Protestant thinkers and moralists had believed that success could be rationalized through the work ethic or the free market, believers in chance could point to the rise of the speculative economy and the vagaries of the Civil War as evidence for the illogic of the times.²⁰ Gambling represented a denial of the will and motivation that, according to Victorian American thinkers, governed all aspects of life.²¹ Gambling was viewed as primitive as well as decadent: moralists of the period cast gambling habits as “an enemy of progress, a form of regression into childhood dependence and animal passion.”²² For Veblen, gamblers’ ritualistic embrace of their lucky charms marked the persistence of the barbarian instinct, striking a blow to the cause of industrial efficiency.²³ Playing for money threatened the stability of class distinctions as well: just as gaming could bring the classes into uneasy proximity in the public forums of horse races or cockfights, betting embodied the arbitrariness of democracy, in which rich and poor could change places with a roll of the dice.

Veblen might argue that Lily’s atavistic belief in luck allows her to ignore the straightforward operations of capitalism, in which she pays for her visits to the houses of the wealthy through her expenditures at the bridge table.²⁴ However, Lily’s justification of her gambling combines a Protestant ethos of self-recrimination with a faith in the power of chance: “Once or twice of late she had won a large sum, and instead of keeping it against future losses, had spent it in dress or jewelry; and the desire to atone from this imprudence,

combined with the increasing exhilaration of the game, drove her to risk higher stakes at each fresh venture" (24). Lily's gambling habits, then, are driven not only by the thrill of play, but by guilt over the agency she has exercised as a consumer; her gambling, given the probability that she will lose, becomes a way to minimize the threatening power in her hands.

With the beginning of Book II, as the novel's setting shifts to Monte Carlo, Wharton foreshadows the consequences of Lily's addictive play in the market economy: a setting for the peccadilloes of the titled elite, Monte Carlo was also believed responsible for a rash of suicides after gambling failures.²⁵ Whereas in New York gambling serves as covert entertainment for the leisure class, Monte Carlo highlights the near-universal effort to get something for nothing. As Wharton depicts it, Monte Carlo celebrates eating, drinking, and smoking as well as gambling. When Selden arrives on the scene, Carry Fisher's protégés are baffled by an embarrassment of riches: "We're starving to death," Carry informs him, "because we can't decide where to lunch" (144).

Wharton's male gamblers suggest that men without means—like Lily—must commodify themselves as the importance of lineage continues to fade. Lord Hubert Dacey, with his "habitual worn smile" and "rapidly dwindling heap of gold" (151), mirrors Lily in his expectation of failure, yet compulsive presence, at the gambling tables and by the sides of the wealthy; like Lily, he is also a cigarette mooch, taking Selden's offer of a smoke when predictably he has none of his own.

Ned Silverton, the charming young man who functions as a male counterpart to Lily, evinces a dissipation akin to Lord Hubert's. Threading the narrative of Ned's compulsive gambling into that of Lily's economic decline, Wharton shows how Ned's behavior portends both class and racial degradation. Ned's case harbors the frayed class boundaries that the leisure class feared would result from gambling: miserable over his break with Bertha Dorset, Ned "has taken to gambling again" both at the tables and at the races "and going about with all sorts of queer people" (205–06). Ned is responsible for the socially questionable unions of two members of the Van Osburgh clan, one of whom is also expelled from Harvard due to Ned's "influence" (206). However, buffered by his sisters—women who are forced to work to rescue their brother from depravity—Ned is protected from the consequences of his behavior when Lily is not. Late in the novel, when Lily establishes herself with Norma Hatch, she is astonished to find that Ned has established himself as a "habitual frequenter of Mrs. Hatch's drawing-room" (214) at the Hotel Imperium. Wharton's use of the word "habitual" to describe both Ned and Lord Dacey is telling, as "*habitué*" and "*habitation*" were terms frequently used to describe addicts and addictions, respectively.²⁶

Referring to addiction as “habituation” cast the user’s behavior as involuntary, a compulsive behavior that was signified as disease on the user’s part rather than a failure of the will.²⁷ That Ned’s behavior is viewed as a disease, or the sign of a breakdown, is emphasized by Gerty’s remark that the Misses Silverton have been asking for financial help so that they might “pay Ned’s debts and send him away” (206), perhaps to a sanatorium.

Gambling clarifies the novel’s conception of the addictive properties of leisure: the entertainments of the leisure class emerge as stark necessity for those without the protection of wealth. Tea-drinking functions in a similar way, deepening Lily’s association with working-class women as the novel moves toward conclusion. For leisure-class women from the eighteenth-century novel on, preparing and consuming tea conveys social status; as Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace reports, “the upper-class woman herself [became] an item of display at the tea table: she herself becomes part of the equipage; the narcissistic display of her body [became] part of the ceremony.”²⁸ The feminized setting of the tea-table emerged as an alternative to the masculinist public environment of the coffee house, which Wolfgang Schivelbusch describes as “the site of the public life of the eighteenth-century middle-class.”²⁹ While the coffee house was the setting for enlivening homosocial exchange, Lily, like the heroines of eighteenth-century fiction Kowaleski-Wallace discusses, uses the tea table as a heterosocial forum for the demonstration of her own mastery.

Given the sheer amount of tea consumed in *The House of Mirth*, it is worth considering how tea and other caffeinated drinks signified culturally in the period. As Schivelbusch demonstrates, coffee in particular was associated with progress in eighteenth-century Europe: “not to drink any coffee would be almost as great a sin for the puritanical bourgeois as wasting time itself.”³⁰ In the early-twentieth century, tea shared coffee’s association with efficiency, but maintained an association with bourgeois and female refinement.³¹ One doctor deemed tea “a necessity of modern life . . . giving a fillip to a jaded brain and heart at the time of the day when it is most needed.”³² Another argued that tea would help its users grapple with the quickening pace of modern life: “About 15 grams of caffeine will entirely abolish both the desire for and the possibility of sleep for a whole night and longer.” The same doctor takes care to distinguish tea from alcohol and opiates, which “deadens [. . .] the sense of ill-being” rather than simply eradicate it.³³ Caffeine would replace anxiety with the ability to complete “hard intellectual work at high speed.”³⁴ In Lily’s case, caffeine fuels her productivity, enabling her to continue to work after exhausted, sleepless nights; yet in staving off her nocturnal “horrors” (207), her caffeine drinking only increases her continued anxious consumption.

As Lily begins her sharp decline, representations of tea drinking demonstrate her new failure to harness the bodily refinement associated with her elite status. When discussing her mounting economic desperation with Gerty Farish over tea, Lily's frustration erupts in a "vehemence of movement that threatened destruction to Miss Farish's fragile tea-table" (206). Gerty's preparation of tea for Lily is marked by a sense of "ministry" (129), which allows her to condescend, although gently so, to her friend. Gerty now performs the role of hostess more effectively than Lily, whose awkwardness at the tea-table signals how the decline in her economic status has disrupted her elite feminine role.

Lily's cravings parallel those of working-class women, who must stimulate their productivity by day and calm themselves in preparation for the next day's work by night. Shortly after her dismissal from Madame Regina's, Lily stops for a tea in a café after wandering aimlessly through the streets. Lily's conspicuous lack of obligations excludes her from the other women diners, enclosing her "in a little circle of silence" (235). Lily's tea-drinking marks both the distinctions and the connections between herself and these others; what for leisure-class women serves as a decorative commodity, for working-class women functions as a drug that propels them back, re-energized, into the world of work.

Unable to either consume or produce, Lily vacillates between stimulants and chloral, the novel's final addictive substance. Lily's developing chloral habit mirrors the rise of "morphinomania" in late-nineteenth-century culture, in which white middle-class women were designated the prototypical users of opiates like chloral and morphine.³⁵ Physicians, many of whom had a background in the temperance movement themselves, had enthusiastically embraced morphine as a pain reliever after the invention of the hypodermic; by the late-nineteenth century, they were in the uncomfortable position of having addicted their own patients.³⁶ Medical discourse worked to reinforce the reasons doctors gave for the rise in female addiction: it was believed that emotional fragility, susceptibility to the pressures of modernity, or gynecological complaints predisposed women to become addicts. Physicians' discussions of female addiction noted the burdens of marriage and maternity, made more stressful by the difficulties of urban living or the isolation of the rural farmhouse. In an 1896 medical report on "Morphinism in Women," J. B. Mattison cites the case of a doctor and his wife, both of whom were addicted to opiates, noting that the wife's responsibilities for her addicted husband would lead them to either "the graveyard or the madhouse."³⁷ The context reminds us that Lily's increasingly risky behavior would have resonated for some turn-of-the-century

readers not only as a disgrace to her class but as a harbinger of impending death or breakdown.

Another woman who fits the category of addiction-prone femininity is Norma Hatch, Wharton's fleeting portrait of a woman who would be seen in at the turn of the century as a prototypical female addict. Mrs. Hatch's life is marked by an overabundance of time, as she and "her friends seemed to float together outside the bounds of time and space" (214). Characterizing her mood as an "Oriental indolence" (214), Wharton evokes the link many turn-of-the-century Americans made between Asians and drug addiction, as newspaper accounts of addiction routinely described visits to Chinese opium dens, and "cure doctor" Leslie Keeley figured opiate abuse as an "Arab" disease.³⁸ As with Trenor's offer of Middle Eastern cigarettes, Wharton racializes addictive substances, showing how the leisure class's enjoyment of these objects puts their whiteness in jeopardy; moreover, Mrs. Hatch's lazy transgression of temporal and spatial boundaries recalls Gus Trenor's violation of temporal norms in his drinking habits.

Wharton notes the presence of a series of semiprofessional assistants in the construction of Mrs. Hatch's expensive femininity: "manicures, beauty-doctors, hair-dressers, teachers of bridge, of French, of 'physical development'" (214). To these we should add the druggist, who gives Lily a copy of her employer's chloral prescription (225). While classic feminist readings of *The House of Mirth* argue that Lily's experiences as a worker deepen her identification with women across the class spectrum, I wish to suggest that it is female self-medication—an act of consumption that is neither completely volitional nor fully dependent on another—that aligns Lily with Mrs. Hatch on the one hand and working women like Miss Kilroy, who recommends that Lily "try orangeine" (224) on the other.³⁹ In the background chatter at the milliner's shop, Wharton makes clear that working women have traded temporary pain relief for the equally ephemeral charms of advertising fame: "She's taken ten bottles," one woman tells another, "and her headaches don't seem no better—but she's written a testimonial to say the first bottle cured her, and she got five dollars and her picture in the paper" (223). Through these fleeting portraits of everyday female dissatisfaction—the aimless divorcee, the fatigued woman worker—we see how women across the class spectrum are encouraged to consume drugs as a mean of alleviating pain. The chloral prescription and the allusion to patent medicine function as switch-points between the novel's female users. In the first case, Lily must pass as her leisure-class employer even as her act of theft links her to working-class criminality; in the second, working women briefly form a bond through their need for emotional and physical pain relief.

Given Wharton's preservation of the Orangeine ads and her residence in Lenox and New York during the composition of *The House of Mirth*, she may have known of muckraking journalist Samuel Hopkins Adams' exposé of patent medicines in *Collier's Weekly*, which appeared in the fall of 1905, just as *The House of Mirth* was nearing the end of its serial run in *Scribner's*. Adams claimed that Orangeine, one of the "most conspicuous" of the "quack medicines," had killed at least twenty people between 1903 and 1905.⁴⁰ The simultaneous appearance of the two references might be sheer coincidence. However, the timing of the two letters also directly coincides with Adams' first article, though he would not refer to Orangeine by name until December 1905. The specificity of the reference suggests Wharton's familiarity with the growing critique of patent medicine. Adams' articles, read as companion texts to the final chapters of *The House of Mirth*, point to a growing cultural anxiety around patent medicines and the complicity of doctors and pharmacists in drug abuse, which culminated in the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act in 1906.

In her casting of drugs as consumable commodities, Wharton underscores the role of pharmacists—professionals who stood at an intersection between medicine and consumer culture—in the growing turn-of-the-century addiction problem. Wharton characterizes the pharmacist's shop as a department store in miniature replete with a "flaring plate-glass window" (225) and an array of expensive perfume bottles. Lily attempts to avoid walking past the pharmacy yet is "irresistibly drawn" to its offerings. Her anxiety and paranoia bespeak her increasing dependency as she "fears that he should question her, or keep the bottle back" (225). The pharmacist's off-hand warning to Lily about a possible overdose recalls debates of the period about the ethics of dispensing drugs to patients who seemed addicted. Despite pharmacists' concerns about such dilemmas, they also feared losing a loyal clientele.⁴¹ The need to attract consumers shaped pharmacists' behavior, which in turn influenced consumers' decisions about drug purchases.

Lily's growing obsession with chloral—which she figures as a charm, with an ability to "lay its spell upon her" (250)—distills both the pleasure and the dangers of the novel's addictive objects. As Lily sits alone in the "melancholy pleasure-ground" of Bryant Park, which recalls the deserted gardens of Monte Carlo where Lily briefly muses after her expulsion from the *Sabrina*, her mind wanders back to the bottle of chloral, whose image "was the only spot of light in the dark prospect: she could feel its lulling influence stealing over her already." While chloral harbors the promise of a good night's sleep, Lily also fears the possible consequences of her repeated use of the drug: "What if the effect of the drug should gradually

fail, as all narcotics were said to fail? She remembered the chemist's warning against increasing the dose; and she had heard before the capricious and incalculable action of the drug" (242).

These lonely speculations immediately precede Lily's encounter with Nettie Struther, in which Wharton reverses readerly expectations about the female substance user. While elites of the period demonized the poor for their ostensible predisposition toward addiction, Nettie emerges as one of the few characters of the novel free from such habits. Nettie emerges as a paragon of structure, balancing wage-earning with responsibilities for a child. As the novel's only coffee drinker, Nettie's consumption distances her from the genteel performance of femininity at the tea-table, while the milk she keeps for the baby aligns her femininity with maternity rather than the art of flirtation. But just as Lily never imbibes the cigarettes or drugs that would associate her with working-class or nonwhite women more explicitly, she rejects Nettie's offer of coffee, a symbol of the ethos of productivity she is unable to claim.

As Lily succumbs to her final dose of chloral, Wharton reintroduces the language of dependency, noting that Lily "knew in advance what form" the effects of the drug "would take—the gradual cessation of the inner throb, the soft approach of passiveness, as though an invisible hand made magic passes over her in the dark. The very slowness and hesitancy of the effect increased its fascination: it was delicious to lean over and look down into the dim abysses of unconsciousness" (250). Only here does Lily experience the pleasures of self-examination without pain, briefly resembling the narrator of Chopin's "An Egyptian Cigarette," whose opium hallucination frees her from the constrictions of white leisure-class femininity.

While Elizabeth Ammons and Elaine Showalter have read Lily's fancied embrace of Nettie's baby as a moment of union between the working and the leisure classes, Hildegard Hoeller has recast the scene as Wharton's claiming of a sentimental literary context that, as a realist, she might otherwise deplore.⁴² Reading the novel through the lens of sentimentalism, one might argue for the division between Nettie's domestic space and the market-driven world of the rest of the novel. More cynically, however, I wish to suggest that Lily's hallucination of Nettie's baby in her arms marks the final installment in the novel's catalogue of female addictive consumers. Lily's response to her final dose of chloral illuminates the similarities between the desires of the adult woman and those of the infant: her yearning for relief from exhaustion mimics the baby's hunger in its physical immediacy. Named for Marie Antoinette, a symbol of female extravagance, Nettie's baby evokes the specter of female power that Veblen describes, "penetrat[ing] [Lily] with a strange sense of weakness" (246). If Nettie's

baby has a kind of phallic power, her power suggests the threatening force of female consumer desire. Nettie's baby, like her notorious namesake, is a creature of habitual needs, the threatening subject that might lie beneath the veneer of the social construction of femininity.

In figuring Lily's death as an accident, Gerty absolves the medical and pharmaceutical professions of responsibility for Lily's habit. As she tells Selden, "The doctor found a bottle of chloral—she had been sleeping badly for a long time, and she must have taken an over-dose by mistake. There is no doubt of that—no doubt—there will be no question—he has been very kind" (253).⁴³ As Gerty papers over Lily's final days, the complicity of doctor and social worker suggests medical practitioners' role in the addiction crisis. By the turn of the century, doctors were sensitive to the fact that they had fueled a generation of compliant drug users; physicians like Dr. Hale may have felt a twinge of guilt while reading of Lily's decline, although Bartlett apparently did not. In 1900, future AMA president John Witherspoon urged his fellow doctors to "acknowledge that we are culpable in too often giving this seductive siren [in this case, morphine] until the will-power is gone."⁴⁴ Painkillers like morphine and choral were ideal modern commodities—cheap, disposable, and habit-forming. Physicians and pharmacists, working in tandem with the burgeoning culture of consumption, used these commodities to treat the symptoms of women's frustrations. Wharton points toward the inextricability of gendered consumer behavior and mass production: as patent medicines and drugs like chloral were marketed to women, many of whom, by the early-twentieth century, had their own jobs and income, their consumption in turn fueled the building of the pharmaceutical industry.

Ephemera like cigarettes and patent medicines help make up the backdrop of realist fiction, so ubiquitous as to appear almost invisible. Used sometimes for pleasure, sometimes from habit, and sometimes as a result of painful dependency, addictive substances can seem as elusive as smoke. However, analyzing the role of addictive practices in *The House of Mirth* shows Wharton's sensitivity not simply to the dilemmas of women like Lily but to the concerns of middle-class and working-class women who were offered quick fixes to pressing social problems. Wharton's decision to leave the reference to Orangeine in the book version of *The House of Mirth*—published after Adams' damning articles had been printed—functions not as an act of product placement, but as a warning.

Reading *The House of Mirth* in this light allows us to reconsider the function of addictive commodities throughout Wharton's work. Although Wharton's critique of the drug habit was clear as early as "The Bunner Sisters" (1892) and as late as *Twilight Sleep* (1927), in which nearly all the characters

are engaged in a flight from pain, the perils of addiction emerge most clearly in *The Fruit of the Tree* (1907), published two years after *The House of Mirth*. Typically seen as Wharton's only attempt at a "problem novel," *The Fruit of the Tree* also offers the author's deepest exploration into the numbing of psychic and physical pain through medication. Recent criticism has brought attention to the novel's discussions of the end of life, which culminate in the decision of nurse-heroine Justine Brent to euthanize a severely crippled patient, the society belle Bessy Westmore. However, critics have yet to sufficiently attend to the depiction of Stephen Wyant, the self-injecting, morphine-addicted doctor who attempts to blackmail Justine after guessing her actions.⁴⁵ Wyant's self-generated addiction informs his conviction that Bessy can be cured; thus his addiction fuels her own developing habituation. Bessy's addiction to luxury commodities and behaviors would be replaced, if she lived, by medically-cultivated morphine dependency. Viewing the two novels as a diptych reveals Wharton's linking of medications, physicians, and addiction with the burgeoning consumer culture of the day.

Wharton's characters' susceptibility to the pleasures of cigarettes, tea, cards, and chloral correspond to David Courtwright's description of the rise of the drug trade in the late-nineteenth century. Wharton's habitués answer the call of what Courtwright calls "mature capitalism's limbic turn, its increasing focus on pleasure and gratification, as opposed to consumers' material needs."⁴⁶ As *The House of Mirth* and Wharton's subsequent fiction demonstrate, the author surveyed the rise of the pleasure economy with increasing dismay. Reading Wharton's fiction in this light helps restore the addictive allure of turn-of-the-century commodity culture: if the house of mirth, in Wai-Chee Dimock's words, "has no exit,"⁴⁷ its occupants remain poised at the gambling tables, ready to roll the dice once more or even perhaps to light another cigarette.

—Ursinus College

Notes

I would like to thank Lisa Botshon, Jean Lutes and Susan Tomlinson for their generous reading of multiple drafts of this essay, and the anonymous reviewers of *American Literary Realism* for their guidance.

1. Albert B. Hale to Edith Wharton, 5 October 1905 (Box 26, Folder 795, Edith Wharton Collection, Beinecke Library, Yale University). While I cannot be certain of Hale's identity, chronology and location suggest that the author of the letter was a Chicago ophthalmologist who published in *JAMA* and later worked for the Pan-American Union.

2. Charles Bartlett to Edith Wharton, 11 October 1905 (Box 23, Folder 705, Edith Wharton Collection, Beinecke Library, Yale University).

3. Timothy Hickman, *The Secret Leprosy of Modern Days: Narcotic Addiction and Cultural Crisis in the United States, 1870–1920* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 2007), p. 2. For general background on addiction in the U.S., see David Musto, *The American Disease: The Origins of Narcotic Control* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973). On addiction in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, see David Courtwright, *Dark Paradise: Opiate Addiction in America Before 1940* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982); and *Yesterday's Addicts: American Society and Drug Abuse, 1865–1920*, ed. Howard Morgan (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1974).

4. Hickman, p. 12.

5. J. Michael Duvall makes a related argument about consumption in *The House of Mirth* by focusing on the *use* of objects—a process that lies between purchase and waste. Although Duvall does not address the representation of cigarettes or drugs, he demonstrates that Wharton's elites are defined as much by their habits of disposal as by their acts of consumption. See Duvall, "The Futile and the Dinky: Wasting and Being Wasted in *The House of Mirth*," in *Memorial Boxes and Guarded Interiors: Edith Wharton and Material Culture*, ed. Gary Totten (Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 2007), pp. 159–183. For other influential arguments about Wharton and drugs, see Dale Bauer, "Wharton's 'Others': Addiction and Intimacy," in *A Historical Guide to Edith Wharton*, ed. Carol J. Singley (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2003), pp. 115–45; and Jennie Kassanoff, "Corporate Thinking: Edith Wharton's *The Fruit of the Tree*," *Arizona Quarterly*, 53 (Spring 1997), 25–59. Bauer views addiction primarily as a metaphor for the failure of intimacy, while Kassanoff's discussion of drugs attends to Wharton's tacit endorsement of euthanasia.

6. Susan Zieger, *Inventing the Addict: Drugs, Race, and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century British and American Literature* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 2008), pp. 77–78.

7. For a discussion of the conventions of temperance literature, see *The Serpent in the Cup: Temperance in American Literature*, ed. David S. Reynolds and Debra J. Rosenthal (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1997); Scott Martin, *Devil of the Domestic Sphere: Temperance, Gender, and Middle-class Ideology, 1800–1860* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Univ. Press, 2008); *The Drunkard's Progress: Narratives of Addiction, Despair, and Recovery*, ed. John Crowley (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1999); *Well-Tempered Women: Nineteenth-Century Temperance Rhetoric*, ed. Carol Mattingly (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1998); and *Water Drops from Women Writers: A Temperance Reader*, ed. Mattingly (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 2001).

8. Zieger, p. 131.

9. *Edith Wharton: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. James Tuttleton, Kristin Lauer, and Margaret Murray (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), p. 112. This reviewer imposes his or her own ladder of the vices on Lily, who neither drinks nor swears through the course of the novel.

10. Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, ed. Elizabeth Ammons (1905; rpt. New York: Norton, 1990), p. 126. All subsequent citations refer to this edition.

11. Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899; rpt. New York: Penguin, 1968), p. 72.

12. Cassandra Tate, *Cigarette Wars: The Triumph of the Little White Slaver* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), pp. 101–02, 24.

13. Tate, p. 24.

14. Tate, p. 98. Attempting to address this new phenomenon, M. E. W. Sherwood argued that if young white women of the better classes were to smoke, they would have to learn to do so without jeopardizing their sexual and racial purity. Despite her concern for the preservation of white femininity, Sherwood encouraged gentlewomen to develop "graceful" smoking habits by modeling their behavior on women of Cuba, whose smoking, she believed, enhanced their femininity rather than compromising it ("Heroines Who Smoke," *New York Times Saturday Review*, 21 July 1900, pp. 481–82).

15. For a comparison, see Ellen Olenska, whose smoking in *The Age of Innocence* (1920) marks her as a racialized bohemian. Ellen's dusky complexion and "gypsy" childhood deepen her association with Carmen (Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence* [New York: Collier, 1987]), p. 59.
16. Tate, pp. 101–02.
17. Martin, p. 156.
18. Sherwood encouraged American women to look to the work of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who described female smokers in the Turkish harems, for examples of elegant female smoking; by the 'teens, cigarette ads capitalized on the image of Middle Eastern female smokers as a symbol of languid sexuality. On Orientalism in cigarette advertising, see Nancy Bowman, "Questionable Beauty: The Dangers and Delights of the Cigarette, in American Society, 1880–1930," in *Beauty and Business: Commerce, Gender, and Culture in Modern America*, ed. Philip Scanlon (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 74–75; Delores Mitchell, "Images of Exotic Women in Turn-of-the-Century Tobacco Art," *Feminist Studies*, 18 (1992), 327–50; and Tate, p. 105.
19. *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*, ed. Per Seyersted (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press), pp. 570–73.
20. T. J. Jackson Lears, *Something for Nothing: Luck in America* (New York: Viking, 2003), p. 174.
21. John Bigelow, "What Is Gambling?" *Harper's Monthly*, 90 (February 1895), 470–73.
22. Lears, p. 175.
23. Veblen, p. 276.
24. For an exemplary Marxist reading along these lines, see Wai-Chee Dimock, "De-basing Exchange: Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*," *PMLA*, 100 (1985), 783–92.
25. George Herald and Edward Radin, *The Big Wheel: Monte Carlo's Opulent Century* (New York: Morrow, 1963), pp. 21–44.
26. See Zieger, pp. 21–23, on the rise of "habituation" as a metaphor for addiction.
27. See Hickman, pp. 8–10, and Zeiger, pp. 12–13, on the conflict between theories of addiction as disease and those that posited addiction as a moral failing.
28. Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1997), p. 29.
29. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise: A Social History of Spices, Stimulants, and Intoxicants* (New York: Vintage, 1992), p. 59.
30. Schivelbusch, p. 39.
31. Robert Roth, "Tea-Drinking in Eighteenth-Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage," *Material Life in America, 1600–1860*, ed. Robert Blair St. George (Boston: Northeastern Univ. Press, 1988), pp. 439–62.
32. Quoted in William Ukers, *All About Tea* (New York: Tea and Coffee Trade Journal Co., 1935), p. 558.
33. Quoted in Ukers, p. 555.
34. Quoted in Ukers, p. 555.
35. See Zieger, pp. 127–154; and Courtwright, *Dark Paradise*, pp. 36, 58–60.
36. See Courtwright, *Dark Paradise*, pp. 42–55; and Musto, pp. 98–101.
37. J. B. Mattison, "Morphinism in Women," *Atlantic Medical Weekly*, 20 June 1896, pp. 389–92.
38. See Hickman, p. 61, 83.
39. See Elizabeth Ammons, *Edith Wharton's Argument with America* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1980), p. 43; and Elaine Showalter, *Sister's Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991), p. 101.
40. Samuel Hopkins Adams, *The Great American Fraud* (New York: AMA Press, 1907), p. 32.
41. Courtwright, *Dark Paradise*, p. 39.

42. See Hoeller, *Edith Wharton's Dialogue with Realism and Sentimentalism* (Gainesville: Univ. of Florida Press, 2000), p. 116.

43. Despite Gerty and the doctor's narrative imposition on Lily's death, during the serial publication of *The House of Mirth* Wharton wrote to Dr. Francis Kennicutt, a physician who had treated her husband, asking for the name of a medication that would help her protagonist end her life in the least unpleasant way possible (Charles McGrath, "Wharton Letter Reopens a Mystery," *New York Times*, 21 November 2007, pp. E1, E12).

44. Quoted in Musto, p. 281.

45. Kassanoff notes that Wyant's addiction "correlates with his bitter loss of self-direction" (p. 49) as well as the blackmail scheme; Bauer argues that Wyant's "naked ambition is as repulsive as his clandestine drug-taking" (p. 130).

46. Courtwright, *Forces of Habit* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2001), p. 3.

47. Dimock, p. 791.