



Edith Wharton's Inner Circle (Literary Modernism Series)

Susan Goodman

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When Edith Wharton became friends with Henry James, she joined a group of men who became her "inner circle" or, sometimes, "the happy few." This group included both well-known figures, such as James, Percy Lubbock, and Bernard Berenson, and several now forgotten, including John Hugh Smith, Walter Berry, Gaillard Lapsley, Robert Norton, and Howard Sturgis. Drawing on unpublished archival material by and about members of the circle, Susan Goodman here presents an intimate view of this American expatriate community, as well as the larger transatlantic culture it mirrored. She explores how the group, which began forming around 1904 and lasted until Wharton's death in 1937, defined itself against the society its founders had left in the United States, while simultaneously criticizing and accommodating the one it found in Europe. Tracing Wharton's individual relationships with these men and their relationships with one another, she examines literary kinships and movements in the biographical and feminist context of gender, exile, and aesthetics. Individual chapters focus on the history of the circle, its connections to and competition with the Bloomsbury Group, the central friendship of Wharton and James, the dynamics of influence within the circle, and the effect of Wharton's vision of the inner circle on her fiction. A concluding chapter examines the phenomenon of literary exile and investigates how other writers - Gertrude Stein and F. Scott Fitzgerald, among them - positioned themselves in their inherited or chosen places. Filled with new insights into Wharton's works and her relationships with a group of asexual or homoerotically oriented men, this study will be important reading for all readers of American literature, literary modernism, and gender studies.

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