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Anti-Semitism in American Realist Literature: Edith Wharton's *Sim Rosedale* - a Thorn in American Identity

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Abstract

How does canonical American literature from the early twentieth century reflect the American Jew and anti-Semitic sentiments? How do these novels portray the American Jew as a threat to American identity? In this thesis, I answer these questions and argue how American literature is a product of its culture demonstrating and reproducing fears and accepted ideologies. These fears perpetuated and solidified anti-Semitic stereotypes and alienated Jews from society. In my research, I examine how literature acts as a cultural product specifically homing in on particular anti-Semitic stereotypes which represent a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant fear of "otherness." This analysis will draw from historical context that can be revealed through archival material, biographical research, scholarly critiques, and a close reading of the novel *The House of Mirth* (1905) by Edith Wharton. This novel reflects elitist societal beliefs, provides insights into social structures of the period, and invites a deep exploration of religion defined in terms of race.

I read this novel in its historical context as a symptom of prejudice. This essay focuses on the Jewish character Sim Rosedale as an outcast and threat to American identity and society, both exemplifying early twentieth-century attitudes and perpetuating anti-Semitic sentiments. Wharton's Rosedale is the epitome of a Jewish stereotype, and Wharton portrays Rosedale as a pariah and threat to society and social order. She depicts him as greedy and shallow propagating the miser stereotype while denying his character social mobility and agency. Wharton's novel accurately exposes how Jews were excluded from elitist restaurants, social events, and clubs. This exclusion resulted from the fears of the dominant hegemonic class, as revealed through the heroine, Lily Bart.

My analysis of *The House of Mirth* will demonstrate how the discourse and language in the novel reveals anti-Semitic stereotypes. The language the narrator uses makes biased statements regarding the "Jewish race" declaring them as fact. The language Wharton uses for Rosedale and the dynamic in which he speaks illuminate his otherness. He is classified as an outsider, polluting white Anglo-Saxon principles of marriage, socio-economic status, religion, and identity. Rosedale is an economic immigrant, raiding the social relations and institutions in early twentieth century New York. His classification by race and alienation posit him as inferior to the dominant class. Despite Wharton's own anti-Semitic sentiments, Wharton exposes the anti-Semitism rampant in her society. This essay will reveal how literature can act as an artifact by providing a historical view of society that replicates popular ideology and sentiments as seen in *The House of Mirth*.

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

Anti-Semitism in American Realist Literature: Edith Wharton's Sim Rosedale - a Thorn in

American Identity

by

Elizabeth Pantirer

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

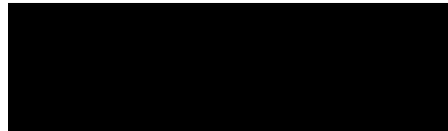
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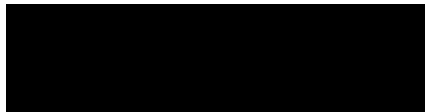
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ANTI-SEMITISM IN AMERICAN REALIST LITERATURE: EDITH WHARTON'S SIM
ROSEDALE - A THORN IN AMERICAN IDENTITY

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Arts

by

ELIZABETH PANTIRER

Montclair State University

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1. Introduction

On December 11, 2019, an executive order was enacted in the United States to combat anti-Semitism in federally funded programs. The order states, "discrimination against Jews may give rise to a Title VI violation when the discrimination is based on an individual's race, color, or national origin" (Donald Trump). Under this order, Jews are defined as a racial group, since Jews do not belong to a specific "color" or "national origin." Although the order is deemed "protective," it may give credence to anti-Semitic tropes that target Jews as inferior and unequal by racial decree. This definition recalls late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century racial ideologies that led to growing anti-Semitism and, ultimately, the Nazi Holocaust. The rhetoric in the order mirrors rhetoric from the turn of the century that inspired the foundation of the Anti-Defamation League in 1913. On their website, the Anti-Defamation League explains that in the late nineteenth century, "anti-Semites turned to the new 'racial science . . .' to 'prove' the supremacy of non-Jewish whites "and" argued that Jewishness was not a religion but a racial category, and that the Jewish 'race' was biologically inferior." To understand these dangers, one can analyze a nation's art and literature to uncover themes and rhetoric that perpetuate anti-Semitic stereotypes. When race dominates politics, race permeates national literature serving as a historical artifact for sociological analysis; literature, as a product of its culture, embodies the "essence of a nationality" (Appiah 284)¹. Canonical literature from the turn of the century can reveal national racist tropes, which are unfortunately being echoed today.

In my approach to canonical literature, my study asks the following questions: how does American literature from the turn of the century reflect racial ideologies and sentiments of the time period? How do novels of the period portray Jews as a threat to American identity and reproduce anti-Semitic sentiments? In my research, I examine how literature of this era acts as a

cultural product specifically homing in on particular anti-Semitic American views. The dominant ideology of white Anglo-Saxons² as the superior racial group informs the novels of this period. I argue that this literature represents a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant fear of "otherness" defined as the Jewish population. The text I focus on, *The House of Mirth* (1905) by American realist author Edith Wharton, constructs a world of norms, whites, degrading outliers, Jews. The novel mirrors contemporary racial ideologies that alienate and vilify Jews. Using archival information and a cultural analysis, I read this novel in its historical context as a symptom of prejudice. Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* portrays the Jewish Sim Rosedale as an outcast and threat to American identity and society, both exemplifying early twentieth-century attitudes and perpetuating anti-Semitic sentiments.

This thesis will reveal how Wharton exemplifies anti-Semitic stereotypes, which she and her contemporaries accepted through Rosedale. Such widely established stereotypes include a definition of Jews as a racial group (attributing Jews to greed and conspicuous consumption), manipulation for socio-economic power, the usurer and miser who abuse capitalism, and the vulgar predator who threatens American identity (defined by race, and religion). Notably, the basis for these stereotypes relies on the definition of a Jew by race rather than religion or ethnicity. For example, Rosedale is defined in racialized terms by using phrases like "the instincts of his race" (17, 156) and "which characterizes his race" (20). Wharton is seeing Rosedale's cultural identity in racial terms. She excludes any religious or cultural-ethnic portrayals of Jews; Rosedale is never seen attending religious ceremonies, is not identified by ritual objects (such as a skull cap), and is denied a Jewish community. Therefore, his character as a Jew is defined in racially rather than culturally or religiously.

Wharton's Simon Rosedale is the epitome of a personified Jewish stereotype. He is portrayed as a pariah and threat to society and social order and is depicted as greedy and shallow. Wharton propagates the miser stereotype while denying his character social mobility and agency. These stereotypes will be analyzed and revealed by identifying the biographical influences for Simon Rosedale, tracing historical biological definitions of Jews as a race rather than religious group or ethnicity in the nineteenth century, analyzing language and discourse, understanding Jews as a scapegoat, examining alienation from the superior class, and exploring the role of racial purity and miscegenation in a white Anglo-Saxon hegemonic society.

2. Biographical Influences for Simon Rosedale

The inspiration for Simon Rosedale is speculated by Irene Goldman, who argues Rosedale was part of the second wave of German Jews emigrating to America beginning in 1837. His character directly emulates "wealthy German Jewish businessmen [such as Joseph Seligman] . . . who were Wall Street investment bankers – bankers who loaned money in return for stock rather than for a note" (27). Like Rosedale, "the Yankee commercial bankers – were indeed . . . in the position to give 'tips'" (27). These bankers were kept close to social circles for their "tips" and financial support of government activities but ultimately were never permitted to enter these circles. Instead, the Jewish businessmen's desires to climb the social ladder were exploited by other businessmen, politicians, and even presidents.³ In the early twentieth century as "many more of the German immigrants and their children grew affluent, they sought admission in even-larger numbers to the social clubs, resorts, hotels and college fraternities dominated by Gentiles" (Gerber 22). Even though Jews were rarely admitted, their attempts caused panic and posed a threat.

Moreover, Rosedale's absence from visits to Bellomont in the novel resembles an incident in 1877 when Joseph Seligman and his family were denied hospitality at the Grand Union Hotel in Saratoga, New York. The historical moment led to the widespread acceptance of denying certain privileges to Jews (Birmingham 143). Wharton's novel thus accurately portrays the alienation and exclusion of Jews from the society in which she lived. In *The House of Mirth* Wharton amalgamates historical Jewish figures to sculpt the stereotypical Jewish businessman as a threat to the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant American elites.

3. Historical Understanding of Race Defined Biologically

Critics of Wharton's work often overlook race as Wharton carefully constructs her novels camouflaging racist ideologies. Yet Wharton "is thoroughly implicated in standard turn-of-the-century racist and colonial attitudes and rhetorics . . . we must refuse to continue to approach her work as if race is not an operative category within it" (Ammons 68, 83)⁴. Readers neglect the critical dialogue between author, audience, ideology, history, and text when they ignore race in Wharton's writing. Analyzing *The House of Mirth* through a racial lens allows readers to understand the novel as a historical artifact. In overlooking race, readers fail to appreciate her ability to craft characters and understand her social commentary.

The nineteenth century "was the heyday of appeals to race," seeing a rise in popularity of biological racial ideology in literature, and Wharton's writings were no exception (Appiah 276). Her work, as evidently demonstrated in *The House of Mirth*, not only portrays her racial attitudes but also the attitudes of the elite society in which she lived. Her writing comes with the strong influence of a new development in science, the emergence of biology as a field of science. Biology and social Darwinist race theory led to breakthroughs in the concept of race, seeing race

as a biological category in which human beings could be classified and analyzed as species and subspecies by characteristics of race.⁵ Society began viewing race in terms of biology defining groups as biologically inferior or superior. By the mid-nineteenth century, it was firmly believed that "nonwhite people lacked either the intelligence or the vigor of white races: among which the highest" were considered Anglo-Saxon (Appiah 280). It is widely understood that Wharton was an avid reader and admirer of social Darwinist race theory that fortified white Anglo-Saxon superiority and informs her dominant characters in *The House of Mirth*.⁶ Wharton's anti-Semitism burns in her published personal letters and reveals shared racist generalizations and stereotypes of her contemporaries.⁷

Wharton's anti-Semitic beliefs are reflected in the hegemonic white Anglo-Saxon society in which she lived in. Even when Jews excelled, critics were quick to accredit their success to racially inherited traits. For example, in 1917 when the popularity of basketball increased in the Jewish community, the *Daily News* published an article explaining: "basketball 'appeal[s] to the temperament of the Jews' because of its 'premium on an alert, scheming mind . . . flashy trickiness, artful dodging and general smart aleckness'" (Anbinder 423). The *Daily News* excuses the physical nature of the sport and expands on anti-Semitic tropes about manipulation and subversion promoting fear and mistrust. Not only the media, but politicians also furthered fear by passing legislation in the late nineteenth century that "deliberately [kept] Jews . . . from entering the country" during the American financial depression (between 1893 and 1897) (Goldman 28). This legislation introduced by Henry Cabot Lodge supported anti-Semitic beliefs and fears of Jews as invaders of American society. The financial depression perpetuated mistrust as some Jews rose to financial success while much of the general population needed to work harder to maintain their exclusive privileged status. Wharton along with Lodge believed Jews were a

separate race and "to be a separate race meant more than just to have certain physical characteristics . . . the traits of avarice, business astuteness, and social vulgarity were seen as inherent to Jews" (Goldman 29). These principles are perfectly portrayed as immanently linked in Wharton's Jew, whose physical biology and behavior are described as attributes of his race.

This widely accepted association between biology and race is particularly dangerous when manifested in characters such as Wharton's Sim Rosedale, whom she defines as of the Jewish "race." Her definition of the white race in the novel is characterized by white Anglo-Saxon Protestants and all alternative "races" fit into the category of "other" or "nonwhite." She constructs a racial meaning beyond physical inheritable characteristics combining morality and good manners, heightening an awareness between an inferior group and the superior white Anglo-Saxons. Her racial designations are significant towards her attention to otherness or nonwhiteness by reflecting Omi and Winant's Racial Formation Theory which states: "race-making can also be understood as a process of 'othering' . . . perceived distinctions, are frequently evoked to justify structures of inequality, differential treatment, [and] subordinate status" (Omi & Winant 105).⁸ Describing Rosedale by his race rather than religion or cultural ethnicity allows him to be defined as nonwhite and inferior to his wealthy counterparts. Characters in the novel who classify Rosedale, in turn, classify themselves as belonging to an elitist oppositional group, creating two distinct groups and an unequal power structure. Rosedale's race dictates his rights and agency in early twentieth century America. Rosedale may have financial success in the novel, but his social mobility is capped as determined by the economically driven Anglo-Saxon elites. Since "in the United States, race is a master category," the reproduction of hierarchies result in marginalization based on race as portrayed through an imbalance of power in Wharton's racialized characters (Omi & Winant 106).

4. Analysis of Language and Discourse

Wharton uses her language in *The House of Mirth* to define her characters racially and create a hierarchical power structure exploiting otherness. Through language, stereotypes portray inequalities and inferiority. Written shortly before her death, Edith Wharton's *A Backward Glance* (1934) provides an intimate account of her personal and social life. The book provides evidence for motivations and techniques sculpted in many of her novels. For example, Wharton's masterful craft for language is detailed:

I used to say that I had been taught only two things in my childhood: the modern languages and good manners . . . But in justice to my parents I ought to have named a third element in my training; a reverence for the English language as spoken according to the best usage. Usage, in my childhood, was as authoritative an element in speaking English as tradition was in social conduct. And it was because our little society still lived in the reflected light of a long-established culture that my parents, who were far from intellectual, who read little and studied not at all, nevertheless spoke their mother tongue with scrupulous perfection, and insisted that their children should do the same. (48-49)

Wharton's respect for language is undeniable and evident throughout her novels and she uses language as a tool for characterization in *The House of Mirth*. The elite characters speak with "scrupulous perfection," while substandard jargon is reserved for her inferior characters, such as Sim Rosedale. In linking language with manners and social conduct, it can be inferred that individuals with poor language skills are subordinate. A poor grasp of the English language is implied to denote social vulgarity and inferiority. In the novel thus, Wharton uses the elocution of a race to determine superiority.

4.1 Analysis of Language and Discourse: Narrator and Narration

In multiple instances in *The House of Mirth*, the narrator's language describes Rosedale by defining his race's characteristics. Wharton's definitions call on traditional stereotypes that are clearly negative. The language the narrator uses makes biased statements regarding the "Jewish race" declaring them as fact. For example, the text says: "he had his race's accuracy in the appraisal of values" (19) and "Rosedale, with that mixture of artistic sensibility and business astuteness which characterizes his race" (20). These declarative sentences suggest fact-based observations rather than subjective opinions, recreating a particular hegemonic version of Wharton's world. By associating business terms with the Jewish race, Wharton effectively portrays her Jewish character as materialistic, shallow, and greedy. Throughout the novel she perpetuates the usurer stereotype imbedded in American anti-Semitic beliefs. Using rhetoric that pairs Jews with words like "appraisal" and "business" reverts to a twelfth-century stereotype created when Jews dominated the moneylending industry.⁹ By the twentieth century,

the usurer stereotype was firmly enshrined in law, literature, and art . . . [and] because of that long and prominent engagement of many Jews in moneylending, and also their later prominence in high finance, the stereotypes of Jews as peculiarly adept in economic manipulations . . . had some basis in reality.

(Frankel 16)

Wharton's Jewish businessman is built on a history of negative and alienating Jewish stereotypes firmly believed by society. When describing Rosedale's marriage proposal to Lily, the narrator states, "put by Rosedale in terms of business-like give-and-take, this understanding took on the harmless air of a mutual accommodation, like a transfer of property or a revision of boundary lines" (338). In portraying a marriage proposal as a business transaction, Wharton attributes anti-

Semitic stereotypes to Rosedale prohibiting him from being a sympathetic character. The narrator's language exposes Rosedale's inability to distinguish intimate personal affairs from business. These stereotypes led to mistrust and envy perpetuating otherness and exclusion. If Rosedale is only defined as a businessman, he cannot be a romantic character.

The anti-Semitic stereotype inextricably linking Jews with business "represented both the capitalist virtues and the capitalist vices. On the favorable side, Jews symbolized an admirable keenness and resourcefulness in trade" (Hingham 101). When characters in the novel suffer in a struggling market, Rosedale prospers, implying his manipulative capitalistic ways: "according to Wall Street rumors, Welly Bry and Rosedale had found the secret of performing this miracle" (155). Even though both Rosedale and Bry are prosperous in the market, little attention is paid to Bry. Instead, the conversation lingers on Rosedale's success and he becomes easily taken advantage of for his financial insights. The white elite characters only view him for his financial prowess. One investor even claims, "he's a chap it pays to be decent to" (120) referring literally to the monetary benefits. Financially savvy investors exploit Rosedale's desperation for acceptance by exchanging dinners for advice on the market. Since his financial rise and slow but minor social ascent are credited to "the instincts of his race," Rosedale is viewed as a sly Jewish capitalist (17). These moments are indicative of widespread anti-Semitic judgments as:

Americans at the time often equated keenness in a capitalist with cunning in a Jew, and enterprise in a Jew was often seen as straying into the realm of avarice. The derogatory remarks by characters in *The House of Mirth* pass on the double standard of seeing things as virtues in Gentiles and vices in Jews. (Reigel 222)

The white Anglo-Saxon Welly Bry's success is expected and admired, but Rosedale's success is worthy of envy and malice because of his race. None of the characters consider manipulating Bry for their personal gains because he is also white.

Wharton also manipulates discursive power in her conversations between Rosedale and other characters. In fact, Rosedale never speaks to any other characters aside from Lily. By prohibiting Rosedale from speaking to other characters, Wharton confirms Rosedale's alienation and otherness. According to Gabriele Griffin's argument on discourse analysis, this dynamic "provides insights into the portrayal of social structures during the period" based on the verbal space occupied by Rosedale; he is unwelcomed by society and is not even permitted to communicate with the dominant race consequently occupying no space in conversations with multiple characters (94). Early in the novel, when Rosedale is invited to a party out of pity, he is surrounded by Gus Trenor, Lawrence Seldon, and Lily, but he is the only character without a line of dialogue. Lily's submission, by speaking to him when the other guests leave, makes her a heroine for having the courage and sympathy to speak to a member of a lower race. Although she speaks to him, her language is often dismissive, as she hardly entertains his comments. In this scene, the narrator notes Lily's anxiety by prohibiting her of words and conveying her paranoia in being seen with Rosedale: "Lily gave him a startled look: his voice was louder than usual, and the room was beginning to fill with people. But as her glance assured her that they were still beyond ear-shot a sense of pleasure replaced her apprehension" (118). Her debasement in acknowledging him at all aligns with her fall from social graces as she is ousted by the wealthy and powerful Bertha Dorset and loses financial stability. She is in a liminal state between social statuses; she cannot afford to be with the elite, but she is not base enough to partake in miscegenation. Wharton's language reflects not just her personal beliefs but those of her

contemporaries and the white hegemonic society she lived in: "Wharton and her set believed that all people belong to a particular race and that this racial inheritance accounts for not just physical, but intellectual, linguistic, moral and spiritual characteristics as well" (Goldman 30). Through the narrator, Wharton shows Rosedale's characteristics that were widely accepted as attributes of his race.

4. 2 Analysis of Language and Discourse: Form - How Rosedale Talks

Despite being economically superior, Rosedale is beneath Lily in society and is portrayed so in his language. The wealthy counterparts in the novel speak eloquently and at times are depicted speaking French (a hint to their privileged education). Their fluency and grammatical accuracy depict their intellectual superiority; their race is characterized by loftier language. Rosedale, on the other hand, is the only wealthy character in the novel who uses inferior jargon. Few characters are depicted struggling to utilize their language to Wharton's standards: a housemaid, Gerty Farish, Sim Rosedale, and in one instance, Gus Trenor. Their use of contractions, specifically "'em," and colloquialisms position them as inferior. The housemaid's poor English is logical as her occupation suggests a substandard level of education and she cannot be expected to speak with reverence. Gerty Farish, although part of the Anglo-Saxon group, is often excluded as she is unmarried and lives alone. Even though she is one of Lily's only sincere friends, her friendship denotes Lily's fall from social graces. To Lily, Gerty is not a girl to be admired but rather a girl to pity. As Lily falls, Gerty is the only individual low enough to be, quite literally, a shoulder to cry on. It is no surprise then that Gerty's language would match her inability to elevate her social status beyond old maid.

Rosedale's use of contractions, on the other hand, is inexplicable except as an attribution of his bad manners and poor social conduct. Even in a scene where he boasts opulence by presenting a lavish wedding present, a diamond pendant, he is degraded to the level of the poor and ill-mannered through his language. His language does not match the wealth of the gift when he uses "'em," exhibiting a lack of control over the language which someone with an opulent gift should have in Wharton's eyes. Lily and other guests are perturbed by his obtrusive presence rather than impressed. His language represents his otherness as he is intruding on this elite society. Unlike the other characters, Rosedale's vulgarity is inexcusable as it is simply a characteristic of his race; his vulgar language matches his vulgar social presence. Rosedale's jargon marks him as an immoral foreigner and his racial inferiority casts him as powerless.

During his marriage proposal to Lily, in which he is desperately trying to woo her with his proposition, he uses "'em" and "ain't." His slang coupled with his attempt to persuade her only make him more unappealing to Lily. An individual of Lily's status would never use such base language when speaking especially when proposing marriage. Wharton uses his meager language as a symbol that his race is not worthy of intermingling with someone of Lily's caliber. He becomes not just an invader into society but an invader into the English language, the language of the white American identity.

The only white Anglo-Saxon socio-economically superior character to use jargon when speaking is Gus Trenor and this only occurs in one instance. Trenor resorts to using "'em " in the scene where he forces himself upon Lily (185, 187). His language and behavior are lascivious and his base language demeans him regardless of his affluence and social status. Like Rosedale, his language signifies vulgarity. This connection between Trenor and Rosedale suggests that just as Trenor attempts to violate Lily's body, Rosedale attempts to violate society. Trenor is

ultimately forgiven for his language as he never again stoops to contractions. Trenor has the privilege to behave immorally and is protected by his racial status. Rosedale, on the other hand, consistently defiles the form of a language Wharton held so dear. Rosedale's religion allows him to be a scapegoat and his vulgarity is expected; his language is used as an excuse to alienate him.

4.3 Analysis of Language and Discourse: Content - What Rosedale Talks About

Wharton brilliantly weds form and content to offend and exemplify Rosedale's ignorance. It is not only Rosedale's vernacular that perturbs Lily but also his subject matter. In *A Backward Glance* Wharton notes, "one of the first rules of conversation was the one early instilled in me by my mother: 'Never talk about money'" (57). Although other characters talk of transactions and wealth, it is Rosedale who blatantly discusses Lily's finances and offers frequent deals; it is fundamentally his sole talking point. Wharton depicts Rosedale as unable to separate capital from sentimentality. He tarnishes a proposal by stipulating a business offer, deeming Lily a commodity rather than a human with needs, wants, and desires. His offer is cold and calculated, portraying the "business astuteness which characterizes his race" (20). Unlike the sentimental Lawrence Seldon, who speaks at length in the beginning of the novel about the unimportance and frivolity of money, Rosedale is incapable of being anything other than the embodiment of greed; as Hildegard Hoeller notes, "it is precisely his inability to transcend his capitalist view of life that disqualifies him as a human being and makes him the 'Jew'" (18).

Rosedale's arrangement posits him as rapacious in opposition to Seldon's romantic language. When Rosedale discovers Lily's ability to blackmail Bertha Dorset, he encourages her to dishonor herself while also establishing his position of financial power:

"You're wondering how I found out about 'em?" he went on, answering her look with a note of conscious pride. "Perhaps you've forgotten that I'm the owner of the Benedick—but never mind about that now. Getting on to things is a mighty useful accomplishment in business, and I've simply extended it to my private affairs."

(336-7)¹⁰

Rosedale's reminder to Lily that he is the owner of the Benedick situates him in a domineering and threatening dynamic over Lily. Rosedale's ownership suggests his subversive manipulation of the superior white Anglo-Saxon characters. Furthermore, this scene occurs during his marriage proposal to Lily. He displays both a manipulative and predatory nature while offering a marriage proposal as "an accomplishment in business."

A thorough analysis of the novel must acknowledge that Lily does offer herself on the market, as a bride for sale, but ultimately, she denies any suitor in exchange for money. Although even Dorset suggests the financial benefits of marriage, it is only after he is victimized as a cuckold. His suggestion is far less of a business deal and more of a desperate plea. Unlike Rosedale, his proposal seems less transactional, as Dorset is limited by manners; as Goldman argues, "Rosedale, being a Jew, can speak of economics when other society members, whose conduct is governed by economics, nevertheless maintain a willful silence about anything having to do with it" (32). It is Dorset's circumstances that lead him to speak of marriage as transaction, not his race.

Wharton paints Rosedale as a man with no ambition for love but rather usurpation in the white upper class through greed. His only opportunity for mobility exists in trading financial tips for opportunities to be seen with white characters in elite social spaces. Furthermore, his conversations often revolve around his procurement and objectification of white Anglo-Saxon

socialite Lily Bart as a wife to elevate his social ranking: "it was becoming more and more clear to him that Miss Bart herself possessed precisely the complementary qualities needed to round off his social personality" (156). Rosedale views Lily as the object that will elevate his social status in which his money already belongs. In marrying Lily, he would rise in the ranks where he has been frequently ostracized. He is ostentatious and entitled claiming in a marriage proposal to Lily, "I generally HAVE got what I wanted in life, Miss Bart. I wanted money, and I've got more than I know how to invest; and now the money doesn't seem to be of any account unless I can spend it on the right woman" (228). By combining money and marriage in the same sentence, Rosedale is not a sympathetic victim of unrequited love but a businessman offering a deal. He is unlike Lily's other suitor, Lawrence Selden, who is not concerned with material values and has a tender attitude towards Lily. Wharton thus makes a commentary on conspicuous consumption, with Rosedale appraising humans as objects. His lengthy proposal is insincere and offers Lily profit rather than love. However, an "interracial" marriage would degrade and tarnish Lily's white status and purity.

In a moment of desperation after Lily refuses his proposal, Rosedale suggests, "I'm just giving you a plain business statement of the consequences. You're not very fond of me—YET—but . . . You like to have a good time, and not have to settle for it; and what I propose to do is to provide for the good time and do the settling" (229-230). Wharton portrays Rosedale as a man willing to sacrifice love for a profitable exchange; he acknowledges Lily's revulsion of him, but is willing to settle for a rewarding boost in the social hierarchy. It is his awareness of her repulsion that makes his proposition so vile; the marriage is proposed as a metaphorical invasion of her society. By marrying business jargon with courtship Rosedale identifies marriage as transactional, eliminating a romantic human drive; to Rosedale, love is transactional. This

threatens his masculinity and humanity. His role shifts from man to business partner, eradicating any masculine conjugal chances. He loses any opportunity to be a sympathetic character as his morals are defined in dollars rather than love.

Not only is Rosedale's proposal entirely transactional but he speaks excessively about opulence and money, something Wharton considered taboo and distasteful. He is the only character in the novel to speak so openly about money and does so in the least appropriate of circumstances. He tells Lily when trying to court her, "some women looked buried under their jewelry. What I want is a woman who'll hold her head higher the more diamonds I put on it" leading his courtship to revolve around excess, opulence, and material, not love (228). Although Lily outwardly does not appear to be looking for love, it is clear that she loves Lawrence Seldon despite his humble financial attitude.

Wharton was not alone in her understanding of Jews as dangerous, arrogant, and garish. Wharton's contemporary, William Lecky, who wrote extensively on Jews and their historical role in society, claims:

Great is the power of assimilation the Jewish race possesses, the charm and grace of manner seem to have been among the qualities they most slowly and most imperfectly acquire . . . [their] love of the loud, the gaudy, the ostentatious, and the meretricious and their inability to master the happy mean between arrogance and obsequiousness. (114-115)

It is not unexpected, then, that Rosedale is described as "half obsequious, half obtrusive" in the novel (118). Lecky's commentaries match Rosedale's language as he ineptly attempts to charm and grace Lily with his devotion to opulence and wealth. The flashy, pretentious, and superficial desires ascribed to Jews inform Rosedale's decision to lure Lily with the temptations of excess.

A pure albeit shallow Lily still has better manners than to succumb to the seductions of conspicuous consumption.

Rosedale's imperfect attempt to assimilate is seamlessly depicted in the grandiose wedding gift. While a wedding gift poses as an opportunity to tastefully impress, Rosedale misses the mark, and his gift is portrayed as tasteless and arrogant. Rather than impress, his gift perturbs the wedding guests; Gerty Farish exclaims, "Oh, Lily, do look at this diamond pendant—it's as big as a dinner-plate! Who can have given it?' Miss Farish bent short-sightedly over the accompanying card. '*Mr. Simon Rosedale*. What, that horrid man?'" (116). Although Lily seems less offended than Gerty by the gift, the gifts from other guests are described as "much prettier" and "exquisite" (116). Gerty's remarks, while affected by her dislike of Rosedale, represent a repulsion to Jews expressing great wealth. Instead of being accepted as part of the tradition, Rosedale's gift is cast out and offends. His only desire is to adapt and integrate into the elite society, but his race informs his relationship to material objects and thus disqualifies him from having the good manners (language) and taste (gift) to do so.

By juxtaposing Rosedale's language (in both form and content) and the language of other characters, Wharton creates an excuse to alienate Rosedale accentuating his inferior immobile role in society. In carefully crafting what Rosedale says, Wharton can tie poor racial inheritance to intellect and morality. Both the form and content of his language and the language used by the narrator alienate Rosedale from the society he wishes to be a part of and portrays his inferiority. Furthermore, Wharton's discourse and language on Jews and money reveal the anti-Semitic views popular during her lifetime; Rosedale's transactional language propagates the usurer stereotype so detailed in *The House of Mirth*.

5. Rosedale as Scapegoat

Although Rosedale appears to be a two-dimensional Jewish stereotype, Wharton crafts other characters in the novel to complicate Rosedale's role in society. Despite being a member of an inferior racial group, vulgarity, manipulation, and rapacity are not exclusively attributed to Rosedale, still Rosedale is the only one ostracized for these qualities. Wharton thus uses Rosedale as a scapegoat to hold a mirror to society's hypocrisies. She forces her readers to see the irony in having villainous characters such as Gus Trenor and Bertha Dorset forgiven or excused and Rosedale vilified and blamed. While his shortcomings, flaws, and errors are rooted in his race, the qualities of greed, lust, and exploitation are exhibited by other characters. However, neither Gus Trenor nor Bertha Dorset experiences any rebuke or alienation for their uncouth behavior.

Rosedale, discounting his race, is far less of a villain than Bertha Dorset and Gus Trenor. Rosedale poses only a hypothetical risk to Lily; the reader never directly sees her suffer as a consequence of his actions. Bertha, on the other hand, devastates Lily's reputation through manipulation (a quality often ascribed to Jews). Bertha's manipulation causes Lily to consider marrying Rosedale and ultimately destroys her relationship with Lawrence Seldon. Moreover, Bertha is having an affair. Bertha exhibits lust, rapacity and a thirst for social power. The general fear towards Rosedale, and all Jews, warns against these qualities, yet Lily does not suffer on behalf of Rosedale's actions. While these qualities would be condemned in a Jew, they are excused in Bertha because of her race, which provides her with dominance and power.

Gus Trenor, likewise, attempts to rape Lily, and his lecherous assault leads to much gossip around her. Lily's appearance of giving in to Trenor's lustful demands certainly jeopardizes her reputation and contributes to her financial ruin. Dorset and Trenor's behaviors

pass as socially acceptable simply because of the power integral to their racial inheritance. However, it is these characteristics that define Rosedale's race thus rendering him inherently insidious. While Rosedale's behaviors are blamed on his race, Bertha's and Trenor's are pardoned: "with all his faults, Trenor had the safeguard of his traditions, and was the less likely to overstep them because they were so purely instinctive" (147). Despite trying to rape Lily, Trenor is redeemed by white privilege. Rosedale thus becomes a scapegoat and his propositions, albeit far more benign and less aggressive, are deemed vulgar and unforgiveable. Rosedale is the only character forced to embody the sins of Bertha Dorset and Gus Trenor despite not having behaved so viciously.

Wharton suggests that Lily fails to capitalize on her inherited white Anglo-Saxon privilege which ultimately leads to her demise. Unlike Bertha Dorset and Gus Trenor, Lily is described as rootless, prohibiting her from fully maximizing her privilege. It is not her race that makes her a victim, but rather her inability to capitalize on her inheritance:

That was the feeling which possessed her now—the feeling of being something rootless and ephemeral . . . Her parents too had been rootless, blown hither and thither on every wind of fashion, without any personal existence to shelter them from its shifting gusts. She herself had grown up without any one spot of earth being dearer to her than another: there was no centre of early pieties, of grave endearing traditions, to which her heart could revert and from which it could draw strength for itself and tenderness for others. In whatever form a slowly-accumulated past lives in the blood. (417-418)

Just before Lily's death, the narrator acknowledges that Lily has failed because she could not make the most of her blood, her racial inheritance. Rosedale similarly lacks roots; the reader

never sees him engage in non-secular activities, nor does he tie himself to other Jewish characters. Rosedale, portrayed as rootless, poses a threat to tradition. Lily's lack of roots acts as a symptom of her modernity and Rosedale, as a rootless Jew, embodies the modernity that threatens Lily. Yet, in stark contrast to Lily, Rosedale begins to rise in society because he is denied any association with a Jewish community. Nonetheless, Rosedale will never fully integrate in society because he is a scapegoat for immorality and can never fully be separated from his Jewishness.

Race, as an inherited quality, is demonstrated as providing privilege to Wharton's white Anglo-Saxon characters. According to Goldman, "To Wharton, all people are the products of their racial inheritance" (31). Nonetheless Lily was never tied to her inheritance. This belief leads Lily to trust villains like Gus Trenor and Bertha Dorset but to distrust Rosedale. Bertha and Trenor only appear amiable and trustworthy because of their racial inheritance or white privilege. Rosedale's racial inheritance makes him a deviant and pariah; his Jewishness leads Lily and her society to view Rosedale as a villain, and Wharton chooses death for her heroine rather than miscegenation.

In blurring the lines between villain and victim, Wharton crafts Rosedale to be a complex figure to comment on a hypocrisy she sees in her society. While she utilizes and manipulates Jewish stereotypes, she complicates his role by juxtaposing him with other villainous characters. Although he is ultimately cast as the greatest pariah and contaminant in elite society, the presence of other immoral characters allows deeper exploration of his wrongdoings. It becomes clear through analysis that his greatest flaw is his race rather than his behavior. Ultimately, Rosedale embodies Jewish stereotypes that present a threat to the white Anglo-Saxon society.

6. Alienation

The language Wharton uses throughout the novel for the narrator, Rosedale, and other characters as well as their behaviors create a norm and a deviation. Rosedale's language, both the way he speaks and his subject matter, shapes his otherness, and his role as a scapegoat deepens an excuse for exclusion. In an analysis of outcasts and normalcy in literature, Lennard Davis describes, "the concept of a norm . . . implies that the majority of the population must or should somehow be part of the norm. So, with the concept of the norm comes the concept of deviations or extremes" (6). *The House of Mirth* establishes the "norm" in society early on in the novel, chapter five, when the wealthy characters, with the exception of Rosedale, travel to Bellomont. While in Bellomont, the white Anglo-Saxon characters perform their societal roles by attending church: "the Wetheralls always went to church. They belonged to the vast group of human automata who go through life without neglecting to perform a single one of the gestures executed by the surrounding puppets" (66). Rosedale, who is of financially equal status as the Wetheralls, is not only exempt from the scene but also, due to his religion, could never join the puppets' regular church attendance. The puppets represent the norms in society; Rosedale is a clear deviation, and his exclusion casts him as a deviant to the church-going community. From the beginning of the novel he is established as an outcast and is thus alienated from social engagements. By mocking the Wetheralls, Wharton is also making a social commentary on the elite class in which she was a part of.

Race, in a world dominated by racial politics, easily becomes a central theme in literature. The characters in *The House of Mirth* embody racial politics at the turn of the century by alienating Rosedale from their social lives. Although Jews were welcomed into certain elite private social clubs in New York City, such as The Union League Club, into the 1890s, by 1895

many of "the city's Republican establishments were no longer admitting Jews" (Anbinder 441)¹¹. Wharton portrays this rejection in the text by prohibiting Rosedale from patronizing certain elite social clubs, private affairs, and restaurants. His physical presence is absent from these scenes and characters express his otherness as an excuse to why he is unwelcomed.

Only the "improvident" Jack Stepney tries to include Rosedale in social gatherings: "Jack Stepney, had obtained for him (in return for favors too easily guessed) a card to one of the vast impersonal Van Osburgh 'crushes'—Rosedale, with that mixture of artistic sensibility and business astuteness which characterizes his race, had instantly gravitated toward Miss Bart" (20). The sentence is vague, as it is unclear if a favor was owed to the Van Osburghs for the invitation or if Rosedale had to provide a favor for the invitation. In the one scenario, it is clear that Rosedale's presence is unwelcomed by the hosts, and likely their guests, despite the event being "impersonal." If the second scenario is true, Stepney is a sycophant.

The subsequent moment suggests both scenarios to be possible. The Van Osburghs, along with their Anglo-Saxon elitist friends, disapprove of Rosedale's presence in social settings and Jack Stepney sees Rosedale as a tool for capitalist gain:

Even Mrs. Trenor, whose taste for variety had led her into some hazardous experiments, resisted Jack's attempts to disguise Mr. Rosedale as a novelty, and declared that he was the same little Jew who had been served up and rejected at the social board a dozen times within her memory; and while Judy Trenor was obdurate there was small chance of Mr. Rosedale's penetrating beyond the outer limbo of the Van Osburgh crushes. Jack gave up the contest with a laughing "You'll see," and, sticking manfully to his guns, showed himself with Rosedale at the fashionable restaurants, in company with the personally vivid if socially

obscure ladies who are available for such purposes. But the attempt had hitherto been vain, and as Rosedale undoubtedly paid for the dinners, the laugh remained with his debtor. (20-21)

Judy Trenor's comments recall the racialized politics of the time that prohibited Jews from joining social groups, clubs, and boards. By the end of the nineteenth century, anti-Semitic views were not only pervasive but also fashionable in America:

Few Jews had belonged to exclusive social clubs, civic boards, and business clubs... Gentiles rejected the notion of sharing with Jews the social prestige conferred by such places and organization. The Jews were deemed socially unacceptable intruders who brought only money to the elevated circles to which they sought entrance. (Gerber 23)

This scene depicts Rosedale as a "socially unacceptable intruder" as Stepney's attempts are scorned and only "obscure ladies who are available for such purposes" are willing to be seen in public with Rosedale. The scene also supports the second scenario stereotype that Jews were affluent capitalists with little else to offer. The improvident Jack Stepney is willing to stain his public image in exchange for financial gains from Rosedale. Stepney's foreshadowing, "you'll see," hints at Rosedale's success in an unstable market. While the white Anglo-Saxon investors struggle, Rosedale's perceived cunning capitalist nature leads to financial success and Stepney predicts this based on his race alone.

Judy Trenor's husband, Gus, also addresses the alienating side effect of anti-Semitism when he notes, "I don't believe two women have spoken to him this afternoon, and I can tell you he's a chap it pays to be decent to" (120). He acknowledges Rosedale's isolation at an engagement party and reiterates Stepney's intentions to take advantage of Rosedale. Irrespective

of Trenor's suggestion, Rosedale remains excluded at the party and his presence is described as "half obsequious, half obtrusive" (118). The physical space Rosedale occupies in the novel is described as unwanted and intrusive, as he is violating social norms. Trenor and Stepney's intentions with Rosedale "make it clear that this kind of reciprocal behavior is an integral part of the maintenance of social standing in New York" (Reigel 221). Trenor and Stepney are never seen in dialogue with Rosedale, but their engagement with him is implied. Nonetheless, their intentions are selfish and materialistic. Wharton is both perpetuating anti-Semitic tropes and exposing the anti-Semitism in her society.

Rosedale's most notable exclusion occurs in book two when Lily travels to Europe with the Dorsets. The novel's imperialist backdrop, set just after the U.S. success over Spain, once again stresses racial colonial ideologies. The Anglo-Saxon characters tour through Europe with the privileges of their race, traveling through different countries with ease. Rosedale's absence conveniently reflects his function as the Jew; Elizabeth Ammons describes Rosedale's role as, "the outsider, the carrier of race whose presence sets in relief Anglo-Saxonness, showing us its supreme superiority" (80). His absence makes him the outcast, the deviation, the extreme, juxtaposing the ideologically superior race as free, privileged, and normal. While the white characters appropriate European culture by gallivanting freely through Europe, Rosedale is nonexistent. Lily and her friends are seen taking advantage of their white privilege for numerous chapters and Rosedale is notably excluded from these pages. His alienation is obvious as he's mentioned but not included in their travel activities. Wharton prevents any opportunity for compassion for Rosedale by attributing his alienation to his race, claiming "the instincts of his race fitted him to suffer rebuffs and put up with delays" (156), and he was "disciplined by the tradition of his blood to accept what was conceded" (231). This language makes their choice to

exclude Rosedale acceptable as it is a characteristic of his race to concede exclusion. It would not be appropriate for Rosedale to take part in the excursion to Europe because his race is not afforded the necessary white privilege. His presence would represent an invasion or a pillaging rather than an exploration.

7. Racial Purity

The backdrop of U.S. colonial ambitions¹² and rise in Social Darwinist Theory and eugenics in the late nineteenth century informed a society reliant on the white Anglo-Saxon purity that defined the American identity. This identity stemmed from the rise of the United States as a world power and its competition with European rivals for control of the non-European world during the nineteenth and twentieth century. This ideology is portrayed in *The House of Mirth* culminating in Lily's death. Wharton effectively tells her audience it is better to die than partake in interracial marriage, in this case, marrying the Jewish Sim Rosedale. The scene is laden with suggestive language of procreation citing her "mating-instinct," "it had taken two to build the nest," and in an intoxicated trance Lily hallucinates falling asleep with the "warmth and pleasure" of a "sleeping child" (422). Wharton emphasizes the preservation of racial inherence. Lily's death, portrayed as beautiful and heroic, preserves racial purity as she chooses death over racial contamination. Whether or not Lily commits suicide, Wharton martyrs the character instead of sully her;¹³ despite Lily's moment of weakness in considering marrying Rosedale, Wharton paints her as a tragic heroine. It is no surprise then that the novel was a best seller in a society which valued Anglo-Saxon whiteness as the superior racial group sympathizing with a character who prefers to die than marry a Jew.

In a rare tender moment, Wharton shows Rosedale interacting with a child. Although he never exchanges words with the child, the novel reveals a paternal instinct unseen before and nearly admired by Lily: "Rosedale in the paternal role was hardly a figure to soften Lily; yet she could not but notice a quality of homely goodness in his advances to the child" (325). But just one sentence later, Wharton disgraces this "homely goodness" saying, "yes, he would be kind . . . kind in his gross, unscrupulous, rapacious way, the way of the predatory creature with his mate" (325). Although for a moment Rosedale is portrayed in a slightly positive light, even "the underlying psychology of the benign stereotypes is subtly anti-Semitic" (Schneider 461). Wharton affirms popular anti-Semitic tropes by immediately revoking the benign nature of his "goodness." His subtle moment of ethical ascension is degraded with words like "unscrupulous," "rapacious," and "predatory," reinvigorating stereotypical characteristics of a Jew. Rosedale's relationship to children is predatory rather than paternal; he is emasculated and disparaged.

This familial description of Rosedale, used only a few chapters before her death, loses its endearing quality and poses a threat to Anglo-Saxon purity through interracial reproduction. If Rosedale marries and fathers Lily's children, her Christian purity and white blood would be tarnished by his race; his blood is toxic. Even her name, Lily, evokes an association, according to Christian lore, with the Virgin Mary, with "purity, chastity, and innocence" (Lehner & Lehner 33). Her name conjures her whiteness, her virtue and her superiority. Her last moment holding "the tender pressure of the [imaginary child's] body . . . still close to hers: the recovered warmth flowed through her once more, she yielded to it, sank into it, and slept" portrays Lily's death as holy and pure conjuring the vision of a virgin mother (423). The association between her death, religion, race, and procreation further encourage a racial purity that evaded Jewish

contamination. Wharton prevents Lily's white bloodline from being soiled by the predatory Jew; it is better for Lily to die a virgin than to bear an interracial child.

In an earlier scene, this holy link between Lily and Christian purity is conspicuously addressed: "he had slipped insensibly into the use of her Christian name . . . besides in her set all the men and women called each other by their Christian names" (117). The term "Christian name" denotes an exclusivity (from Baptism), an inheritance denied to characters like Rosedale. Rosedale can never be included as part of "her set" because he does not have a Christian name. This is likely why he is never referred to as Simon or Sim but rather, Rosedale. He does not have the right to a Christian name and is excluded on behalf of his otherness. His otherness would degrade Lily's Christian name especially in considering the loss of her maiden name. Adopting her husband's name would degrade the value of her Christian name.

Rosedale, on the other hand, behaves more like the thorns on a rose. Although a rose may appear to have redeeming qualities, the thorns are inherent to its existence. Likewise, Rosedale's seemingly redeeming qualities are diminished by the barbed qualities of his race. Lily's reaction to seeing him at her door "caused her a sharp pang" as if pricked by a thorn (227). His presence is unwelcomed as he intrudes on her privacy. In this scene he is portrayed as a threat to her holiness and virginity as he suggests Lily engage in the immoral act of extortion and then proposes marriage. His otherness makes him a contaminant to the moral Lily who ultimately refuses both propositions. Even in the end, when Lily is poor, lonely, and in debt, Rosedale gives her an ultimatum to blackmail Bertha Dorset in exchange for his hand, and Lily chooses death over immorality. He is unable to pierce her purity with his uncouth thorn. His unscrupulous pressure to blackmail Dorset echoes anti-Semitic stereotypes of betrayal, manipulation, and

immorality. As a prickly thorn, Rosedale attempts to harm Lily's white identity. His name and presence in the novel stand in for Jews as contaminants of Anglo-Saxon white identity.

8. Conclusion

The language Wharton uses for Rosedale, the dynamic in which he speaks, and his physical and verbal space in *The House of Mirth* illuminate his otherness. He is classified as an outsider contaminating principles of marriage, socio-economic status, and religion. Rosedale essentially is an economic immigrant, raiding the social relations and institutions in early twentieth-century New York. His race is inferior to the Anglo-Saxon upper class he attempts to associate with, and his intention to rise in the ranks is a threat to their whiteness. His existence in the novel embodies fears of Americans during the turn of the century who viewed Jews as a genuine threat to their identity and prosperity. Unfortunately, the racial ideologies exemplified in Wharton's novel still resonate. Just as the novel acts as a product of its culture, it continues to resonate with growing anti-Semitism today. Race in *The House of Mirth* must be considered to better understand rising anti-Semitism today. The myopic wide acceptance of the executive order passed on December 11, to protect Jews in America, fails to connect the blatant anti-Semitic rhetoric with history. It seems society has learned little in 114 years, and there is a vehement return to nationalism, racism, and anti-Semitism. For example, consider the implications of images of Hilary Clinton with the star of David surrounded by cash disseminated on Twitter by President Trump, which harkens back to Wharton's depiction of Rosedale's inextricable link to money. Furthermore, the novel reveals the dangers of these portrayals and touches upon its effects on future generations who grew up reading these popular novels. Reading novels like *The*

House of Mirth as artifacts of history can better educate society on the dangers of stereotypes and racial tropes such as the usurer, infiltrator, and miser that are still propagated today.

Notes

¹ For further discussion on the connection between race, nationality, and literature see Appiah, Anthony Kwame. "Race." *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, edited by Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, The U of Chicago P, 1990, pp. 274-287.

² I use the term "Anglo-Saxon" throughout this paper to describe the white dominant hegemonic group in America during the late 19th and early 20th century. Despite the term being regarded as racially offensive by some scholars, "Anglo-Saxon" was a defining designation used during the time period and accurately describes an identity in Wharton's society. Wharton's contemporaries such as, "Lodge, Adams, and Roosevelt – all friends of Wharton whom she was actively visiting during the time she was writing *The House of Mirth* – believed that American democracy derived from the Anglo-Saxon, Teutonic peoples and that the Aryan race was superior to others" (Goldman, 28-29). Denominations such as "Anglo-Saxon" and "Aryan" had anthropological rather than linguistic meaning resulting in the classification of Jews as a separate race.

³ It was well known that Roosevelt spent time with Wharton while she was writing *The House of Mirth*. Commentary by Irene Goldman and correspondences between the two reveal a shared mistrust of Jews.

⁴ Ammons argues, "I think that the importance of race in Wharton's writing has not received attention for at least two reasons. First, she herself masterfully created the fiction that race was not one of her subjects. Second, her critics - most of them, like her (and me), white people - have been happy to support that fiction" (83).

⁵ According to Ali Mazrui, shortly after Darwin published *On the Origin of Species*, sociologist Herbert Spencer interpreted Darwin's "survival of the fittest" to suggest traits such as intelligence and frugality to be passed genetically. American economist William Graham Sumner argued in the late 19th century that Social Darwinism accounted for competition that weeded out the immoral. Finally, Sir Francis Galton initiated a new "science" which would become known as eugenics (Mazrui).

⁶ In her memoir *A Backward Glance* and in her letters, Wharton describes her delight in receiving works by Darwin and popular race theorists that influenced her perception of race as a biological construct. Wharton explains close friend Egerton Winthrop's "chief gift was to introduce me to the wonder-world of nineteenth century science. He it was who gave me Wallace's 'Darwin and Darwinism,' and 'The Origin of Species,' and made known to me Huxley, Herbert Spencer, Romanes, Haeckel, Westermarck, and the various popular exponents of the great evolutionary movement" (94). Wharton's influences interpreted the social implications of *On the Origin of Species* which were ultimately manipulated to support a racist agenda.

⁷ Wharton's letters with F. Scott Fitzgerald discuss her fondness of his "perfect Jew" in *The Great Gatsby* referring to the corrupt and miserly Meyer Wolfsheim. In a question and answer session with *The Letters of Edith Wharton*, editors R.W.B Lewis and Nancy Lewis admit, "in a few of the letters we rejected, there are some racist or anti-Semitic remarks. There was one letter that we originally planned to include that did contain some vilely anti-Semitic comments." The letters were omitted due to the publisher's concern about Wharton's public image. However, her anti-Semitism is evident to any close reader of her novels.

⁸ Omi and Winant define their racial formation theory as "the process of race making, and its reverberations throughout the social order, is what we call racial formation. We define racial formation as the sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed" (109).

⁹ "Although Christian doctrine [from the twelfth century] . . . disapproved of lending at interest, moneylending became a much needed and highly profitable occupation . . . Jews, who were now excluded from most other occupations . . . were now peculiarly well placed to profit from the new opportunity" (Frankel 16).

¹⁰ Again, Wharton uses "em" to exemplify vulgarity and inferiority.

¹¹ Some of Wharton's own relatives were members of The Union League Club in New York City (Goldberg 26).

¹² The late 19th century saw a surge in U.S. imperialism as exemplified in the Spanish-American War (1898) in which Spain relinquished Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines to the United States.

¹³ Lily's suicide is a highly contentious topic, however, in 2007, a letter discovered in a first-edition copy of *The House of Mirth* may reveal Wharton's intentions. The letter from 1904 to Dr. Francis Kinnicutt asks for advice on "the most painless and least unpleasant method" of committing suicide. Wharton asks "I have a heroine to get rid of, and want some points on the best way of disposing of her . . . What soporific, or nerve-calming drug, would a nervous and worried young lady in the smart set be likely to take to, & what would be its effects if deliberately taken with the intent to kill herself? I mean, how would she feel and look toward the end?" (McGrath).

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