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Paige Szmodis

Text and Paratext: Analyzing Edith Wharton's *Hudson River Bracketed* in its Periodical Context

English

Mentor: Meredith Goldsmith

Abstract:

Studying a novel in the context of its paratexts—including the illustrations, advertisements, and captions surrounding the fiction—reveals how the publication context can shape a literary work. This project examines Edith Wharton's *Hudson River Bracketed* (1929) and its paratexts by comparing the final version of the novel with textual changes made in its monthly periodical publication in the magazine *The Delineator* (1928-1930). As mass-consumerism and advertising increasingly targeted women during the 1920s, examining Wharton's work in a popular middle-class women's magazine like *The Delineator* illuminates how paratexts affect audience perceptions of the novel's characters, conflicts, and themes. In *Hudson River Bracketed*, Wharton challenges the commercial publishing industry through her portrait of the artist, Vance Weston, as he struggles to adapt to New York's high-brow literary society; however, her social critique of the industry often conflicts with the paratexts' emphasis on ads for beauty and household supplies, romantic illustrations, and modernized captions. Using literature on popular women writers and the gendered consumer culture of the twenties, this analytical paper argues that *The Delineator*, its paratexts, and its textual changes to *Hudson River Bracketed* rewrite Wharton's work as a romance novel, diminishing her critique of the publishing industry and ultimately promoting the commodification of women's literature.

Literary criticism regularly discusses the importance of considering the historical and social context of literary works; however, scholars have just begun to use a periodical lens to better understand literature, its audience, and how its publication form can affect the meaning of the text. Since serial publication was a common medium for publishing novels in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the magazine's paratexts—including the illustrations, advertisements, and any captions around the prose—add an underappreciated context for audience reception of the text's characters, conflicts, and themes. As mass-consumerism and advertising became increasingly targeted toward women in the 1920s, Edith Wharton's work, as published in popular middle-class women's magazines, provides an exceptional opportunity to compare the final forms of her novels to their periodical publication and paratexts. In her penultimate completed novel, *Hudson River Bracketed* (1929) Wharton challenges the commercial publishing industry through her portrait of the artist, Vance Weston, as he struggles to adapt to New York's high-brow literary society. However, this novel was originally published serially in the magazine, *The Delineator*, from 1928 to 1930, aimed at a middle-class female audience. Wharton's critical themes in the original text often conflict with the magazine's feminized and romanticized advertisements, captions, and illustrations as well as its objective to market products to middle-class women. By emphasizing women's social roles as romantic objects and housewives in the magazine's paratexts and textual edits, *The Delineator* rewrites *Hudson River Bracketed* as a romance novel, diminishing Wharton's social critique of the commercial publishing industry and ultimately promoting the commodification of women's literature.

Wharton displays her own personal disenchantment with New York's literary industry through Vance Weston's feminized exploitation by the masculine mass-advertising industry and celebrity culture of the twenties. At the age of 67 when *Hudson River Bracketed* was published,

Wharton had years of experience with middle-class women's magazine publications to fuel her critique of their corruption. Her publisher, Oscar Graeve provided a copy of the beginning of the novel to Jewett, the editor of *The Delineator*, who began serializing the work without Wharton's awareness or permission. Under this demand for more and longer installments, Wharton felt a pressure to write that "made her feel," in biographer Hermione Lee's words, "like Vance, trapped and exploited by his publishers" (687). Inspired by her own literary relations, Wharton critiques the culture of publicity that promotes "the author as a product" through Vance Weston, an aspiring writer who moves to New York City from the mid-west whose publishers exploit him due to his passive, feminine role (Lee 681). He becomes trapped in two bad contracts with his publishers, one that surrendered his serial rights for three years to *The Hour* and another to Dreck and Saltzer for a book publication (*Hudson* 247). In addition to restricting his publication opportunities, Dreck and Saltzer cut his profits in half for his novel *Instead* due to its short length despite the success it had from their advertisements (*Hudson* 379). Wharton also demonstrates Vance's feminine objectification in this industry when Halo asks him, "How does it feel to be It?" comparing him to a 1920s celebrity "It Girl" (*Hudson* 279; Goldsmith 242). Additionally, admen like Bunty Hayes threaten Vance's masculinity, both personally by fighting him over Laura Lou, Vance's wife who had been previously engaged to Hayes, (*Hudson* 261-62) as well as professionally through Bunty's advertising business, Storecraft, which even sells a bust of Vance, thus literally transforming him into a product (*Hudson* 400). As Vance struggles with masculinity and agency in his writing profession and romantic relationships, Wharton emphasizes the harm of turning writers into commodified celebrities for commercial gain by the masculine publishing industry.

In addition to Vance's conflicts with the publishing industry, the novel also focuses on Halo Spear, an upper-middle class, yet impoverished, educated woman who introduces Vance to

New York's high-brow literary society. Vance and Halo meet at the Willows, the vacant home tended by Vance's cousins, the Tracys, and which Halo will eventually inherit; she guides him through his discovery of classic literature like Coleridge and introduces him to her friend, Frenside, the literary critic of *The Hour* before Lewis Tarrant takes over and renames the magazine (*Hudson* 102). Despite Halo's connections to prominent men in the literary industry, she mainly serves as Vance's critic, first on the mountaintop where Vance recites his poetry to her and later by advising her husband, Lewis Tarrant, about Vance's stories for the *New Hour* (*Hudson* 100, 224). While Wharton intentionally chose a male subject for the novel, Halo's character remains significant as a way of "depict[ing] the intellectual and artistic ascendancy of a woman over her less talented male lover" (Werlock 181). Although Halo has more education and cultural capital than Vance does, she feels restricted by her class since she remains unable to establish herself professionally, but simultaneously lacks a "means of independence" other than through marriage because of her family's debts (*Hudson* 104). Meanwhile, Vance is able to pursue a job to gain income, but struggles from a lack of cultural capital, especially with respect to the novel's literati, like the satirized figure, Jet Pulsifer, a wealthy widow named after a literary prize. Halo and Vance's distinct struggles with class also often conflict with *The Delineator's* attempt to portray a middle-class narrative to a consumerist audience.

Despite Vance and Halo's critiques of consumerism in the novel, *The Delineator* uses mass-advertising strategies that Wharton condemns to exploit middle-class female consumers. Although advertising was established as a professional industry in the mid-nineteenth century, between 1914 and 1929, the US magazine advertising grew by 600% by targeting women as the predominant consumers, since women bought 97% of the dry goods, 67% of the foodstuffs, and 67% of the automobiles (Davis 22-23, 87). As a magazine with roots in fashion, *The Delineator* also targets women, featuring popular women writers of the time and predominantly displaying

ads for house supplies, beauty products, and childcare. Although the main purpose of advertising appears to promote a particular brand name for profit, Simone Davis claims that ads are more effective at creating a consumer culture and shaping social identities through gender, race, class, and so on (1). *The Delineator* contributes to this gendering of a mass consumer society through the idea of a “New Woman”; but rather than liberating women from restrictive social roles by depicting them in the workplace, the advertisements promote women’s new independence and income as ways for them to spend more on products to become better and more beautiful housewives and mothers. Women writers like Wharton had reason to fear this commercialization of their work given negative perceptions of feminine art and writing as imitative commodities, which devalue women’s literary work (Churchwell 138-39). Sarah Churchwell defines this mass-advertisement and mass production as a “middlebrow” cultural space, in which “literature and advertisement combined forces to sell commodified markers and discourses of ‘high culture’ to the aspiring middle classes” (Churchwell 139). To Wharton and Vance, the advertisement blurbs for “silk stockings or face cream” distance the writer from their artistic success (*Hudson* 510); however, *The Delineator* must turn *Hudson River Bracketed* into middlebrow literature to promote the necessity of these products to their female audience and to profit off Wharton’s writing.

The Delineator’s ads for women’s beauty and household products promote insecurity and celebrity commodification to reinforce their audience’s social roles as housewives, mothers, and sexual objects. Figure 1 displays ad for a facial product, with a large caption, “The fault, dear lady, lies often with yourself” which summarizes the common use of anxiety found in other beauty ads as well (*Delineator* March 1929: 84). This caption exemplifies John Berger’s claim that “[all] publicity works upon anxiety” by blaming women for their appearances to cause anxiety about reaching unachievable beauty standards (143). These ads also often use female

celebrities to promote their beauty products and ideals to convey the message that it is their fault if the product does not work for them like the celebrity in the ad (Davis 10). For instance, Figure 2 displays a woman named “Claire Windsor” as she sports “a certain type of hosiery” to associate that brand name with a higher celebrity class (*Delineator* December 1928: 72).

Wharton equates this mass-advertising of beauty products to the commercialization of literature through Halo. In response to the *New Hour*'s publicizing of Vance to “steal” the Pulsifer prize, a satirical name for the Pulitzer, Halo tells her husband, the editor of the magazine, that “[if] that's the way literature is produced, it had better cease altogether. If it has to be shoved down people's throats like Beauty Products and patent collar buttons it shows our people don't really want it; that's all!” (*Hudson* 332-33). However, by using the same publishing strategies that Wharton condemns, the novel's publication in *The Delineator* made Wharton \$95,000 in royalties in 1929 before the Great Depression hit (Lee 691). By the late nineteenth century when magazines like *The Delineator* broadened their audience by becoming middle-class ten cent monthlies, they came to depend on advertising, rather than subscriptions, for revenue (Garvey 9). Despite Wharton's financial success from the advertising techniques that Halo condemns, women writers like Wharton suffered from negative feminine stereotypes, as their work was viewed as imitative or unoriginal, on par with mass-produced beauty products.



Figure 1. Advertisement for a Sal Hepatica face serum for improving complexion. *The Delineator* (March 1929), p. 84.



Figure 2. Advertisement displaying a famous woman named “Claire Windsor” to promote a hosiery brand. *The Delineator* (Dec. 1928), p. 72.



Figure 3. Ten cent price tag in the top right corner of the issue cover. *The Delineator* (Sept. 1928).

As with beauty ads, other advertisements convey to women readers that they could make their lives as housewives and mothers more fulfilling by succumbing to their anxiety and guilt about attaining household and childcare products. In *Hudson River Bracketed*, Laura Lou fails as a housewife, and Vance continually comes home to his “cramped untidy” apartment to a dirty floor, unwashed and unfolded clothing, and “their scanty possessions untidily tossed about” (384-85). While Laura Lou’s failure as Vance’s housewife can be attributed to her illness,

Vance's financial instability, and their immature early marriage, the products in the ads promote the idea that Laura Lou could be a better housewife with products in the advertisements like speed electric irons, furniture cream, self-wringing mops, and washers (*Delineator* Oct. 1928, Feb. 1929). The juxtaposition of this scene in *Hudson River Bracketed* and the ads convinces the reader that Laura Lou is at fault as a woman, housewife, and consumer to not be able to provide for Vance with a clean, tidy apartment. However, Wharton means to attribute the couple's financial struggles and poor living situation to the publishing industry's lack of support for Vance and his sick wife. Halo criticizes her husband's unfair contract with and treatment of Vance that "wounded his pride as an artist," causing him to destroy his manuscript along with the potential income source (*Hudson* 466-69). Using advertisements that emphasize a housewife's responsibilities, *The Delineator* recasts Vance's lack of professional success to Laura Lou's unachieved consumer role as opposed to the publishing industry's oppressive control over his writing.

Although the new technologies, fashions, and lifestyle of the 1920s were viewed as liberating for the "New Woman," *The Delineator's* ads promote an illusion of agency and independence in relation to women's new incomes and consumerist abilities that conflict with Wharton's representation of women's stifled agency. Beauty ads, as Berger reports, exemplify how "[p]ublicity...uses sexuality to sell any product or service...to be able to buy is the same thing as being sexually desirable," so women must have disposable incomes to find love and fulfill traditional roles as wives and mothers (144). Therefore, magazines often encouraged ways for women to make income in conventional roles like fashion, sewing, writing, home decorating, and so on (Garvey 142). Figure 4 presents one of several ads for women's jobs with the promise of making extra money. Most of these ads are informational booklets so women can learn skills like dressmaking, home decoration, or beauty application. However, women primarily gained the

“freedom to shop” to promote their individuality, ironically through mass-produced products (Davis 9). Brand diversification and competition was “thought [to offer] a free choice” for women; however, Berger argues that the publicity is never really about just the product or “a celebration of a pleasure-in-itself,” but about selling an ideology (131-32). Magazines also promoted stories in which female characters would make small amounts of income, showing how editors conceived the messages of their fiction in contrast to the consumerism necessary for them to profit from ads (Garvey 139-42). Meanwhile, Wharton exposes this false premise of agency through the characterization of Halo, who lacks the freedom she desires like other girls her age who have their own cars, apartments, and so on, which in turn allow them to avoid marriage. Halo considered professions similar to advertised ones in *The Delineator* like writing and painting to earn an income, but succumbs to the belief that “her real gift... was for appreciating the gift of others” (Hudson 104). The new jobs advertised for women in the 1920s were not created for women like Halo to have their independence, but as small disposable incomes designed for housewives and mothers to spend to become better at their traditional social roles.



Figure 4. Advertisement for a free booklet on house decoration as a job for women to make extra money. *The Delineator* (Feb. 1929), p. 104.

While women's jobs were promoted in the ads, the advertising and publishing industries were male-dominated during the twenties, which masculinized business writing while feminizing and devaluing artistic work. Some women entered the advertising industry, but their male-coworkers often viewed them as subjects to teach them how to advertise to their female audience (Davis 88). Therefore, the men working for *The Delineator* most likely controlled the content in the magazine's ads, illustrations, and other paratexts. Wharton represents how these admen had the control to level out the middle-class's tastes and ambitions to sell mass-produced products through Hayes' 'Storecraft' (Bauer 130). The "gendering" of this divide between adman like Hayes and commodities like Vance "has been central to maintaining [the] hierarchy" between male producers and female consumers (Davis 7). Because of the commodification of writers by masculine businesses like Storecraft, Vance's mother reveals the perception of creative writing as a feminine profession as she encourages him to write "pure manly stores" (Hudson 257). Due to Vance's artistic failures, feminization, and inability to provide for his sick wife, at the end of the novel, he resorts to earning money by writing for Storecraft's publicity department, convinced by Hayes that "writing a good advertisement was just as much of an art as turning out *Paradise Lost* or *Gentleman Prefer Blondes*" (Hudson 510). While meeting with Vance, Hayes outlines his plans for Storecraft's own publishing department that intends to use original novels to direct women readers to their own products, subtly revealing Wharton's discomfort with how *The Delineator* and other women's magazines use her literature to sell products. As seen throughout *The Delineator*'s advertisements and Hayes' business, the publishing industry promotes capitalism "by forcing the majority, whom it exploits, to define their own interests as narrowly as possible" (Berger 154). Therefore, *The Delineator* must simplify *Hudson River Bracketed* and its characters through the later illustrations, headers, and textual variants to profit from imitative ads.

Advertisers and magazine editors began new advertising strategies to blend their ads into the text, creating more parallels between ads, illustrations, and the characterization of the female characters in *Hudson River Bracketed* to promote consumerist lifestyles and conventional roles. Before the late 1910s, most ads were separated to the front or back sections of the magazines, until later magazines mixed advertisements with stories to ensure advertisers that their ads were viewed by readers (Garvey 4-5). “Blind ads” that mixed advertising with illustrations and fiction were more effective at selling products and ideologies to readers, so “editorial content and advertising context were deliberately rendered visually similar as well” (Churchwell 141). Because of these progressive advertising strategies, editors “prefer[ed] stories that neither detracted from the premises of advertising nor undercut the tone of the ads, but rather created fictional worlds as much as possible continuous with the concerns of the ads” (Garvey 14). Therefore, *The Delineator* had reason to undercut the satire in Wharton’s text to promote realistic fiction that portrayed characters not as powerless in their social situations, but as free consumers. Common “vehicles” or advertising models placed beautiful women next to the product in an ad not only to blend the ads into the illustrations and fiction, but to “augment the commodity’s appeal” and “impersonate a potential you” to the viewer (Davis 105-07). Figure 5 from *The Delineator* shows this common technique with a portrait of a woman above an ad for a hair product. The same issue displays an illustration of Halo and Vance on the mountaintop, so that from the first page of this section of *Hudson River Bracketed*, Halo’s image is compared to women in the illustrations. Vance’s position facing Halo as she lounges puts her in the position of the “surveyed” to the reader as well, equating her to other women like the celebrity in Figure 2 and the portrait of the woman in Figure 5 through their similar placing, hair styles, and fashion. Because these magazine illustrations were the most commonly viewed visual representations during the 1920s (Thornton 31), publishers had reason to want to match them with

advertisements to sell products and consumerist ideologies. In her analysis of Wharton's novel, *The Mother's Recompense*, in its serialization in the *Pictorial Review*, Thornton reveals how "the ad and illustration confirm the magazine's consumer agenda: tie the fictional text to the advertiser's sales interests; and provide both instructions on what is a desirable woman and points of identification and fantasy for becoming that woman" (Thornton 42). Although Halo's character calls out this commodification of literature like beauty products in Wharton's text, *The Delineator's* advertising strategies revise her character as an advertising tool and commodity when closely paring illustrations with advertisements.



Figure 5. Portrait of a woman above an advertisement for Lemon Juice Rinse hair product. *The Delineator* (Dec. 1928), p. 66.

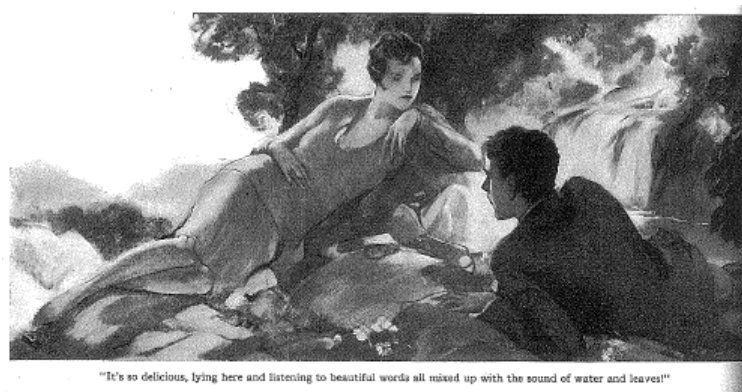


Figure 6. Illustration of Halo and Vance on the mountaintop. *The Delineator* (Dec. 1928), p. 16. Illustration by Henry Sutter.

The chosen illustrated scenes as well as their objectifying representations of women also refocus the novel's conflict on romance and family drama, exaggerating a love triangle between Vance, Halo, and Laura Lou that reduces the agency of Wharton's female characters. From the first issue in Figure 7, Henry Sutter's illustrations portray Halo as a love interest, as she fashionably lounges with Vance facing her. Halo and Vance's portrayals in the illustrations follow Berger's analysis of European nude art positions in which "the women's attention is very rarely directed towards him," but rather toward the audience, giving Vance the power in this situation as the male "spectator-owner" (56). However, Laura Lou's illustrations eventually compete with Halo as Vance's romantic interest. Figure 8 replicates Laura Lou in the same original position as Halo from the first illustration with Vance facing her and her gaze towards the readers. By presenting both Halo and Laura Lou as objectified love interests in the illustrations, *The Delineator* reinforces messages from the ads on women's romantic roles and beauty standards. Some issues with two illustrations also pair one illustration of Halo with another focusing on Laura Lou, setting them up to be competing love interests in Vance's romantic conflicts. Even though "Vance seems to distinguish Halo from other women" (Bauer 125), these illustrations simply replicate female characters and portray both women as equal love interests to Vance despite their differing relationships with him. For instance, the concluding caption for the issue that introduces Halo into the story mentions Halo's "strong new emotional influence in the life of Vance Weston" rather than the intellectual influence she had over him in the beginning of the novel (*Delineator* Oct. 1928: 85). Combined with the ads and surrounding captions about the text, the illustrations objectify the women of *Hudson River Bracketed*, which redirects the novel's focus on romance and drama to better market the novel.



Figure 7. First illustration of Halo and Vance. *The Delineator* (Sept. 1928), p. 12. By Henry Sutter.



Figure 8. Illustration of Laura Lou and Vance on their honeymoon. *The Delineator* (April 1929), p. 25. By Henry Sutter.

The Delineator's serialization also adds headers and captions about the novel as paratexts, written by editors for the purpose of marketing the novel to potential readers of the magazine. These headers focus on themes of “modern youth” and romantic conflicts to convey to the reader the importance of the romantic plots over Wharton’s complex satirical and realistic criticism of the modern literary industry, class, and consumerism. The first issue describes the novel as “a modern American youth’s quest for beauty, and his struggle between old beliefs and new purposes” seen in Figure 9 (*Delineator* September 1928: 12). This ambiguous description

implies a conflict with old beliefs that can be solved with new purposes, although Wharton actually critiques the modern youth culture by depicting Vance as unequipped and ignorant, often comparing him to a schoolboy. This header becomes increasingly simplified as it gets reiterated through the monthly issues to “a novel of a modern youth’s struggle for love and achievement” (March 1929: 25). By May 1929 in Figure 10, the header cuts out references to Vance and his struggles as a “modern youth” and calls *Hudson River Bracketed* a “modern novel of love and achievement” (May 1929: 27). These headers contradict Vance’s struggle to balance his marriage and career, due to “the unfairness of life, the cruelty of social conditions” to eliminate Wharton’s demonstration of working class obstacles (*Hudson* 387-89). In actuality, Vance fails both romantically and artistically as his attempt to achieve genius by writing his book, *Magic*, because he continually gets interrupted to care for Laura Lou before her death and can barely afford to hire someone else to care for her (*Hudson* 488-95). By emphasizing modern romance and achievement, the captions appear to make Vance more successful, and therefore have more agency both in his marriage and publishing contracts.



Figure 9. The first header describing *Hudson River Bracketed*. *The Delineator* (Sept. 1928), p. 12.



Figure 10. Header for *Hudson River Bracketed*. *The Delineator* (May 1929), p. 37.

The headers presents in Figures 9 and 10 also show the progression of the magazine paratexts to appeal to modern women readers. The May 1929 issue's header illustrates how *Hudson River Bracketed* is "a modern novel" through its modernized lower-case typography and feminine script. The headers' content and typography may have been increasingly distanced from Wharton's original themes due to criticism about her work becoming "stuffy, remote and old-fashioned" (Lee 691). For instance, a critic of the time, Percy Hutchison criticizes how the novel "is in the present, although a present which has been influenced, more than commonly perhaps, by the past" (Tuttleton 467). However, Wharton also discussed the issue with modern critics' belief that "whatever is complex is unauthentic" in her own writing, which may explain why *The Delineator* would attempt to simplify the complex conflicts with modernity in the novel through its paratexts (*Uncollected Critical Writings* 155). Modernizing the captions also serves the purpose of comparing the novel to the advertisements, which advertisers and editors also attempted to align with modernity (Garvey 13). Along with the ads and illustrations, the modernized and romanticized captions about *Hudson River Bracketed* not only simplify female characters' representations, but also portray Vance with more agency and success in order to counter Wharton's expression of his exploitation by the publishing industry and its harmful effects on his income and romantic life.

Although the paratexts have a heavy influence over the audience's perception of the novel, the editors and publishers also gain control over audience interpretation by truncating and modifying the original text. These textual edits to *Hudson River Bracketed* in *The Delineator* reinforce twenties ideals of genius and success in the paratexts to simplify the novel's major themes about the consumerist influences on the literary industry. From the first September 1928 issue, Vance's suicidal conflict at the end of the third chapter was removed, until the story picks back up at the beginning of the fourth chapter (*Delineator* Sept.1928: 94). The removal of an

essential scene in which Vance begins to write his first story, “One Day,” diminishes the stakes of the novel, thus aiding the work of the paratext, which recasts the main conflicts as romantic rather than social. Because of this scene’s importance, Wharton refers to it several times later in the novel, but *The Delineator* continues to edit out any references to the suicide attempt as well as other minor references to his mid-west background. Lee acknowledges that Vance, as Wharton intended his character to be conveyed, “is a bad judge of character and a hopeless husband and lover, childish, egotistical and unfaithful” (683); however, the deletion of this scene helps *The Delineator* to establish Vance’s character as not only more emotionally stable, but as more competent, mature, and successful. For instance, the second issue also removes a paragraph referencing Vance’s usual inability to write poetry due to his lack of life experience, jumping to the line as he “finished the Magdalen poem about the lilacs” to show his success at writing (*Delineator* Oct. 28: 96). By cutting the line, “No one had ever before asked him to recite his verses” after Halo asked him on Thundertop, the periodical makes Vance also appear a more experienced writer (*Hudson* 98; *Delineator* Dec. 1928: 16). Although Wharton’s personal experience compares to Vance’s commodification, she still intended for him to be “a parody of the male writer” (Goodman 129). As Vance is bombarded by fan questions at the Tarrant’s evening party that he does not know how to answer, Wharton demonstrates how quickly the literary society desires to make a genius out of a young man who remains uncultured and unaware of how to navigate high-brow society (*Hudson* 277-78). Combined with headers about achievement, these textual edits also begin to rewrite this depiction of Vance, promoting a celebrity culture based on his experience and capability to succeed.

To sell Wharton’s work to middle class audiences, the textual changes also dilute Wharton’s complex class portrayal by altering Vance’s class background to make him more educated and cultured. By removing a line about Vance having “no aristocratic blood” *The*

Delineator presents Vance of a higher class and more cultured like Halo, potentially to present them as equals (Oct. 1928: 79). Later in the January 1929 issue, *The Delineator* removes another large section from the novel depicting Vance's time spent educating himself in the New York Public Library, "eating daily less, studying daily for longer hours" to the point where he "saw in the blotched looking glass a face so bloodless and shrunken that he thought he must be on the verge of another illness" (Hudson 160). Replacing Wharton's pages of detailed descriptions with the simple explanation, "Finally, on the verge of starving..." may have been done to save space in the magazine; however, it decreases the stakes of Vance's financial conflict and lack of education that leads him nearly to starvation (*Delineator* Jan. 1929: 72). Vance's appearance was also edited by *The Delineator* from Halo's perception of him at their evening party; she remarks both on his physicality and class status that "in his evening clothes, [he] looked unexpectedly heavy and common" (Hudson 273; *Delineator* May 1929: 112). *The Delineator* not only presents Vance as higher class by removing this reflection on his appearance, but also solidifies his artistic ability by cutting Halo's questioning if "this [was] the way genius was cut?" (Hudson 270). While many illustrations focus on the women's appearances, some illustrations also depict Vance as higher class, portraying him in polished suits such as in Figure 11. With all of the artistic, romantic, and class conflicts that Vance faces in the original text of *Hudson River Bracketed*, critic V.S. Pritchett claims that "Vance Weston is perhaps more of a problem than a man" (Tuttleton 474); however, this interpretation may be lost on readers of *The Delineator* since it diminishes Vance's struggle with complex social issues. With the presence of the paratexts emphasizing romance and success, these textual changes to the novel characterize Vance as more educated, wealthy, and successful, which lessens Wharton's critique of the celebrated male artist in the increasingly consumerist publishing industry.



Figure 11. Illustration of Vance (on the left), Halo, and Mr. Lorburn in the Willows library. *The Delineator* (Jan. 1929), p. 16. By Henry Sutter.

Meanwhile, *The Delineator* also alters Halo's character as an intellectual, upper-middle class literary critic to promote more traditional, middle-class roles for women seen in the advertisements and illustrations of women. Although Vance initially feels insecure around Halo after she forgot to arrive at dawn to take him to Thundertop, *The Delineator* reduces his timidity by cutting his worrying that she had "forgotten him because he was too young and insignificant to be remembered" as well as his reference to the fact that she was a few years older than him (*Hudson* 92-93; Nov. 1928). The next issue also removes several of Wharton's lines depicting Halo as more educated and cultured than Vance such as "the simplest things she said presupposed a familiarity with something or other that he was ignorant of" (*Hudson* 97; Dec. 1928). Beyond these subtle hints at Halo's maturity and intelligence, *The Delineator* goes further to remove her critique of Vance's poem, stripping her of her role as a literary critic in the novel (Dec. 1928: 17). After she critiques his diction and rhyming, Vance ruminates on how "her verbal criticism...brought him down like a shot bird. He hardly understood what she meant, did

not know what there was to find fault with in the English of the people who wrote for book jackets—“ (*Hudson* 100-101). While removing Halo’s harm to Vance’s ego, *The Delineator* also avoids Wharton’s critique of admen and their commercial writing style that is unsuited for Vance’s poetic writing. Meanwhile, the issue skips to Halo’s compliments, saying that he has “the real gift,” reinforcing the twenties idea of individual genius (Dec. 1928: 17). Similarly to their removal of Vance’s suicidal scene, *The Delineator* also edits out later references to Halo’s criticism throughout the magazine publication. By making Vance more educated and Halo less intellectual, *The Delineator* is able to better objectify Halo in the illustrations as a romantic interest, which also contributes to masculinizing Vance to make him appear as less of a victim of the publishing industry as well as equalizing them through a middle-class status. Therefore, through these textual variants, Wharton’s critique of the exploitation and commodification of writers by the commercial literary industry may be lost to many readers exposed to *The Delineator’s* paratexts.

The Delineator’s reinterpretation of Halo also removes Wharton’s demonstration of the restrictions of marriage as an institution on women’s lives. Although Halo expresses a desire to be more independent from her family toward the beginning of the novel, *The Delineator* removes Wharton’s explicit description of Halo’s marriage to Lewis Tarrant, in which the narrator explains that “the extent of [the Spear family’s] borrowings...had in fact been the direct cause of Halo’s marriage” (*Hudson* 179). Rather than mentioning her family’s financial debt to Tarrant, the magazine rewrites Halo’s debt to him that he had just “been immensely generous to them; and that was the main thing, that was what she would never forget” (*Delineator* February 1929: 21). By portraying their relationship based on kindness rather than financial support, *The Delineator* attempts to promote a traditional romantic relationship that supposedly gives women like Halo more agency. However, Wharton often writes about her perception that “marriage is at

best a compromise that severely suppresses or limits the self” (Goodman 142). She later explicitly proclaims that Tarrant “wanted her; [Halo] suited him; he had bought her. It was no more romantic than that” (*Hudson* 337); conversely, *The Delineator* must romanticize the text to agree with the paratext and advertisements that promote romantic goals for women. The progressive representation of women that Wharton attempts by exposing the restrictions of the institution of marriage and Halo as an intellectual equal to her husband may be absent to *The Delineator*’s female audience due to these textual changes, as well as the advertisements that endorse traditional women’s roles as romantic objects and housewives. This rewriting of *Hudson River Bracketed* as a romance novel simplifies its themes to a modern, middle-class, female audience as consumers rather than potential critics of consumerism like Wharton.

However, readers must not forget that despite Wharton’s condemnation of the commercial publishing industry, her text ultimately contributes to and benefits from the consumerism that *Hudson River Bracketed* critiques. The novel’s multiple complex interpretations are a result the “conflicting narratives and struggling authorities” over the meaning of a text in its periodical form, including Wharton, editors, illustrations, admen, and so on (Thornton 31-32). The commercial goals of middle-class women’s magazines of the 1920s permit many of these contributors to take away Wharton’s agency and control over her work. Through Vance’s writing career, Wharton “makes clear that the production of literature cannot be reduced simply to a transaction between author and publisher or even author and public” (Goldsmith 234); similarly, the periodical context of *Hudson River Bracketed* reveals the complexity of the publication of literature that extends beyond authorial intent to include advertisers, illustrators, and editors who all play a role in producing the meaning of a text. Through analyzing Wharton’s *The Mother’s Recompense* in its periodical context, Thornton also concludes that “the magazine’s repetition of familiar images and narratives overpowered

possible subversive readings of Wharton's text" (32). These multiple influences bring into question how progressive Wharton's complex gender and class representations could be while functioning within a commercial industry. In addition, magazine serialization affected Wharton's as well as other popular middle-brow women writers' past and present reputations; critics perceived their writing as "artificial" due to the commodification of their works with ceaseless similar advertisements and illustrations (Lewis 484). The competing narratives in the paratexts as well as Wharton's satirical tone may explain the novel's lack of popularity and "may even have contributed to the decline in her reputation" (Goldsmith 245). The periodical context of popular women writer's works in the 1920s may expose why texts like Wharton's *Hudson River Bracketed* have not made it into the American literary canon, due to both the magazine's association with a middle-class feminine audience as well as its revision of Wharton's complex themes. Analyzing the text within its periodical context "guides reader attention in a manner completely absent in traditional novel reading," which ultimately helps us to fully understand the social context of a literary work (Thornton 42). In the case of *Hudson River Bracketed*, the paratext and publishing context reveal Wharton's tension with the commercial publishing industry and the commodification of her own work, explaining why *Hudson River Bracketed* failed to become one of her canonical works.

The 1920s gendering of mass-consumerism helps us apprehend how women writers like Edith Wharton and their works were commodified by middle-class women's magazines like *The Delineator*. Although Wharton's final novels, *Hudson River Bracketed* and its sequel, *The Gods Arrive* (1932), aimed to reveal the corruption in the modern literary industry, many of these themes were lost to *The Delineator's* audience due to its textual variants and paratexts. Both past critics and contemporary readers may not have considered Wharton's negative experiences with the literary industry, which devalued her work by commodifying it, as evidenced by reading the

novel in its periodical context. For the rest of her writing career, Wharton struggled to balance her critique of American consumer culture, her need for positive publicity, and her equally pressing need for financial stability, which relied on advertising revenue of the magazines in which she published. Examining the women's magazine and its paratexts offers an inside look at how publishers' textual changes, advertisements, illustrations, and other captions can alter the meaning of a literary work to perpetuate a capitalist consumer culture. The periodical context and its association with a middle-brow, feminine audience persists to affect Wharton and her work's inclusion in the literary canon and her contemporary reputation. As a result, women writers like Wharton in the early twentieth century had more reason than ever to critique the industry's commodification of and control over their artistic work.

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