

but because Persephone has eaten one seed from the pomegranate she was carrying when Pluto abducted her, she is doomed forever to spend a part of every year in Hades. The book's epigraph from *The Descent Of Inanna*, a Sumerian story of 2000 B.C., opens the door to an even more ancient myth, that of the powerful goddess, Inanna, who braved the underworld to establish her power (and by her example the power of women) and succeeded.

Echlin's homage to the myths begins with Moll, a motherless girl who bore and then drowned a dead baby, hid in a ship that was shipwrecked in the gulf of St. Lawrence and "after two days and a night she washed up a blue meagre hag on the shore of a little island" called Millstone Nether. Moll is a presiding spirit, and the character related to Inanna, for her near-drowning has been her descent to the underworld: "She was whirled and spun below and divested of what she once was ...She became in the lowest deep, a lower deep." Always hiding in the woods, she was sometimes an agent of light and healing, more often of darkness and death, but always hovering over the tale, a powerful dynamic in its telling. She found the body of Meggie Dob's mother washed up on the shore of the island that had first been settled by "merry-begots and hangashores, sleveens and slawmeens," and all of them musicians; "Millstone Nether's impractical claim for itself was music." Making their own instruments out of branches and boards, they were favoured by fate with instruments washed up on their shores, one time a barrel of fiddles and another of whistles. Moll herself drew strange music out of a bronze pot she had salvaged from the sea. The developing lineage of three generations of heroically strong women, begins with Norea Nolan in an impoverished Irish village, desperate to escape. She stole the shoes from her dead mother's feet and walked to Dublin, where she stowed away on a ship bound for the New World and

the island of Millstone Nether.

Norea was beguiled by the music made by Rory, a young man of the village, but Rory died in the great flu epidemic, and Norea gave birth to Dagmar who from the beginning had a strange gift: plants grew if she touched them, and whole orchards and gardens appeared; storms occurred if she was unhappy, and harvests were abundant if she smiled. She is the Demeter figure, and her daughter Nyssa, the Persephone, irrevocably but not permanently linked to Moll and her fearsome power.

The tale is anchored to a reality we can recognize by its music—the music of Donal Dob, the son of Meggie, and his friend, Colin Cane. In a complicated courtship dance of leaving and return, acceptance, love and loss, and always their obsessive devotion to the perfectibility of their music, they ensnare both Dagmar and Nyssa whose music is likewise magic and perfectly matched to Donal's. The end brings with it redemption as the whole village celebrates the inevitable reunion of Nyssa and Donal: "The Millstone Nether people called for more and played together the old reels and jigs and strathspeys. They were happy to hear again the playing of Nyssa, who went her own way and Donal, who went with her, to hear the sounds those two alone could wring from fiddle and double bass."

Dagmar's Daughter is anything but an easy novel to read and understand, but it rewards the effort, not only for the depth of its story and its ancient undertones, but for its grounding in an unshakeable reverence for art: "It was a young island where art and life went hand in hand....On the island it was thought that life could not be beautiful without art, nor art flourish without life. When Norea gave her grandchild Nyssa a fiddle she said, "This little fiddle is fashioned from the suffering of the world. Are you worthy of it?" At the last, Nyssa proved herself worthy.

This book should really be read

aloud. It is a story begging to be heard, with all the variations of tone and expression that a voice could bring to it. But even experienced only as the words on the page, it is hauntingly memorable.

NEW ESSAYS ON THE HOUSE OF MIRTH

Deborah Esch, Ed.
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BY SHERRILL CHEDA

"Killed by the double standard" might be an alternative title for *The House Of Mirth* by Edith Wharton. Lily Bart was nothing if not a victim of the social conventions of her time, which punished innocent women on the basis of their reputation while allowing men total freedom.

The first essay in this collection, an introduction by University of Toronto Associate Professor Deborah Esch, reviews and summarizes the autobiographical, biographical, and critical literature on novelist Edith Wharton to place her in the context of *fin de siècle* New York society. It is important to know that *The House Of Mirth*, first published in 1905, was not only a critical success but also a popular one.

The second essay "The conspicuous wasting of Lily Bart," by Ruth Yeazell of Yale University, compares *The House Of Mirth* with Veblen's *The Theory Of The Leisure Class* and finds that the novel and the sociological treatise mirror each other in their views of class in America. She points out that one of the main ironies for women like Lily Bart is that, on the one hand, they are to use their beauty as a bargaining chip for a society husband while on the other

hand, they are socially ostracized if they call attention to themselves. This manifestation of the double standard, of course, puts them into the danger of a double bind.

University of Toronto's Mary Nyquist's long, theoretical essay, "Determining Influences: Resistance and Mentorship in *The House of Mirth* and the Anglo-American Realist Tradition," first looks at Henry James as a possible mentor for Edith Wharton but dismisses that possibility and then examines *Daniel Deronda* by George Eliot and *Emma* by Jane Austen for signs of mentorship. As well, she looks at how these authors deal with romantic love and narcissism in their characters and compares them to Wharton's treatment of romantic love and narcissism in *The House of Mirth*. Nyquist goes on to explore femininity in these three novels and the role of males as mentors to the heroine.

In "Beyond her self," a philosophical essay using the theories of Levinas, Irigaray, Derrida and Lacan, Thomas Loebel of the University of Calgary explains that while *The House of Mirth* criticizes the upper class system of New York at the turn of the century and shows Lily as its captive, we may be past the point where this text can really scare us about the commodification of human relations. Yet, *The House of Mirth* is a profoundly disturbing novel because of what it presents as the process of self-discovery that Lily undergoes. Society stays the same but Lily Bart alters and resists commodification. Loebel thinks that *The House of Mirth* can be read as a narrative of a woman who does not really want what she has been brought up to want, who is, therefore, a misfit, who cannot live alone and therefore, dies. "Wharton's text of a capitalistic social system" he argues,

maps the power dynamics onto a gendered identity of the different sexes, inscribing marriage as the fundamental purchase transaction motivating the system.

Goods produced that can't be sold, unmarried women and men without means, are remaindered into the bargain bin and eventually excluded from the system altogether.

This ethical self-discovery is deeper than and beyond understanding and logic. Loebel expands on these themes, particularly the gap between identity and being, in this insightful essay. In conclusion, he explores Lily as "outsider," "queer." He concludes that it is difficult to see Lily as a feminist protagonist in practical political terms. "Lily can see out of her cage, but she can't seem to get out."

The fifth and final essay "A mole in the house of the modern" by novelist Lynne Tillman begins by looking at the architectural metaphor/motif in *The House of Mirth* and continues to include decoration. These ideas segue into Wharton's enclosures and what they mean to women's roles generally and to Lily's position specifically: "Lily contains within her traces and pieces of the old order and longings for the new." Freud is thrown into this architectural stew for one page and then he wanders off only to be mentioned two more times en passant. Although unfocused, this essay shows a creative mind at work.

LINDSEY SOBERANO

English

I hear sounds coming from a man's lips
he is speaking to his girlfriend
and they are beautiful sounds
but that's all the words are to me
as mysterious as monkey chatter

I hear a woman speaking Spanish
to her children
and these words are more than sounds for me
yet less than a language
because I can only grasp the expressions
that I memorized from Friday night dinners
at *mi abuelas*

As I'm leaning against the bus shelter
a man in a white T-shirt and Jean shorts
appears
and something in the atmosphere dies
like a hunter who invades the jungle
He mumbles "English *Englisssh*"

When we board the bus
the Hispanic woman's daughter sang
a Backstreet Boys song
and even her English sounded Spanish
as the curves of her mouth struggled to bend

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