These electronic notes—which may be cited as “e-notes”—supplement the printed endnotes for Sarah Way Sherman’s *Sacramental Shopping: Louisa May Alcott, Edith Wharton, and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2013). The e-notes contain additional material not found in the printed text of the book. Any printed endnote for which an e-note is also available contains a notation to that effect.

**Introduction (pages 1–15)**


2. The website description of the box reads: “The world has been enthralled with the distinctive Tiffany Blue Box since the very beginning. It was Charles Lewis Tiffany who mandated that the coveted boxes could only be acquired with a Tiffany purchase. As reported by the *New York Sun* in 1906, ‘Tiffany has one thing in stock that you cannot buy of him for as much money as you may offer; he will only give it to you. And that is one of his boxes.’ The description concludes: “Glimpsed on a busy street or resting in the palm of a hand, Tiffany Blue Boxes make hearts beat faster, and epitomize Tiffany’s great heritage of elegance, exclusivity, and flawless craftsmanship” (Tiffany & Co., www.tiffany.com/about/thetiffanystory).

Wharton acknowledged the significance of the Tiffany box in her 1913 novel *The Custom of the Country*. When the social climber Undine Spragg receives an engagement ring from Ralph Marvell, a member of one of New York’s “oldest” families, her masseuse and guide, Mrs. Heeny, wonders if the ring might have been passed down in the family. When Undine’s mother anxiously asks, “Why don’t you s’pose he bought it for her, Mrs. Heeny? It came in a Tiff’ny box,” the masseuse laughs, “Of course he’s had Tiff’ny rub it up. Ain’t you ever heard of ancestral jewels, Mrs Spragg? In the Eu-ropene aristocracy they never go out and
buy engagement rings; and Undine’s marrying into our aristocracy” (54). The ring may be the American equivalent of “ancestral jewels,” but it takes a Tiffany box to convey that prestige properly. Edith Wharton, *The Custom of the Country*, ed. with an intro. by Stephen Orgel (1913; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).


Although an immediate bestseller when it appeared in 1905, *The House of Mirth* has never enjoyed the fervent devotion inspired by Alcott's novel. Nevertheless, it has long had an admiring community of “serious” general readers, as well as a secure niche in the canon of academically approved texts. There are numerous editions now in print and critical studies abound, including several volumes devoted to this novel alone: *The House of Mirth: A Casebook*, ed. Carol J. Singley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) and Linda Wagner-Martin, *The House of Mirth: A Novel of Admonition* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1990) among them. Despite its sobering conclusion, this darker novel still has a strong appeal, as evidenced by the well-received 2000 film adaptation, written and directed by Terence Davies, and starring Gillian Anderson as Lily Bart and Eric Stoltz as Laurence Selden (Sony Pictures Classics).

14. According to Rzepka, De Quincy saw the literary text not as a material commodity but as a possible Eucharistic medium, the vessel of a transubstantiated “presence” that, once consumed and “interiorized” as a gift by readers, “turns him who receives it into the spiritual debtor and imaginative communicant of its authorial ‘alpha and omega’ through a sacramental experience of the Sublime” (234). By contrast, the writers I examine are still strongly Protestant in their resistance to the idea of a transubstantiated presence. For them, the literary text, like the Protestant sacrament, produces its effects through symbolic means. Texts transform readers by evoking “remembrance,” thereby engaging emotions and opening dialogue. For more on gift exchange and capitalism, see Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (New York: Random House, 1979); also, Hildegard Hoeller, *From Gift to Commodity: Capitalism and Sacrifice in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2012).

15. According to Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace: “For eighteenth-century England, ambiguity in the notion of ‘consumption’ initiated a national debate: should one consider wide-scale consumerism as enhancing the national coffers, allowing for lucrative trade on a global level, or should one recognize that same spending as draining the nation of its capital, rendering it dependent and ‘weakened’ by its inability to live off indigenous resources? In the writing of male writers from the period we see both views at work in the presentation of consumption. What remains constant on either side of the debate, however, is the notion that women are the primary consumers. Again and again a society that is deeply ambivalent about its own relationship to consumption focuses its attention on the female body” (*Consuming Subjects*, 7). Erin Mackie, in *Fashion, Commodity, and Gender in The Tatler and The Spectator* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), writes of this same period: “Sexual difference removes bourgeois women more completely from the arenas of production, relegating them more and more to spheres of leisured consumption. At the same time it puts certain kinds of consumption and leisure activities outside the bounds of the properly masculine” (168). Focusing on domestic fiction in the United States, Lori Merish “demonstrates that the feminization of consumption in the late eighteenth century partook of new ideas, derived from eighteenth-century pietistic Protestantism and the emerging political discourse of liberalism, about gender, women’s role in the public sphere, and the ‘civilizing’ power of an array of mediating material forms — including luxury commodities and the bodies of ‘refined’ and gracious women” (*Sentimental Materialism*, 2). Her analysis, which parallels my own at key points, argues that “part of the cultural work of domestic fiction . . . was to construct equivalences between material and subject ‘refinement’ — between commodity and psychological forms — while suppressing the marketplace orientation of ‘pri-
vate’ life, often by advertising a distinction between home and market. Reinventing capitalist economic and commodity structures as the form of interiority proper to ‘private’ domestic life, these novels helped write into existence a modern consumer psychology in which individuals ‘express themselves’ through consumption and ‘identify’ with personal possessions” (*Sentimental Materialism*, 3).


19. Franchot argues that “that anti-Catholicism operated as an imaginative category of discourse through which antebellum American writers of popular and elite fictional and historical texts indirectly voiced the tensions and limitations of mainstream Protestant culture” (xvii). The result was a renewed vision of Protestantism’s mission: “This resuscitated evangelical force, heroically transported to the New World in the Puritan migration, reemerged in the nineteenth century as the Protestant Way, a cultural route invoked to unify an increasing fragmented Protestantism and to fight the threats posed by Irish and German Catholic immigration” (4–5).


Bushnell’s ideas were also in accord with those of “sentimental” writers such as Harriet Beecher Stowe. For example, as her biographer Joan Hedrick explains, Stowe ultimately rejected the Calvinist orthodoxy of her father, Lyman Beecher, especially his belief in infant damnation and the requirement of crisis conversion for salvation. Hedrick quotes Stowe’s son Charles, who, in his 1889 authorized biography of his mother, looked back on her early, gentler religious experiences: “If she could have been left alone . . . and taught ‘to look up and not down, forward and not back, out and not in,’ this religious experience might have gone as sweetly and naturally as the opening of a flower in the gentle rays of the sun” (Charles Edward Stowe, *Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Compiled from her Letters and Journals* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1889], 34–35); quoted in Joan Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 144. As Hedrick explains, “Calvinism had been long in decline by this time; the more developmental approach to Christianity that superseded it — explicated in Horace Bushnell’s *Christian Nurture* (1861) — is reflected in Charles Stowe’s sympathetic commentary on the young Harriet’s religious experience” (144).

22. Ann Douglas saw this shift as having negative cultural consequences, a kind of “bad faith” power-seeking by disenfranchised Protestant ministers and middle-class women who, in an industrialized age, had lost economic power and were complicit in the formation of the new consumer culture. Tompkins saw sentimentalism, rather, as a critique of the masculine, capitalist public sphere and its values: the expression of an oppositional feminine world view. Both looked primarily at middle- and upper-class white women and tended to overlook working-class women and women of color. New research puts much less emphasis
on the role of separate spheres, since recent scholarship has shown that the domestic and the public were less separate than previously imagined and that middle-class women’s social roles were more complicit with larger national agendas, such as imperialism and racist ideologies, than had been previously acknowledged. See, for example, Cathy N. Davidson and Jessamyn Hatcher, eds., *No More Separate Spheres!* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002). Some of the most recent work on sentimentalism views it, as Shirley Samuels writes in her introduction to *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), as “literally at the heart of nineteenth-century American culture” (4), a dominant discourse that affected both men and women in many different contexts. There is too much of this new work to cover here, but helpful overviews can be found in the following: Hildegard Hoeller, “From Agony to Ecstasy: The New Studies of American Sentimentality,” *ESQ: Journal of the American Renaissance* 52 (Winter 2006): 339–69; Cindy Weinstein, *Family, Kinship, and Sympathy in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 194–95; and Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler, “Introduction,” *Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture*, ed. Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 1–16.

Much of this new work on sentimentalism draws on the moral philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment, particularly the influence of Adam Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759; rpt. ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Raphael, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), as in Lori Merish’s wide-ranging *Sentimental Materialism*. However, in the case of the Alcotts and the Transcendentalist circle of Concord, the salient influences come from Romantic theology and liberal Protestantism, as can be seen in the early assessment of sentimentalism by Douglas and Tompkins. Douglas, for example, includes Louisa May Alcott and Horace Bushnell, as well as Harriet Beecher Stowe, in the cohort of liberal ministers and women writers assembled for her study. All were influenced by the liberal Protestantism that I will be examining here. And, as discussed in e-note 20 above, Bushnell advanced his own version of this theology in his influential book, *Christian Nurture*, whose ideas about the dependence of moral development on emotional attachment I will be referencing through this study. Thus, although Smith’s ideas were certainly extremely important to many nineteenth-century writers, they are less central to my concerns here, although I will be making some references to Smith’s theory of the “marketplace of virtue,” with its emphasis on the social determination and dissemination of moral values, ideas which also have a place in my story.

23. In *Sentimental Collaborations*, Mary Louise Kete explains that, while sentimentality is not itself a genre, as the “written trace” of a cultural discourse, sentimentality “can inflect any genre.” Moreover, it has some small set of shared, identifiable characteristics” (xiv). In particular, Kete believes that “sentiment . . . structures a collaboration through which individuals can join together in solving the seemingly local problem of grief in the face of death” (3). Her study of a Vermont community — the friends and family of a deceased woman — shows that its members “as post-Calvinist Protestants . . . sought consolation for their losses by attempting to maintain and reinforce their bonds with one another.” (55). Kete concludes from her analysis, that “in contrast to conventional wisdom concerning the nature of American individualism, it was within and through (rather than against) this web of affectionate bonds that the American sense of individualism of constituted” (55). In other words, “the posses-
sive, possessing individual at the base of liberal society is not an autochthonous being but a deeply social, possessed, creature” (56).

This conclusion has much in common with my own reading of the role that “post-Calvinist” Protestantism plays in Alcott’s work, as well as with my interpretation of the importance of the “social self,” or what Kete calls “collaborative individualism,” in sentimental discourse. In addition, Kete believes that “the sentimental mode, as it inflects either the cultural practices of mourning or literature, is not interested in autonomy or liberation but in the restoration of constitutive bonds, which make subjectivity possible” (62). I would agree with this assessment and with the notion that, in sentimental discourse, mourning, with its basis in the rhythms of attachment and loss, replaces crisis conversion as the means by which the individual is brought to full moral awareness, both of self and of others. I will discuss this dynamic later in chapter 1 and, in more detail, in chapter 5.


39. In section 4 of Capital, “The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof,” Marx writes: “A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men’s labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour: because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour
is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour . . . There it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with each other and the human race. So, it is in the world of commodities with the products of men’s hands. This I will call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore in separable from the production of commodities” (72).

CHAPTER 1. Raising Virtuous Shoppers (pages 17–71)


8. In Victorian Domesticity: Families in the Life and Art of Louisa May Alcott (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1985), Charles Strickland also comments that, while Alcott had some reservations about the “sentimental family model,” from her “vantage point, the real warfare within Victorian domesticity was not between women and the family, but rather between the family of fashion and other forms of family life that would square with the aspirations of . . . women like Alcott” (101). John Matteson’s discussion of Alcott’s novel An Old-Fashioned Girl (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1870) also addresses its opposition to
“the family of fashion” and argues that the novel should receive more credit for anticipating themes later treated in Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie*, William Dean Howells’s *A Traveler from Altruria*, and Edith Wharton’s *The Custom of the Country*, novels that also feature male characters “whose wives and daughters have come to have no other purpose in life than to spend and be seen. To keep up with the ceaseless demands of fashion, these characters devote themselves to the making of money, so that at last their relationships with their homes and the people who live there become solely economic” (362).

13. Nicholas Adams, for example, writes, “Just as Aquinas is for many the authoritative voice of medieval Christian theology, so Schleiermacher is the authoritative voice of modern Christian theology” (81). However, Schleiermacher’s dominance was challenged in the early twentieth-century by neo-orthodox theologians such as Karl Barth (see note 14 below). As result, Adams writes, “theology in the twenty-first century has learned from both [Aquinas and Schleiermacher], but is no longer medieval or modern” (Nicholas Adams, “Shapers of Protestantism: F. D. E. Schleiermacher,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Protestantism*, ed. Alister E. McGrath and Darren C. Marks [Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, 2007], 81). As historian Philip Gura notes, Schleiermacher’s first important book, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultural Despisers*, trans. Richard Crouter (1799; rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) had a major influence on many American Transcendentalists. The core affinity between this German Idealist/Romantic theologian and his American Transcendentalist counterparts was his insistence that religious faith and salvation are dependent on emotion and intuition, the human “feeling of radical dependence” on God (Gura, 66–67).

It is not clear if Bronson Alcott read Schleiermacher (he came to German idealist philosophy primarily through the work of Samuel Taylor Coleridge). However, like Alcott, Schleiermacher was deeply influenced by the dialogues of Plato, for which he wrote his own introductions: *Schleiermacher’s Introductions to the Dialogues of Plato*, trans. William Dobson (1836; rept. Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2009). Also like Alcott, Schleiermacher saw the home and domestic relations as crucial for formation of moral and spiritual identity, as exemplified in Schleiermacher’s own “Christmas story”: *Christmas Eve; A Dialogue on the Incarnation*, trans. Terrance Tice (1826; rpt. Richmond, VA: Scholars Press, 1967). Alcott’s pedagogy may also have been indirectly influenced by Schleiermacher through the American George Bancroft who had traveled to Germany and studied philosophy of education with Schleiermacher and, when he returned to the United States in 1823, set up his own experimental secondary school, the Round Hill School in Northampton, Massachusetts, where “he put into practice many of the progressive educational ideas to which he had been exposed abroad, particularly in Schleiermacher’s course” (Gura, 29). For a history of Schleiermacher’s influence on the American Transcendentalist movement, see Gura, 66–67, 80–81, 112–13, and 118. See also: Brian A. Gerrish, *A Prince of the Church: Schleiermacher and the Beginnings of Modern Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984).

14. According to Nicholas Adams, one of the long-standing problems with Schleiermacher’s theology for later neo-orthodox thinkers such as Karl Barth was his “Christology,” the uncertainty in his thought about the divinity of Christ, which his Christian “anthropology” seemed to discount. As John Webster explains, “Barth feared that Schleiermacher ran together Christology and anthropology too easily, in such a way that the specificity of Jesus’s existence is imperiled, and the Christ reduced to being a mere modification of a general realm of religious feeling. And he feared that for all his greatness Schleiermacher offered the
initial impulse to a tradition which, in its late nineteenth-century phase, rendered the Christian gospel immanent within human moral and religious culture” (John Webster, “Shapers of Protestantism: Karl Barth,” in The Blackwell Companion to Protestantism, 88). Certainly Bronson Alcott and his fellow Transcendentalists shared this problem. For example, John Matteson writes that Bronson Alcott “never accepted the idea of Jesus as the son of God . . . [and] could not convince himself to think of Jesus as anything other than a superb specimen of humanity” (20). See also Ralph Waldo Emerson’s famously controversial 1838 “Divinity School Address” that makes a similar assertion. For Barth’s critique of Schleiermacher’s liberal Protestant “immanentism,” see Karl Barth, The Theology of Schleiermacher (1923/4; rpt. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1982) and “Schleiermacher,” in Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century, trans. B. Cozens and J. Bowden (London: SCM, 1972), 425–73.

15. While Edwards’ Calvinist belief in natural depravity, predestination, and the necessity of divine election for salvation might seem to have little in common with Schleiermacher’s “immanentism,” Philip Gura explains that a through-going Unitarian like George Ripley, who admired both theologians, found common ground between them in their shared emphasis on the “religious affections,” the intuitive sense of radical dependence on God (Gura, 80–81). See also Perry Miller, “From Edwards to Emerson,” in Errand Into the Wilderness (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 184–203.

23. As James R. Otteson explains “an examination of Smith’s analysis of human morality in TMS [The Theory of Moral Sentiments] reveals that the rules he has found that describe our moral behavior conform to a determinate model, a model that Smith develops through the course of his book. This model is of a market in which free exchanges among participating people give rise, over time, to an unintended system of order. Specifically, Smith understands the nature of moral judgments, including their concomitant features of the impartial spectator procedure and the human conscience, to be the codified results, both at the social and the individual levels, of a coherent and orderly system of morality that is effected by individuals who did not intend to effect it. Put differently, this human institution has developed and is maintained by what I propose to call a ‘marketplace of morality’” (Adam Smith’s Marketplace of Life [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002], 101).

29. Protestant denunciations of Catholic sacramentalism could be extreme. For example, in Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Rome (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), Jenny Franchot describes how John Williams, a Protestant minister and author of The Redeemed Captive (1707), saw his Indian captivity as “logically derived from a generative captivity at the heart of Catholic theology: the doctrine of transubstantiation, which profanely embodied and hence incarcerated God. . . . Williams pictures the Eucharist as capture and cannibalism: a closeting of the Deity that, in permitting consumption, provokes a terrifying specter of God’s instability and vulnerability: If God can be eaten, he can disappear. From this original act of confinement issue a proliferating series of enclosures by which Catholics, already expert cannibals of God, seek to trap (and by implication, devour), their fellow humans” (97).

30. As Mechling explains, Douglas and Isherwood “treat consumption as normal discourse with objects. One of the characteristics of the healthy use of goods . . . is that the person in the person-goods system is able to distinguish between the ‘map’ that is the goods and ‘the territory’ that is the pattern of social relations. In the healthy system of goods, as in play, the map and the territory are both equated and discriminated . . . In contrast to this normal,
healthy use of objects in discourse, [Mechling] reserves the word materialism to describe the pathological system in which a person is no longer able to distinguish between the map and the territory; that is, a person is no longer able to distinguish between the literal and the figurative use of goods in communicating with others” (“The Collecting Self,” 281, Mechling’s emphasis). The map/territory distinction comes originally from Alfred Korzybski, who first used the phrase “the map is not the territory” in a talk at the American Association for the Advancement of Science in New Orleans in 1931. A widely useful distinction, it is discussed by, among others, Gregory Bateson in his Steps to an Ecology of Mind (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972) and White and Epston, Narrative Means, 2.


38. Celia Lury finds a helpful approach to this phenomenon in Marshall Sahlins’s work, which uses the anthropological concept of totemism to analyze how material objects function as a “symbolic code by which its wearers communicate their membership of social groups” (16). See Celia Lury, Consumer Culture (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996) and Marshall Sahlins, Culture and Practical Reason (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

39. For example, Elizabeth Lynn Lynton wrote in the English magazine The Saturday Review (14 March 1868), the same year that Little Women appeared: “All men whose opinion is worth having, prefer the simple and genuine girl of the past, with her tender little ways and pretty bashful modesties, to this loud and rampant modernization” (Breward, Culture of Fashion, 148). Breward locates the advent of this modernization in the late 1850s with the introduction of aniline dyes and steel-framed crinolines, which encouraged flamboyant colors, padding, and “scant cutting.” Significantly, he titles this section of his history “From Madonna to Magdalene: Fashion Change and Femininity, c. 1830–90.” In chapter 3 of Confidence Men and Painted Women, “Sentimental Culture and the Problem of Fashion,” Karen Halttunen also documents an emphasis during the 1840s and early 1850s on “sincere” and “sentimental” dress, a style that lost favor with a more skeptical and urbane public by the late 1860s (56–91). Significantly, while Alcott identifies the Marches’ old-fashioned tastes as properly American, Elizabeth Lynton also laments that “all we can do is to wait patiently until the national madness has passed, and our women have gone back again to the English ideal, once the most beautiful, the most modest, the most essentially womanly in the world” (quoted in Breward, Culture of Fashion, 148). Finally, in Fashion, Commodity, and Gender in The Tatler and The Spectator (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), Erin Mackie writes: “The kinds of fashion reforms advocated by Addison and Steele are aimed more at the inner man and woman than the mere externals of behavior and dress; they depend on an ideology of authentic subjectivity.” However, she also notes the unintended irony of these views appearing in these venues: “Advocating the internal over the superficial,
the real over the merely simulated, this ideology is at odds with its own representation and dissemination” (158).

40. The Alcott family had strong opinions on dress reform. The Fruitlands experiment included a doctrine that community members wear loose-fitting, functional garments made of linen. The clothing thus stressed its use-value and avoided both cotton (which exploited slaves) and wool (which exploited sheep). In her 1874 novel Eight Cousins, or The Aunt-Hill (rpt. Boston: Little, Brown, 1927), Alcott includes a chapter entitled “Fashion and Physiology,” in which the young heroine is persuaded to give up her corsets and fashionable dresses for more functional, “healthful” clothing provided by her kindly uncle, a progressive medical doctor, who also instructs her on human anatomy and physiology, to the consternation of her conservative aunts. The doll references in the “Vanity Fair” scenes are also significant, since dolls in miniature dresses were often used by contemporary seamstresses to display fashionable designs. For a fascinating discussion of the role of the “mannequin” in the history of consumer culture, see Stuart Culver, “What Manikins Want: The Wonderful Wizard of Oz and The Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows,” Representations 21 (Winter 1988): 97–116.

44. As Christopher Breward explains in his 2003 study Fashion (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): “Some historians and social theorists interested in the relationship between identity and the material world have argued that the Romantic bohemian’s concern with displaying authentic emotions and desires set an important precedent for modern assumptions that the intimate concerns of selfhood can be read directly from the surface of the body and deciphered through an examination of the manner in which sartorial commodities are fashioned around it by the subject.” Breward further comments that this “authenticity” was “supported, paradoxically, by the illusory and manipulative strategies of those designers, retailers, and advertisers whose businesses expanded through the nineteenth century to serve a growing middle-class market, and given further credence by the emerging disciplines of psychology and sociology” (219–20). See also Elizabeth Wilson, The Bohemians: The Glamorous Outcasts (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000) and Anne Hollander, Sex and Suits (New York: Knopf, 1994), esp. “The Great Divide,” (63–75) and “Sobriety and Simplicity” (79–84).

47. While the novel is noteworthy for its feminism and its appreciative treatment of working-class women and African Americans, the narrator describes some poor working women as being as “unfit” for voting rights as “any ignorant Patrick bribed with a dollar and a sip of whiskey” (331). When the respectable “Mrs. Sterling” asks if the heroine Christie likes housework, she replies, “Oh, yes! If I need not do it with a shiftless Irish girl to drive me distracted by pretending to help” (172). While common nineteenth-century Protestant stereotypes associated French Roman Catholics with aristocratic social systems, insincere manners, and fashionable materialism, comparable stereotypes associated Irish Catholics with slavish obedience to the Pope, uncouth manners, and intractable ignorance. The supposed moral inferiority of the Irish was based on their primitive idolatry and lack of self-awareness. Recent analysis reveals an association in the nineteenth-century United States between Irish stereotypes and similar stereotypes of African-American “primitivism.” See Noel Ignatiev, How the Irish Became White (New and London: Routledge, 1995). Such attitudes are clearly displayed in Thoreau’s treatment of the Irish in the “Baker Farm” chapter of Walden. See William Gleason, “Re-Creating Walden: Thoreau’s Economy of Work and Play,” American Literature 65 (1993): 673–701; and Helen Lojek, “Thoreau’s Bog-People,” New England

48. According to Christopher Breward, “the evolution of the synthetic dye industry . . . orientates itself around the specific discovery of aniline purple or mauve by the training chemist William Perkin during the Easter of 1856” (Culture of Fashion, 16). When Perkin sent a sample of his new violet pigment to Pullar’s dye works, he received this reply: “If your discovery does not make the goods too expensive, it is decidedly one of the most valuable that has come out for a very long time, this colour is one that has been very much wanted in all classes of goods and could only be had on fast silks and only at great expense on cotton yarns. I enclose you a pattern of the best lilac we have in cotton, it is done by only one house in the United Kingdom . . . and they get any price they ask for it” (quoted in M. R. Fox, Dye Makers of Great Britain 1856–1976: A History of Chemists, Companies, Products and Changes [London, 1987], 95). Significantly, Mrs. March’s treasure chest contains a “violet colored” silk dress as a relic of the family’s wealthier days. By the time Little Women was published, the new dyes had produced an explosion of pent-up demand. A. H. Taine describes the fashion’s effect, which he associated with the period’s entrepreneurial spirit: “The exaggeration of the dresses of the ladies or young girls belonging to the wealthy middle class is offensive . . . gowns of violet silk with dazzling reflections, or of starched tulle upon an expanse of petticoats stiff with embroidery . . . gloves of immaculate whiteness or bright violet, golden belts with golden clasps, gold chains, hair falling back over the nape in shining masses . . . the glare is terrible” (Notes on England 1860–1870, trans. W. F. Rae [London, 1872], quoted in Breward, Culture of Fashion, 163).

50. According to John Matteson: “Bronson had once believed that all minds in childhood were fundamentally alike, and that education had the power to shape them toward a common purpose and a shared standard of moral excellence. Over time, however, he had revised his view. It now seemed to him that character was ‘more of a nature than of acquirement, and that the most you do by culture is to adorn and give external polish to natural gifts.’ (A. B. Alcott, March 1846, Journals, 173). He believed that it was impossible to create or develop any spiritual qualities that were not inborn” (Eden’s Outcasts, 187–88).

51. According to Aileen Ribeiro: “Representation of women in classical dress, whether for masque, masquerade or merely as a fashionable artistic convention, can be seen well before the eighteenth century as part of an international code of visual aesthetics. From the 1760s, however, under the aegis of the theories Joshua Reynolds was developing, of the virtues of ‘timeless’ costume in women’s portraiture (by which he meant draped garments based on classical prototypes), it is possible to see a marked increase in the numbers of women in mythological guise” (“Muses and Mythology: Classical Dress in British Eighteenth-Century Female Portraiture,” in Defining Dress: Dress as Object, Meaning, and Identity, ed. Emily de la Haye and Elizabeth Wilson [Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1999], 107). Ribeiro also notes: “The goddess Diana . . . a young virgin, although she also presides over childbirth, was to be seen as a popular choice for both masquerades and portraiture” (110). See also Anne Hollander, “Neo-classical Erotics,” in Sex and Suits, 97–103. Edith Wharton made a similar image of Lily Bart posed in classical dress (inspired by a Reynolds painting) the centerpiece of The House of Mirth.

56. An essay that makes a particularly vehement case for this view is Angela M. Estes and
13


58. Some of Southworth’s titles include *The Curse of Clifton* (serialized in 1852, published 1853) and *Ishmael, or In the Depths* (1876). Her most popular novel was perhaps *The Hidden Hand* (1859), which, with its plucky heroine Capitola, inspired over thirty dramatizations and was originally serialized in *The New York Ledger*, one prototype for Alcott’s *Weekly Volcano*. For discussions of Southworth and other “sensational” women writers of the time, see Nina Baym’s classic *Women’s Fiction: A Guide to Novels By and About Women in America, 1820–1870* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978) and David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (New York: Knopf, 1988).

60. Alcott’s thrillers included stories appearing under the A. M. Barnard pseudonym in the Boston journal *The Flag of Our Union* and anonymously for a series of periodicals published by Frank Leslie in New York, including *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, *Frank Leslie’s Chimney Corner*, and *Frank Leslie’s Lady’s Magazine*. Much of the detective work on these texts was done by Alcott’s biographer, Madeleine B. Stern, who collected them in one volume: *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked: Collected Thrillers*, ed. with an introduction by Madeleine Stern (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1995).

Some of these titles include “A Whisper in the Dark,” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* (6 and 13 June 1863); “A Marble Woman: or, The Mysterious Model,” *The Flag of Our Union* (20, 27 May and 3, 10 June 1865); “Behind a Mask: or, a Woman’s Power,” *The Flag of Our Union* (13, 20, 27 October and 3 November 1866); “Perilous Play,” *Frank Leslie’s Chimney Corner* (13 February 1869). According to Stern, “after the success of Little Women was assured, [Alcott] all but abandoned the secret writing of sensational narratives. Once or twice, however, she returned to the genre, no longer because she needed the money but because she found in that so-called sub-literature a psychological outlet and a professional satisfaction” (*Louisa May Alcott Unmasked*, xxiv). Leona Rostenberg’s groundbreaking article, plus other pieces on Alcott’s career are collected in Madeleine Stern, *Louisa May Alcott: From Blood & Thunder to Hearth & Home* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998). There is now a wealth of critical studies on these texts. See, for example, Judith Fetterley, “Impersonating ‘Little Women’: The Radicalism of Alcott’s Behind A Mask,” *Women’s Studies* 10 (1983): 1–14; Mary Elliott, “Outperforming Femininity: Public Conduct and Private Enterprise in Louisa May Alcott’s Behind a Mask,” *American Transcendentalist Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (December 1994): 279–310; and Elizabeth Lennox Keyser, *Whispers in the Dark* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993).

61. In her introduction to *Moods*, Elbert describes the substantial changes, similar to those required of Jo, that Alcott made to meet Loring’s demands. Elbert also places the work within its larger biographical and literary context, including Alcott’s previous sensational writing and her more radical, feminist thinking. While acknowledging that she “cherished the traditional role of woman,” Elbert also asserts that Alcott “regarded woman’s rights as central to the larger cause” of reform: “*Moods*, in particular, revealed the contradictions between romantic love with its validation of companionate marriage and the nineteenth-
century reality of troubled marriages burdened by female dependency and prescribed spousal role obligations. . . . A young author, Louisa May Alcott, innocently laid bare a common, but private, household grief. Her indiscretion troubled, even angered, critics, and certainly *Moods* violated her publishers’ instincts for popular literature” (“Introduction,” xiv). *Little Women*, of course, avoided these indiscretions.

66. Angela M. Estes and Kathleen Margaret Lant are among those who see the influence of Beth’s death negatively. Richard Brodhead’s study of “disciplinary intimacy” in sentimental novels like Alcott’s is also less than complimentary. Using a Foucauldian approach, Brodhead describes a similar transformational loss for the young heroine Ellen Montgomery in Susan Warner’s 1850 novel, *The Wide, Wide World*: “What the plot of this novel shows is how an acculturation system like Ellen’s makes this newly intensified grief of separation a psychic resource for the disciplining of the subject” (34).

79. According to Strickland, although Alcott did suggest, in a scheme similar to her fictional Plumfield, that respectable families take in poorer children (especially orphans), she herself gave only small amounts of money in charity outside her immediate family. “In the final analysis,” Strickland writes, Alcott was unable “to surmount in her sympathies the barrier between the worthy and the unworthy poor,” an inability she shared with most genteel people of the period, “who ignored the plight of the truly poor and who maintained that the path to human progress lay through the moral conversion of individuals.” In a “vague blend of nineteenth-century liberalism and Christian charity,” philanthropists like Alcott focused on eradicating saloons and brothels and “believed that a reformed family life, carefully insulated from the world outside it and dedicated to the proper rearing of the next generation, would not only enhance the status of women but would also provide the key to moral, cultural, and economic progress” (156). For more on Alcott and social reform see Strickland’s chapter, “The Family and the World: The Privatization of Utopia,” esp. 151–56.

John Matteson also comments on some of the ironies and contradictions in *Little Women*’s vision of philanthropy: “Lacking a system of either rituals or sacraments through which to practice their piety, the March sisters are pressed repeatedly in the direction of good works. Indeed, few books narrate more acts of unselfish generosity than *Little Women*. However, it is this impulse toward charity that exposes Beth to scarlet fever, and the power of the Marches to do good is generally restricted by their limited means. Although one feels deep admiration when the girls give up their Christmas breakfasts to a more abject family, the greatest acts of philanthropy in the novel, for instance, the founding of Plumfield, are possible only by the accumulated capital of wealthy people like Grandfather Laurence and Aunt March. To cynical eyes, *Little Women* may be a novel of the Gilded Age after all” (349). However, Matteson also notes the more socially inclusive reform ideas of Alcott’s later novel, *Work* (380).

82. Thus portraits of the Madonna were common in middle-class Protestant homes of this period, a phenomenon seemingly at odds with the association of Protestantism with Americanism. Another such “Catholic” behavior, of course, is March girls’ periodic need to “confess” to their mother, who then absolves them of their “sins” and advises them on a course of expiation. McDannell also notes that, “by linking morality and religion with the purchase and maintenance of a Christian home, the Victorians legitimized acquisition and display of domestic goods” (50).

Jenny Franchot also comments on the influx of Catholic imagery into Protestant spaces: “Depleted of its previous urgency and salvific aura, and challenged by denominational dis-
putes in Protestantism itself, Reformed Christianity—particularly liberal New England Congregationalism and Unitarianism—could no longer easily dismiss the countertext of Catholic iconography and ceremony. Although declared discontinuous with the present, that iconic past, palpable in image and statue, cathedral and catacomb, lithograph and engraving, now intruded on the purified and printbound present” (9). See also David H. Watters, “‘A Power in the House’: Little Women and the Architecture of Individual Expression,” in Little Women and the Feminist Imagination, 185–212.

CHAPTER 2. Lily Bart and the Pursuit of Happiness (pages 73–118)

1. In her memoir A Backward Glance Wharton wrote: “For years I had wanted to draw life as it really was in the derelict mountain villages of New England, a life in my time, and thousandfold more a generation earlier, utterly unlike that seen through the rose-coloured spectacles of my predecessors, Mary Wilkins [Freeman] and Sarah Orne Jewett” (293). For more on this distancing, see Donna Campbell, “Edith Wharton and the ‘Authoresses,’” Resisting Regionalism: Gender and Naturalism in American Fiction, 1885–1915 (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997), 146–73; and Deborah Lindsay Williams, Not in Sisterhood: Edith Wharton, Willa Cather, Zona Gale, and the Politics of Female Authorship (New York: Palgrave, 2001). I would argue that you can see Wharton’s determination to create sympathy while refusing to see reality through “rose-coloured spectacles” in The House of Mirth.


53. Carol Singley writes, “It is not surprising, given the pressures she faced, that when Wharton did achieve success, she permitted — even cultivated — an image of herself as a cold rationalist, perhaps to avoid giving the opposite impression of sentimentality. A certain coldness also appears in her characters: Lily Bart, for example, feels more deeply than anyone in *The House of Mirth* yet seems aloof. . . . Wharton realized that a creative woman who revealed her heart or exposed the soul risked being labeled ‘feminine’ and therefore less serious. She thus erected a barrier — a cool, detached exterior that masked great feeling and drew attention away from her more visionary side. She also sometimes projected an air of imperiousness with publishers and associates, another overcompensation for being both assertive and female. Only close friends . . . glimpsed Wharton’s true nature” (*Matters*, 51).


57. According to Kim, “Wharton read Lamarck but only identified Darwin, Spender,
William Lecky, and Hippolyte Taine as the ‘formative influences’ of her youth . . . . Each of these men, however, adapted Larmarckian theory into widely disseminated beliefs about heredity. . . . Thus, Wharton had some scientific justification for retaining the Larmarckian ideas she absorbed before 1908. These concepts permeate her writing long after 1908” (Kim, “Lamarckism,” 192–93).


89. Agnew concludes that “Lily . . . pursues an almost caricatured form of situational ethics, one in which her moral interior surrenders entirely to the various physical interiors in which she happens to find herself . . . . She dies as she lives, by the pathetic fallacy of a commodity aesthetic” (150). While I agree that Lily tends to over-identify herself with her surroundings and uses them to veil her awareness of painful moral and financial realities, a topic I explore in later chapters, I believe the sources of her death are even more complex than this interpretation suggests.

99. “The discursive process I have been tracing speaks to the multiple constructions of woman: she might be deemed the purchaser of commodities, the fantasy agent of consumer transaction, or she might be the commodity herself, the equally fantastic object of the pornographic eye. According to the modern understanding of business, she might also be both the agent and the object of consumption, but only when she operated as the ostracized prostitute . . . . In business the prostitute is the exorcised feminine; she testifies to the power of men to exclude women from (legitimate) business, while carrying on business herself” (Kowaleski-Wallace, Consuming Subjects, 128).

103. “In a 1902 essay on George Eliot, Wharton would show particular interest in the morality Eliot evolved after moving away from her early ‘theological’ preoccupations toward agnosticism. Wharton who, like George Eliot, would in her novels be profoundly interested in ethics and morality, moved away from her childhood fear of a punitive God, and from her
family’s bland, conservative Christianity, to an undeclared position of skeptical agnosticism, which she maintained for many years until, much later in life, she became strongly attracted to Catholicism. There are no consolatory beliefs for most of her fictional characters, and no sense of rewards in eternity for any of them. The practising Christians in her novels and stories are mostly sentimentalists or grotesques. But there is, at the same time, a powerful sense that conduct matters, that people are answerable for their actions and they may not always be in control of their own destinies” (Lee, *Edith Wharton*, 63–64).


114. Merish’s study argues: “For Marxists feminists, women’s (unpaid) domestic labor, including women’s sexual labors (the reproduction of life) and the labor of consumption, are part of the reproduction of labor-power and the creation of surplus value within capitalism. Consumption, therefore, cannot be severed from production: home consumption is part of the production process — part of the reproduction of labor and the class relations that structure capital. Domestic labor (including the labors of consumption) is thus necessary labor; it secures the conditions of existence of capitalism. The (middle-class) feminine consumer . . . marks her distance from material ‘need’ through the display of ‘taste,’ signified by fashionable clothing and consumer durables: taste constitutes both an expression of her ‘subjectivity’ and symbolizes her class position and that of her family. From a Marxist feminist perspective, it is clear that part of what domestic consumption reproduces is not merely labor power, but class relations themselves — the social relations of labor, and the unequal allocation of resources, under capitalism” (*Sentimental Materialism*, 7–8).


**Chapter 3. Lily at the Crossroads (pages 119–68)**

7. Sharon Kim argues that Selden possesses a superior inheritance “in his blood” that gives him access to acquired moral values and tastes that cannot be transmitted to Lily. On the other hand, Cynthia Griffin Wolff and Linda Wagner-Martin are highly critical of Selden’s voyeurism, emotional coldness, and judgmental moralism (Wolff, *Feast*, 112–33; and Wagner-Martin, *House of Mirth*, 30–40). As I discuss here and in chapter 4, although I agree with Kim about Selden’s possession of cultural capital, I do not agree that Lily cannot acquire
some of his values and ways of seeing through dialogue with him. And while I agree with Cynthia Griffin Wolff and Linda Wagner-Martin about Selden’s more unappealing traits, I also see him in the novel’s last scenes as acknowledging and accepting responsibility for his failure to help Lily — that is, his failure to read the signs of her struggle, need, and distress.

11. Galbus’s discussion includes a useful overview of Wharton’s interest in Greek philosophy and literature and her readings in this area. However, Galbus concludes that this dialogue is ultimately inconsequential, since neither character seems to her to learn and develop in response to an engagement with Plato’s original ideas. I interpret their dialogue as concerned with the more immediate issues of materialistic values, identity, and moral choice. In addition to this conversation ultimately having crucial consequences for them both, especially for Lily, I see them agreeing to marry toward the close of the dialogue, albeit without ever openly naming the emotions they feel or the step they are about to take: a significant omission as we will see. This brief agreement, which Lily almost immediately disavows, is one that critics often miss, perhaps because it is never fully articulated and because the influence of this dialogue is not fully apparent to both participants, or to readers, until the novel’s conclusion.

Singley’s chapter “Platonic Idealism,” esp. the section “‘Puritan Hellenism’ in The Age of Innocence” (Matters, 164–67), offers an excellent discussion of Platonic dialogues in The Age of Innocence, although in that case it is a female teacher enlightening a male student. The more experienced and self-aware Ellen Olenska opens Newland Archer’s eyes to the rich possibilities of life beyond the social conventions he has learned. In chapter 4, I return to the issue of how values are transmitted through dialogue and the relationship of that process to Wharton’s ideas on race, identity, and evolutionary theory.

12. Thoreau writes, “I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time. To be in company, even with the best, is wearisome and dissipating. I love to be alone. I never found the companion so companionable as solitude . . . It would be better if there were but one inhabitant per square mile, as where I live. The value of a man is not in his skin, that we should touch him” (Walden, 386–87). Solitude clearly does not have the same connotations for Wharton. See, for example, chapter 2, note 21, for Hermione Lee’s discussion of Wharton’s childhood poem about a young boy who commits suicide after being placed in solitary confinement. And while Lily Bart is often resistant to the touch of others, it is human touch of which she dreams in her final, solitary moments.


44. There is a clear parallel between Lily’s response to her feelings of guilt and isolation and Wharton’s own childhood Calvinism and fear of her mother’s unappeasable and inscrutable judgments. Jill Kress also notes that Lily seems incapable of reflecting on her experience and emotions, especially in solitude: “Wharton’s vacillation between the notion
of a ‘real self,’ hidden behind masks or veils, and a socially generated self that corresponds to and is constituted by those presumed disguises, emerges most emphatically in her depiction of Lily Bart alone. If Lily comes to life, as it were, in social company and if social intercourse, as Wharton likewise suggests, generates the self, then what happens to that self when unaccompanied? . . . The unaccompanied self, the self in communion with itself, becomes an impossible fantasy; perhaps, even, a dangerous fiction because this society requires that women provide a social center for life precisely through their public display. Consequently, Wharton’s gestures toward some ‘real self’ within seem trouble, convoluted, contradictory. In *The House of Mirth*, Lily flees any sort of solitary communion with herself as though such activity were a bold deceit” (“Designing Our Interiors,” 144–45). While I agree with Kress’s assessment of Lily’s masking according to her social context, I would argue that she flees “solitary communion with herself,” not because it would seem “a bold deceit,” but because she is unable to cope with the painful emotions and reflections on her own behavior that might emerge when she is alone.


For thoughtful comparisons of *The House of Mirth* with other major novels featuring Jewish characters and their interactions with a gentile society, see Elsa Nettels, “Wharton and

48. See, for example, Jonathan Peter Spiro’s discussion of Houston Stewart Chamberlain, an influential proponent of scientific racism: “According to Chamberlain, the Jews have made no discoveries in science or exploration, and they contributed nothing to art or philosophy. As to the Ten Commandments, they were actually of Egyptian origin. (Also Saint Paul was almost certainly not a pure Jew, a fact clear to anyone who studies the ‘deepest inner nature’ of the apostle. King David was at least three-quarters Aryan, as proven by his biblical description as ‘ruddy and of fair countenance;’ plus the fact that ‘his daring [and] his spirit of adventure are hardly Jewish traits. And Christ himself, who manifested all the noble traits of a typical Aryan, ‘had not a drop of genuinely Jewish blood in his veins.’) The Jews do possess ‘an abnormally developed’ understanding of high finance and thus play a ‘dominant’ role in modern society; nevertheless, the ‘parasitic’ Jews are and always will be an ‘alien element . . . in our midst’” (Spiro, *Defending the Master Race*, 110. Internal quotations from Chamberlain, *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. John Lees, 2 vols. (New York: John Lane, 1912), 1:217, 386; 2:57–65, 246; 1:330, 459, 336).

56. For contemporary anthropologists or neuroscientists like Helen Fisher and Antonio Damasio, the term for this shaping of genetic potential by environmental influences, along with its eventual human expression, would be “epigenetics.” In contemporary scientific language, the medium through which genetics traits are expressed is not simply “blood,” but the complex neurochemistry that affects genetic structures and activates areas of the brain. And the orchestration of human behavior depends on the human prefrontal cortex and its ability to make decisions by drawing not only on “somatic cues” but also on acquired information about moral and cultural values. See Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1994) and Antonio Damasio, “Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain” (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 2003). For a recent study of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century interest in the relationship of affect and reasoning, see Jane F. Thrailkill, *Affecting Fictions: Mind, Body, and Emotion in American Literary Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). For information on epigenetics, see, the special issue of *Science* devoted to epigenetics (10 August 2001) and the journal *Epigenetics*, published by Landes Bioscience.

57. Wharton’s view of “races” as products of historical processes shaping biological/genetic potential, rather than fixed biological/genetic entities, seems to anticipate current thinking about “race” as a social construct without biological reality and an effect of historical forces “impressing” themselves on people’s perceptions, behaviors, and sense of identity. In this sense “race” is a “fiction,” but one with profound consequences for how people perceive themselves and are perceived by others. As Kwame Anthony Appiah explains: “American literature and literary study both reflect the existence of ethnic groups the very contours
of which are, in a certain sense, the product of racism. For, however mythical the notion of race seems to be, we cannot deny the obvious fact that having one set of heritable characteristics — dark skin, say — rather than another — blonde hair, for example — can have profound psychological, economic, and other social consequences, especially in societies where many people are not only racialists but racists. Indeed, much of what is said about races nowadays in American social life, while literally false if understood as being about biological races, can be interpreted as reporting truths about social groups — Afro-Americans, Asian-Americans, Jewish Americans — whose experience of life and whose political relations are strongly determined by the existence of racist stereotypes” (Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Race,” in Critical Terms for Literary Study, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990], 284).

**Chapter 5. Lily in the Valley of the Shadow (pages 217–70)**


5. While I also see Wharton’s treatment of addiction, at least in Lily’s case, as closely tied to issues of intimacy, I would define intimacy more broadly than does Bauer. That is, Wharton’s portrayal here seems consistent with recent psychological studies that find a continuum between materialistic overconsumption and more overtly addictive behavior, both seen as stemming from insecurity and the inability to cope with negative feelings. Compulsive shopping and addiction in this model provide a “narrowing of consciousness” and, therefore, an escape from painful emotions, a temporary sense of “renewal,” as we see in Lily’s case (and in the case of George Hurstwood in Sister Carrie). See the following articles in Psychology and Consumer Culture, ed. Kasser and Kanner: Deborah Du Vann Winter, “Shopping for Sustainability: Psychological Solutions to Overconsumption” (69–87); Jeffrey Kottler, Marilyn Montgomery, and David Shepherd, “Acquisitive Desire: Assessment and Treatment” (149–68); and Ronald J. Faber, “Self-Control and Compulsive Buying” (169–87).

14. Mary Louise Kete offers an illuminating interpretation of the role of dead, salvific children in sentimental literature, with particular regard to Stowe: “One of the most famous American novels, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly, underscores the role of a gift economy in which affections circulate in the operation of sentimental collaboration. On the level of story, the most important forms in which affections can be circulated are the memories of dead children; these memories that convert slaves, senators, and boys into ‘men.’ It is these memories, again on the level of story, that allow protagonists to gain the ‘Victory’ of becoming themselves through a process of sentimental collaboration. In fact, the multiple plots of Uncle Tom’s Cabin often turn on the circulation of child relics” (Sentimental Collaborations, 84). It is this version of the “victory” that we see, for example, in Jo March’s achievement of her “becoming herself” through memories of her dead sister, Beth.

19. The importance of this mother-child identification has been explored thoroughly in Nancy Chodorow’s The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gen-
der (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). See also D. W. Winnicott, The Family and Individual Development (London: Tavistock, 1965, 1966). In his Ph.D. dissertation on Horace Bushnell’s “Discourses on Christian Culture” (1847; see also introduction in this volume, e-note 20), Leander Samuel Harding, Jr., examines the parallels between Bushnell’s ideas on of child-rearing and moral development and the theories of twentieth-century object-relations and family systems psychologists such as Alice Miller and Murray Bowen, psychologists who have much in common with Chodorow and Winnicott.

31. I find Mary Louise Kete’s discussion of sentimentality as a “discursive mode” most useful in understanding what happens in these passages of the novel and why critics and readers have responded to them as they have. As Kete notes, “The mode of sentiment and sentimental collaboration are two different things. While sentimental collaboration is a cultural practice that can be depicted within stories, sentimentality is a discursive mode with its own extrageneric imperatives.” Kete’s example of this distinction comes from Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin, which not only “depicts sentimental collaboration,” but also uses sentimentality as a discursive mode “to coerce the reader into collaborating with the author” (Sentimental Collaborations, 89). This “coercion” occurs through a crucial generic shift: “For the sake of argument here I am relying on the following reductive but useful suppositions about the genre of the novel. One is the novel’s aim to tell a story and that stories, following Aristotle, have beginnings, middles, and ends; that is, stories represent a movement through time. The other is that the novel, in contrast to the lyric, following M. M. Bakhtin, is composed of competing, multiple voices held in tension.” Kete argues that “Uncle Tom’s Cabin shows that sentiment operates in the novel to stop temporarily the ongoing movement of time and to subsume the particularity of the fictional moment into a universal experience. The dissolution of particularity, and hence the achievement of universal sympathy, is marked by the occasional melding of the many disparate voices of the novel in the universal voice of the lyric.” In sum, “the degree to which sentimentality infects a novel is measured by the degree to which it interrupts the diachronicity and polyvocality of the novel by enlarging or opening up a univocal and static moment” (89).

Applying this idea to the “continuity of life” passage we can see how Wharton’s narrator, by losing her ironic distance and unveiling a kind of thesis statement (albeit one that coincides with her character’s own dawning self-awareness) enters into the text as an authority and shifts the narration from one that had been, more or less, diachronic and polyvocal, to one that is, in this moment, static and univocal. However, rather than moving from the novelistic to the lyric mode, I see this shift in genre as moving from the novelistic to the sermonic, a shift that recalls Ann Douglas’s discussion in The Feminization of American Culture of the cultural link between liberal Protestant ministers and sentimental women writers. That is, middle-class women like Stowe, who were either discouraged from speaking or not allowed to speak in public, found a literary pulpit and a justification for speaking with authority in the pages of novels like Uncle Tom’s Cabin.

In this sense, we can see Wharton’s narration in the final scenes of The House of Mirth as evoking “sentimentality” — not that her literary mode recalls the voice of the lyric poet, but that it echoes the voice of a Protestant minister, perhaps of Reverend Washburn, whose beautiful speech and elegant sermons Wharton so admired and imitated as a child. As she wrote in “Life & I,” about her childhood literary attempts, “I loved writing sermons, & I really think I should have been an ornament to the pulpit” (1090). However, this passage
is not, as we will see, her last word in the novel. Although Wharton draws on the discourse of sentimental collaboration and Christian nurture, and through her shift in narration “coerces” her reader into collaborative agreement with her, she then, almost perversely, withholds the happy ending that this discourse promises: the spiritual victory of salvific faith and divine afterlife or the embodied victory of a happy marriage and successful reproduction. By doing so, Wharton asserts a more skeptical view of the human condition than sentimental discourse allows. This withholding, with its implied critique, may explain why Wharton was simultaneously charged with “sentimentality” by literary critics and with “cruelty” by readers disappointed with Lily’s fate. On this latter point, see Blair, “Misreading The House of Mirth,” 149–75.

32. According to Sharon Kim, Lily acquires her vision of the “continuity of life” through her exposure to Selden’s philosophy of the republic of the spirit. However, Kim sees Lily as destroyed by this vision of a transcendence she cannot access because she lacks the necessary familial and cultural heritage. Contrary to this argument, I believe that Lily’s vision comes not through Selden’s individualistic philosophy but through her witnessing of Nettie’s maternal care. Moreover, Lily’s inability to sustain her moment of insight does not mean she is not deeply affected, even changed, by it. Rather, her failure and death stem from her isolation and consequent despair. See Kim, “Lamarckism,” 187–210.

33. As object-relations psychologists like Harry Harlow and John Bowlby demonstrated so poignantly, without emotional attachment to their caregivers, human infants fail to thrive, do not develop, and may even die. This interplay of “inherited tendencies” and environmental influence is what twenty-first-century scientists now call “epigenetics,” the way that environmental influences encourage or discourage the “expression” of genetic potential. In today’s evolutionary biology and neuropsychology, the referent for the circulating material medium that facilitates such genetic expression would not be “blood,” but those neurochemicals and hormones that activate what Wharton described as the “blind motions of our mating-instincts” or the “tendrilly hands” of the infant reaching for a source of parental care. Despite the growing emphasis on genetic inheritance in twenty-first-century neuroscience, there is still a major place for nurture. John Bowlby, Attachment and Loss (New York: Basic Books, 1969); Harry F. Harlow, Learning to Love (New York: J. Aronson, 1974).

38. Given the explicitness of the narrator’s commentary in the “continuity of life” passage, it seems significant that Wharton leaves it to readers in these final scenes to identify the word that Lily cannot find and that Selden discovers too late. In doing so, she “coerces” readers into a kind of sentimental collaboration, but this collaboration is more modernist than sermonic. That is, while the “continuity of life” passage presents a thesis statement for readers to validate, the withholding of this word asks readers to draw on their own experience to name the emotion the characters cannot. The strategy recalls Willa Cather’s famous passage from her essay “The Novel Démeublé”: “Whatever is felt upon the page without being specifically named there—that, one might say, is created. It is the inexplicable presence of the thing not named, of the overtone divined by the ear but not heard by it, the verbal mood, the emotional aura of the fact of the thing or the deed, that gives high quality to the novel or the drama, as well as to poetry itself” (Willa Cather, “The Novel Démeublé,” in Not Under Forty [New York: Knopf, 1953], 50).

39. There are some critics who see this image of Lily’s dead body as the “real” or “essential” Lily. See, for example, Jennie Kassanoff, who writes, “Only in her final tableau of death
is Lily truly transmogrified into her authentic racial personality—a disembodied soul, at once real and invisible” (*Edith Wharton and the Politics of Race*, 52). However, I would argue that this fixed and sculptural beauty is not the real Lily, but the final effect of the temptation to self-objectification with which she has struggled throughout the novel, just as her actual death is the final result of her addiction to the simulacra of wellbeing. For other discussions of this scene, see Showalter, “The Death of the Lady Novelist,” 133–39; Wolff, “Lily Bart and the Beautiful Death,” 16–40; Orlando, “Picturing Lily,” 55–86; Waïd, *Edith Wharton’s Letters*, 15–49. On Lily’s “divided self” and the novel’s conclusion, see also Carol Baker Sapora, “Female Doubling: The Other Lily Bart in Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth*,” *Papers on Language and Literature* 29:4 (Fall 1993): 371–94; and Nancy Von Rosk, “Spectacular Homes and Pastoral Theaters: Gender, Urbanity, and Domesticity in *The House of Mirth*,” *Studies in the Novel*, 33:3 (Fall 2001): 322–50. Von Rosk offers an especially thoughtful analysis of the tension between the novel’s final domestic scenes and its portrayal of urban consumer culture.