Writers, Manuscripts, Collectors: Modern Authorship and the *Fin-de-Siècle* Origins of the Literary Archive

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Abstract: During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, collecting authors' material remains developed from a private pursuit into a public mission, a history that is coupled to the emergence of modern institutions such as the research library and the literary archive. Authors of the period were themselves both aware of and involved in the market for literary manuscripts and the increasingly institutionalized culture of collecting writers' papers. This article looks at literary fiction as a contemporary medium in which this moment of transition was mirrored. Focusing on the early writings of Edith Wharton as a case study, it reconstructs a gradual shift in her creative interests from the autographs of contemporary or near-contemporary writers to those of canonized figures and from collecting as an amateur occupation to collecting as a professional endeavour.

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1. Introduction

From the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards, the public notion of authors as creative producers and biographical subjects becomes tied to the material remains of the authorial corpus (understood as both body and work). Locks of hair, personal items, and manuscript drafts began to be treasured as relics worth preserving, displaying, and studying. In the early twentieth century, such popular manifestations of author worship gradually transitioned into institutional forms of collecting, which soon focused on the archiving of autographs.[1] Like many of her contemporaries, the American writer Edith Wharton was interested in the cultural dispositions that informed how the larger reading public, along with authors themselves, responded to the material traces of literary labour. Her early fiction, in particular, closes in on the relationship between the producers and the consumers of such artefacts – between authors as reluctant or active market participants and collectors as experts in the autograph economy and self-proclaimed custodians of the past.

[1] On different aspects of these phenomena, see Matthews 2004 (on the history of the cult of authorial remains), Watson 2020 (on the musealization of literary matter), and Benne 2015 (on the "invention" of the literary manuscript).

Read in the larger historical context of the cultural-institutional rise of the literary archive and of the modern interest in literary manuscripts, Wharton points both to the past and to the future. In "The Touchstone" (1900), an early novella, she is primarily concerned with a characteristic nineteenth-century fascination with authors' letters and their potentially compromising content. In the novella as well as in her breakthrough novel *The House of Mirth* (1905) there are also, however, intimations of the preservation and study of primary source material as new academic endeavours, and of the public collection as the institutional environment for such forms of engagement. Wharton's management of her own archive and her arrangements for its material survival after her death in 1937 – the subject to which I turn towards the end of this article – departs from the family-centred testamentary regulations favoured by previous generations of writers and makes her a vanguard figure for how literary estates would come to be handled over the further course of the twentieth century – a period that saw literary historiography become increasingly reliant on material traces of the past, with institutional manuscript collecting correspondingly shaping and redefining key categories such as "author" and "work." Writers of Wharton's generation witnessed the early stages of this development and were acutely conscious of their own entanglements with the nascent institution of the archive. Their response was twofold: one was to turn to fiction in an effort to shed light on the new meanings authorship acquired in the cultural context of its material preservation; the other was to make arrangements that were aimed at ensuring their own archival afterlife while simultaneously striving for a maximum of authorial control over selection and access.

2. Manuscript Collecting between Genteel Pursuit and Academic Endeavour

In "The Touchstone," first published in *Scribner's Magazine* in 1900, Wharton critically reflects on the manuscript as a commodity. The novella's plot centres on a dead writer and the responsibilities that manuscript ownership thrusts upon those who outlive her. Margaret Aubyn, the narrative's absent protagonist, is a recently deceased American novelist who spent the final years of her life in England. She corresponded regularly and ardently with Stephen Glennard, a New York lawyer embarrassed by her emotional attachment to him. In dire need of money to be able to marry his own love interest, Glennard decides to publish Aubyn's letters and thus disclose the secrets of her intimate life to an eager reading public. The edition is a huge success and brings Glennard the desired financial reward, but he is left with the moral agony of having betrayed Aubyn's confidence. "The Touchstone" thus over large stretches echoes turn-of-the-century anxieties about publicity and exposure. As Amy Kaplan (1988) has pointed out, the novella revolves around the limits of the authorial "self as private property" (82) in a modern culture of literary celebrity in which the life of the writer becomes "a commodity for mass consumption" (83).[2]

As the very opening paragraph of Wharton's text shows, however, what is at stake here has a distinctly material dimension that transcends the textualist emphasis of the privacy/publicity theme (which is more about the propositional content of intimate writing than about its actual artefactual form). "The Touchstone" begins not with Glennard and his moral qualms, but with the appearance of another character, who is instrumental in introducing Glennard to the idea that Aubyn's correspondence is in fact a historically valuable asset. The text's opening paragraph takes the form of an advertisement printed in the London *Spectator*:

[2] Indeed, most discussions of "The Touchstone" focus on how the text reflects (and, by some accounts, complicates) the privacy/publicity distinction. See – in addition to Kaplan's treatment (Kaplan 1988, 81–84) – Margolis 1995, 91–97, Brittan 2007, 739–44, and Eaton 1997, 7–10.

> Professor Joslin, who, as our readers are doubtless aware, is engaged in writing the life of Mrs. Aubyn, asks us to state that he will be greatly indebted to any of the famous novelist's friends who will furnish him with information concerning the period previous to her coming to England. Mrs. Aubyn had so few intimate friends, and consequently so few regular correspondents, that letters will be of special value. Professor Joslin's address is 10 Augusta Gardens, Kensington, and he begs us to say that he will promptly return any documents entrusted to him. (Wharton [1900] 2001, 162)

Joslin does not make a personal appearance in the narrative that follows, but the fact that the novella's very first words reference the world of academia illustrates the extent to which the craft of literary research had begun to become institutionalized and professionalized at the beginning of the twentieth century. In "The Touchstone," the writer of the author's "life" is no longer the private devotee at the centre of a text such as Wharton's friend Henry James's "The Aspern Papers" (1888) or the youthfully ambitious hack writer type that appears in James's thematically related stories "Sir Dominick Ferrand" (1892) and "The Real Right Thing" (1899). The exact nature of Joslin's academic background remains unclear throughout Wharton's text, which points to the fact that literary studies, in the Anglo-American context, had not yet transitioned into a fully-fledged disciplinary programme (it would take another generation of scholars and critics to flesh out the aims and protocols of a distinctly *modern* study of *modern* literature, as opposed to earlier forms of philological and linguistic interest in medieval and post-medieval writing). Nevertheless, what Joslin's title and method of work signal in Wharton's novella is a new spirit of analytical distance and professional disinterestedness. To Joslin, Aubyn's scattered papers are not relics to be venerated but historical "documents" that contain factual "information" about her life and her embeddedness in networks of social and cultural exchange. Once he has extracted this factual residue, Joslin is prepared to hand the papers back to their legal owners – an attitude that contrasts sharply with the personally motivated possessiveness that characterizes James's protagonists.

Joslin's professional take on the business of literary life-writing is a content-centred one: Aubyn's manuscripts register for him in their use value as raw data and source material for his own writing, but not as objects to be treasured and preserved because of their distinct properties as material evidence. The unpublished and as yet unknown writing that he seeks to collect and analyse is thus detached and abstracted from the process of mediation, from its tangible shape as an actual object. Illustrating such an emphasis on the factual rather than the auratic, the novella's opening vignette gestures towards the outlines of a disciplinary formation that was in the process of emerging at the beginning of the twentieth century: the academic study of modern literature and of modern literary manuscripts.[3] In Lothar Müller's reading of the novella, Joslin comes to stand for yet another institutional formation. The paragraph in the *Spectator* has a paradoxical effect on Glennard, who – according to Müller – "begins to ponder the idea of capitalizing on the

[3] Where I read Joslin's academic disinterestedness about Aubyn's papers as betokening a new age of academic philology that contrasts with earlier modes of amateur collecting and biography, Anna Girling (2015) has suggested that the character represents a residual cultural formation, "the genteel prelapsarian Old World" (77) of English men-of-letters dilettantism from which the print capitalism and sensationalist publicity that dominate much of the rest of the novella are blissfully absent. While this may well be an apt description of Joslin's social location, his manifest scholarly indifference to the most "genteel" of pursuits – the hobbyish antiquarianism of private autograph collecting – seems to me to point to the academic and institutional future rather than to the pre-professional past.

[…] letters by entrusting them not to a literary archive, in the form of the professor, but to the book market" ([2012] 2014, 213). Seen from this angle, "The Touchstone" "illustrates the tension between the autograph trade and public archives," which vie with one another for the acquisition of literary remains (214).

While this contextualization of Wharton's novella sounds intriguing, the straightforward equation of Joslin with the literary archive is historically problematic. In the anglophone world, the establishment of actual "public archives" of the kind Müller has in mind postdate *fin-de-siècle* paper fictions like Wharton's by decades. Glennard's choice between forwarding Aubyn's letters to Joslin and submitting them to a publisher is ultimately not so much a conflict between archiving and exposure as it is a choice between two different forms of publication. Joslin, after all, also seeks to produce a book for the market. The transition from the Jamesian "publishing scoundrel" (James [1888] 1999, 303) to the modern archivist and philologist thus remains incomplete in Wharton's novella. If the opening paragraph of "The Touchstone" replaces the impassioned aura worship of James's fictions with a more sober scholarly approach to the autograph as "document," at another level the plot still gives pride of place to a type of manuscript material that is linked to the author as person and not primarily to the work as text. As Aubyn's biographer rather than as the modern critical editor of her novels, Joslin is interested in papers that reveal aspects of her life as a historical figure. Her papery remains are thus primarily of interest – to Joslin as well as to the reading public – for the hidden or repressed nature of what they contain. Preparatory sketches or drafts (manuscripts that could bring to light details not about Aubyn's love life but about the textual genesis of her fiction) do not, after all, excite anyone's curiosity in "The Touchstone."

Taking his cue from Joslin, Glennard decides to revisit the letters in his possession in order to appraise their content. When he opens the "locked drawer" in which he has deposited the papers, he is surprised to find himself reminded of the sheer extent of the collection ("The letters were tied in packets of thirty or forty. There were a great many packets") (167). Engulfed in literary paperwork, Glennard is seated "a long time staring at the scattered pages on his desk" (173). What results from these musings is the miraculous transformation of the letters from mere object to saleable commodity, with Glennard witnessing "some alchemistic process changing them to gold as he stared" (173). The value that Wharton makes him associate with Aubyn's correspondence relates to the magic of capitalist value creation – a modernized, secular take on the quasi-occult magic of authorial presence with which James's protagonists tend to associate papers.

Glennard soon enough requires expert advice to determine the exact market value of his treasure. Since a foray "into one of the public libraries" (177) to identify comp titles for his projected edition of the letters ends in failure, he turns to his acquaintance Barton Flamel for help. A dandyish bibliophile and lover of nineteenth-century literary manuscripts, Flamel introduces Glennard to his own collection and eventually takes on a crucial role as intermediary in the latter's interactions with the print world. Boasting "rows of fine books" lined with "warm-toned morocco" (179), the library of Flamel's New York apartment seems to have sprung straight from the pages of contemporary interior design manuals – a genre to which Wharton herself had contributed a few years before the publication of the novella.[4] Browsing the contents of the neatly arranged

[4] In *The Decoration of Houses* (1897) – her first published book, co-written with the architect Ogden Codman – Wharton had advised readers of Flamel's socio-economic background on how best to organize and display their "private library," a task she found to be "one of the most interesting problems of interior architecture" (Wharton and Codman 1897, 151). Thinking herself back to the time "[b]efore the invention of printing, when twenty or thirty books formed an exceptionally large library," she envisions "chests […] packed with

bookcases, Glennard is particularly struck by "a thin volume of faded manuscript" (180) which he discovers among the printed matter. Questioned as to the contents of the volume, Flamel tells him that he is looking at "a bit of Stendhal – one of the Italian stories," pages that keep company with "some letters of Balzac" (180). The highlight of Flamel's papers, however – "the rarest thing" that he owns – is "a queer little collection" consisting of "half a dozen of Shelley's letters" (180). In what sounds like a tacit nod to "The Aspern Papers" and its Shelleyan theme, Wharton has Flamel confess that he "had a devil of a time getting them" since "a lot of collectors were after them" (180). This acquisition anecdote steers the conversation in a different direction, as Glennard and Flamel soon proceed to a discussion of the manuscript market and its complex systems of price and value, with Flamel eventually ensuring Glennard that he "could get any money for Margaret Aubyn's love-letters" (184).

Flamel's calculation considers the letters not as manuscripts and collectibles but as publishable "copy" for the printer, however. Although she is no longer alive, Aubyn is still perceived as a contemporary figure. She thus differs from the other authors who appear in the scene through specimens of their handwriting. Although they are modern writers removed by only a generation or two, Stendhal, Balzac, and Shelley have by the turn of the century become canonical writers who mainly excite a philological and literary-historical interest in their texts. It is only gradually that Aubyn moves into the sphere of such consecration herself, that she enters the process of "becom[ing] a *monument historique*" (193) whose posthumous papers begin to be prized (as well as priced) for their "immense literary value, their significance as documents" (194) – as Flamel, channeling the vocabulary that the opening of the novella associates with professional research, notes after their publication. Ironically enough, it is ultimately through the printing of her private papers that Aubyn comes to be acknowledged as a major writer of historic stature.[5] Through an "alchemistic process" that is quite different from the economic one Glennard had at first imagined, the intimate details of her life cease to be thought of as private and instead begin to form part of a literary past worth exploring with scholarly detachment (embodied by Joslin's professional interest in manuscripts as "documents," as opposed to the collector Flamel's concern with their monetary and aesthetic value). In Wharton's novella, this shift is predicated on the media transformation of Aubyn's autograph letters into the "glaring garb of type" (196) – a shift that retroactively confers on Aubyn's manuscripts their value as artefacts worth preserving for posterity.

3. The (Fictional) Birth of the Archive

While the literary archive in "The Touchstone" does not yet exist as a concrete institutional reality, the conservational mindset that informed its eventual real-life emergence is already in place in the text. Wharton astutely captures the process by which, at the beginning of the

precious manuscripts" as the essential accoutrement of the gentleman's private collection (145). Flamel's library includes such "precious" unique material, but also the "good editions in good bindings" that Wharton considers indispensable items for the turn-of-the-century collector and homeowner (148). See Liming 2020 on Wharton's own book collection and on how book collecting features in her fiction.

[5] Feminist readers of the novella have drawn attention to the gendered dimension of the paper transactions at the centre of Wharton's text. Denise Witzig (1991), for example, finds that the "descriptively sexualized" way in which the novella refers to Glennard's handling of Aubyn's letters implies that her manuscripts become "the textual surrogate of her body" (172–73). To Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1988), such forms of dealing with the dead female author and her papers do not so much represent acts of male aggression as they form the precondition for the publication of Aubyn's letters and her "posthumous victory" (191) over Glennard and his mercenary pettiness. For a similarly emancipationist approach to "The Touchstone," see Waid 1991, 192–97.

twentieth century, collecting moved from being the domain of amateurs chasing letters and autographs to being defined as a practice associated with a larger public mission. *The House of Mirth*, published five years after "The Touchstone," documents a further stage of this development. The first two chapters of the novel juxtapose two types of collections and two types of collectors. In the opening scene, Wharton's protagonist Lily Bart finds herself in Lawrence Selden's Manhattan flat, which – like Flamel's apartment – contains a library lined with "walls of books" (Wharton [1905] 1990, 8). By his own modest account, however, Selden is "not really a collector," to the extent that his limited budget allows him to care only about "hav[ing] good editions of the books I am fond of" (11). The more serious collector in the novel is Percy Gryce, the eligible bachelor Lily meets on the train in the following chapter. Gryce has inherited a famous collection from his wealthy uncle, which is housed in the latter's Madison Avenue mansion, "in a fire-proof annex that looked like a mausoleum" (20).[6] A material embodiment of the novel's concern with a contemporary "culture of acquisition and speculation" (Campbell 2011, 226), the "Gryce Americana" (20) are the fictional equivalent of the private libraries of affluent American collectors – bibliophiles such as James Lenox (1800–1880), John Pierpont Morgan (1837–1913), and his son, J. P. Morgan, Jr. (1867–1943) – members of the New York upper class, of which Wharton was herself a part.[7]

The House of Mirth distinguishes between Gryce's and Selden's collections with respect to their extent, but Wharton also makes clear how they differ in terms of what they contain and which uses they serve. In contrast to the decorative volumes that Selden cherishes, Gryce's Americana are – at least in Lily's eyes – "ugly" and "horribly dull" (11). Wharton here opposes two different politics of collecting: the nationalized notion of cultural heritage inscribed in the thematic focus of the "Gryce Americana" and the cosmopolitan standards that guide Selden in his choice of beauty over historical significance (what Lily handles at his place is not "dusty" patriotic documents but an exquisite "first edition of La Bruyère" [11]). If Selden represents an amateur past of idiosyncratic selection, Gryce's national filter points towards the twentieth-century archive and its concentration – both ideological and pragmatic – on the comprehensive collection of material belonging to a specific geographical or linguistic context.[8]

While Wharton leaves her readers in the dark as to the exact nature of the artefacts assembled by Gryce and his uncle, it seems likely that the collection is made up of a combination of "[b]ooks, manuscripts, or other literary artefacts" (the *OED*'s definition of "Americana"), a miscellaneous set of objects that contrasts with Selden's primarily bibliophile concern with first editions. The true value and interest of Gryce's "Americana," Selden explains to Lily, is recognized not by the collector who assembles, but by "the historian" who studies them (11). Selden reflects that members of that profession – which, at the point at which Wharton was writing, was in the process of establishing itself as such – cannot "afford to buy" the primary sources they work with: "They have to use those in the public libraries or in private collections" (11). The "fire-proof annex" on Madison Avenue serves precisely this function. The chief pleasure that Gryce derives from curating and expanding his uncle's Americana is seeing them publicly acknowledged as

[6] In another one of its plot lines, the novel also rehearses the more traditional theme of intimate letters and the risk of public exposure. Lily gets her hands on the correspondence that contains evidence of an affair between Selden and the married Bertha Dorset. Her decision, towards the end of the book, to burn the letters is obliquely foreshadowed by the "fire-proof" archival setup that Wharton imagines at the opening of the novel. In a climate in which manuscripts count as commodities, Lily's refusal to blackmail Bertha and her impulse to destroy the letters illustrate what Wai Chee Dimock (1985), in a classic discussion of the novel, has described as Lily's "puzzling and contradictory relation to the marketplace" (783).

[7] For a detailed discussion of this historical context, see Sheila Liming's contribution in this special issue.

[8] See Leader 2013 for an extensive discussion of manuscript nationalism.

possessing scholarly value ("he subscribed to all the reviews dealing with […] American history," devouring the specialist "journals" in which "allusions to his library abounded") (20). The research infrastructure described in the novel is symptomatic of a larger shift in the character of book and manuscript collecting, which in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century United States resulted in the establishment of a series of private-public institutions,[9] coinciding with – and, indeed, coupled to – the rise of modern academic historical scholarship and literary criticism.

4. "Forging" Papers

Wharton was familiar enough with the period's blend of collecting and philanthropy to avail herself of it when need arose. Troubled by the mass displacements brought about by World War I, in 1915 she developed plans for a joint publication whose sales would help raise funds to aid refugees. *The Book of the Homeless* – a lavish volume of texts, musical scores, and illustrations – included contributions from a who's who of contemporary writers (Joseph Conrad, Thomas Hardy, William Dean Howells, and William Butler Yeats were among the authors represented). Wharton's charity campaign also comprised an accompanying auction of "the original manuscripts and sketches" used in the printing of the book (Wharton 1934, 350). Held at the American Art Galleries in New York in late January 1916, the event raised a total of almost seven thousand dollars, $350 of which came from the sale of the autograph poem Wharton had herself written for the volume. Among the auction's most successful lots was Henry James's contribution, a war-themed autobiographical prose piece entitled "The Long Wards," one of the very last texts he lived to complete, sold in the curious shape of "a typewritten manuscript […], signed in full" (Anon. 1916, 12).[10]

Reading Wharton's prospectus for the book in the summer of 1915 and noting her plans for an auction of the manuscripts, James found himself in a fix. By this point in his career he had turned to producing his texts through dictating to a typist.[11] Conscious of the auratic deficiency of the typewritten page in the eyes of the collector, he wrote to "promise" Wharton "to forge for you such a simulacrum of my script as will successfully pass in the New York market for the copy sent to the printer."[12] James, in other words, was pledging to (re)produce – the *double entendre* on "forge" is significant here – a manuscript version of his typewritten piece. Both Wharton's request and James's reply illustrate an awareness of what Thorstein Veblen (1899) had recently described as an appreciation of "the superiority of hand-wrought articles over machine products" (164) characteristic of the late-nineteenth-century leisure class. One of Veblen's key examples of the prevalence of this attitude was the interest contemporary collectors displayed in "the decadent book," specifically the print artefacts associated with the Arts and Crafts movement, which are marked by a deliberate return to "obsolete processes" of production and by their

[9] Lenox's collection, for example, was endowed as the Lenox Library as early as 1870 and became accessible to scholars soon thereafter (it was later incorporated into the New York Public Library, which was founded in 1895). The architectural framing of the novel's "Americana" directly echoes that of the Pierpont Morgan Library. Construction work on the McKim, Mead & White building on Madison Avenue began in 1903 and its practically windowless design indeed resembles the appearance of "a mausoleum" (the Library became a public institution in 1924). On the Morgans' collection and the genesis of the Library, see Auchincloss 1990, 96–102; on the more general history of New York's library landscape and the importance of private collections, see Glynn 2015.

[10] For details on the book project in general and the auction in particular, see Benstock 1994, 318–19 and Lee 2007, 491–93. James's "manuscript" was sold for $500.

[11] On James and the typewriter, see for example Bosanquet (1924) 2006, Thurschwell 2001, 86–114, and Lyons 2021, 93–96.

[12] James to Wharton, 19 July 1915, quoted in Price 1985, 8.

reliance on the idea of the limited edition – whose main function in Veblen's analysis is that of signalling "that [a] book is scarce and that it therefore is costly and lends pecuniary distinction to its consumer" (164). This dynamic is at work in most collecting, of course – but especially so in a case such as Wharton's auction, where the bidding for manuscripts (objects by definition rarer than any limited edition) was staged as a conspicuous social act, witnessed by the public and reported in the press.

What ended up making its way to the New York auction room, however, was "the autographed and annotated typescript" of James's piece, not a complete holograph ("forged" from the typewritten sheets after the fact) (Price 1985, 19). By adding handwriting to the typescript, James created a hybrid artefact that spoke to both residual and emergent associations with the idea of authorial "script": on the one hand, the autograph signature as the literal token of the writer's presence and, on the other, the corrected typescript (which provides evidence of the creative process and hence relates to work rather than life, to philology rather than biography). Judging from the results of the auction, James's pragmatic combination of these two elements appealed to buyers at a cultural moment at which the notion of the personal aura of the manuscript continued strong and interest in textual genesis was simultaneously on the rise.[13] If at that historical juncture the modern literary archive had not yet become an institutional reality and modern textual scholarship had not yet fully matured into an academic discipline, Wharton's and James's fictions and their dealings with their own manuscripts demonstrate that authors at the time were well aware of these emerging trends.

5. Literary Estates and Archival Custodianship

Wharton dealt with James's manuscript–typescript in the context of the New York auction, but she would soon enough be involved in dealing with his papers in another capacity. Following his death a mere month after the event, she came close to being appointed James's literary executor. His typist Theodora Bosanquet had teamed up with his agent James B. Pinker to convince the ailing James "to leave his literary baggage in the hands of Mrs. Wharton" rather than to bequeath it to his family (whose members they considered ignorant of the true extent of his importance as a literary figure) (Bosanquet [1924] 2006, 85). These efforts failed: it was James's sister-in-law who eventually inherited the manuscripts and opted against assigning the curatorial and editorial care of the material to Wharton.[14] What the episode brought home to Wharton quite distinctly was the importance of making clear arrangements concerning her own papers. As her early fictions and her later experience with the world of autograph dealing imply, she was conscious of the historical and economic value of literary paperwork. Wharton kept a voluminous private

[13] The presence of James's signature on his "work" is a gesture which also illustrates the increasing approximation between literary manuscripts and art objects as items traded and sold in their singular, non-fungible physical form. I am building here on Florence Callu's argument that the nineteenth century sees the gradual emergence of an economic rationale for the preservation of manuscripts that is reminiscent of the working mechanisms of the art market ("À la différence des siècles précédents [...], l'autographe acquiert un prestige qui [...] se double d'une valeur vénale qui confère au manuscrit un statut voisin de celui de l'objet d'art dont la cote varie et dont on peut suivre les oscillations d'un catalogue de vente à l'autre.") (Callu 1993, 64). In this logic of the manuscript as a work of art, the status of the published "text" of a piece of writing resembles that of a mechanical reproduction of an artwork: the actual "content" of the work becomes secondary to its material container (with the unique manuscript displaying, as it were, the author's idiosyncratic brushstroke and technique). Wharton's auction appropriately enough featured autographs alongside pictures (the catalogue also, for instance, included a Monet pastel and a drawing by John Singer Sargent).

[14] See Anesko 2012, 48–61 for a detailed account of the decision-making process and Wharton's role as a candidate for the role.

archive of manuscripts and other documents and, unlike James, she opted against passing this material on to members of her family. Upon her death in 1937, her friend Gaillard Lapsley (1871–1949), an American historian and Cambridge fellow, became her literary executor. To him she left "all [her] manuscripts, literary correspondence and documents, with the request that he shall take care of the publication, sale, preservation or destruction of all such documents and manuscripts."[15]

With an estimated "four hundred kilos" of material on his hands, Lapsley a year later chose to sell Wharton's estate to Yale University, attaching the provision that "anything of a biographical sort" should be kept under lock and key for another three decades.[16] Whether the deposition of the papers in a public research library goes back to a direct injunction from Wharton herself is difficult to determine in retrospect.[17] What her careful attention to the "preservation" of her "manuscripts, literary correspondence and documents" shows, however, is that she was thinking about a long-term solution for the collection as an ensemble. Yale seemed a natural choice because the university had awarded Wharton an honorary doctorate and already enjoyed a reputation for its rare books and manuscripts holdings. Consisting of about 50,000 individual items, Yale's Wharton collection comprises manuscripts of her texts, literary notebooks, and substantial parts of her private and business correspondence.[18] The thirty-year embargo period for sensitive material was a way of counteracting the kinds of revelation and exposure that surface so prominently as authorial anxieties in some of Wharton's own fictions. Absent as an option in turn-of-the-century writing, in real archival transfers the delay arrangement introduced historical distance as a viable alternative to the destruction of manuscripts.

The institutional afterlife of Wharton's papers also illustrates the policies that archives and libraries would increasingly adopt in the further course of the twentieth century in order to expand their institutional holdings. In May 1939, Yale's chief librarian Bernhard Knollenberg issued an announcement to that effect in the *Times Literary Supplement*, calling for private donations of Wharton material to supplement the estate (and unintentionally echoing the opening paragraph of "The Touchstone"):

> It would […] add greatly to the interest and value of the collection if those people fortunate enough to possess letters from [Wharton] would present them to the Yale University Librarian to be deposited with Mrs. Wharton's own collection of manuscripts and letters. It has been suggested that a number of people who would not wish to dispose of their letters by sale might be glad to give or bequeath them for the enrichment of the Yale collection, with the knowledge that they would thus be carefully preserved, and, after an interval of thirty years, made available for scholars […]. (1939, 298)

Archiving papers is here described as a procedure that runs counter to the logic of the autograph market, to the extent that the ultimate aim of gathering Wharton's scattered correspondence is imagined to be its scholarly study. But the university's strategy to consolidate its monopoly on

[15] Excerpt from Wharton's June 1937 French will, quoted in Lee 2007, 749.
[16] Lee 2007, 750 (Lee is quoting here from an undated note by Wharton's secretary Jeanne Fridérich and from Lapsley's letter to the president of Yale of 7 May 1938, respectively).
[17] Wharton's first biographer R. W. B. Lewis suggested that she may explicitly have "asked" Lapsley "to offer her 'literary correspondence' to Yale" (Lewis 1975, 549), but Lee's more recent and more comprehensive study is silent on this point.
[18] For an overview of the acquisition history and the scope of the collection (which also includes additional material that was not part of the original sale), see Finley 1989, 4–6.

the author also figures as a means of effecting the – material as well as reputational – "enrichment" of the collecting institution. While Yale over the years did manage to attract donations and subsequent bequests from additional sources, however, today there are Wharton holdings, especially letters, at other libraries and special collections as well.[19] Wharton's case is nevertheless striking for the concentration of her papers at New Haven, which ultimately has its roots in her own policy of arranging and preserving her manuscripts. Wharton's self-archiving represented a response to the rise of the modern literary archive as a public institution capable of storing substantial collections of manuscripts and of making them available for philological and biographical research. It also testifies to her awareness of her own status as a modern author confronted with public exposure and scholarly scrutiny – themes she had used her early fiction to explore.

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[19] This includes material at Harvard and at Indiana University; some of Wharton's corrected typescripts form part of the archives of her American publisher Scribner's, which today are kept at Princeton University. For an overview of the major collections of Wharton material, see Ohler 2020, 15–16.

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