Editing The Complete Works of Edith Wharton

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Abstract

This paper describes the opportunities and challenges of an exciting new international project: The Complete Works of Edith Wharton (CWEW). A scholarly edition with full textual apparatus, CWEW is being published in thirty volumes in print and online by Oxford University Press; it includes a digital component. I am the General Editor of this historic project, which brings together Wharton's unpublished and published work for the first time. Wharton's place in American literature is well known and increasingly recognized; however, few readers fully appreciate the international scope of her work. An avid traveler in the US, Europe and Northern Africa, she documented her experiences and knowledge of cultures, art, architecture, and gardens in books of nonfiction. The settings of her twenty-five novels and eighty-six short stories span three continents. Too often thought of as an expatriate who wrote only in English, Wharton was a multi-linguist who read and wrote in several languages. She drafted Ethan Frome in French. Her first publication was a translation of German poem. She went on to translate works from the French and Italian as well as from the German-so much so that her output in this genre fills an entire volume of CWEW. This paper presents Wharton in a global context, and CWEW as an international enterprise. Thirty editors from several countries are preparing CWEW volumes; work on the first ten volumes is well underway. Their efforts-and CWEW as a whole-represents a watershed moment in which Wharton emerges not only as a transatlantic but also an international figure, as evident in her writings, World War I charities, and translations. This paper, moreover, serves as a springboard for an audience-based discussion about publishing women writers more generally, including participation from the audience about international publication venues and the issues surrounding the publication of editions of women's writing digitally and in print.

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