

# **The Application and Adaptation of the Writing Process in Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence***

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## **Abstract**

The field of literary criticism is rich in analysis of a writer's final product. The process that a writer implements is often disregarded or overlooked. By neglecting the steps taken during the writing process, researchers limit their study to one, polished form of a text. Without examining the text in each phase of composition, it is difficult to understand a writer's intentions, motivations, and methods. In this project, Edith Wharton's social-satire, *The Age of Innocence*, was examined in its various stages of composition to define a structured approach to the process of creative writing, something highly debated in the academic community. Additionally, the research will provide a detailed review of a methods approach to literature, prioritizing the development of Wharton's fiction as the substance of the final product, rather than the influence of context in her writing.

## **Introduction**

The primary focus of literary analysis regards the context of the period, culture, form, and body of thought in which a text is written. An alternative to this approach is textual scholarship. This criticism regards the "(...) process (the historical stages in the production, transmission, and reception of texts), not just product (...)." (1) In scrutinizing the points of revision and origin of a text, a researcher gains a solid understanding of how the finished product came to be and how rhetorical modes are adapted in composition. This approach, however, is limited by a lack of available documents and

Figure 1. Timeline of Materials

The principle stage of analyzing Wharton's process was the comparison of the corrected manuscript, the typescript, and the published version of the novel. In this step, I read the texts side by side, and noted the changes made from one to the other. I then read Wharton's non-fiction book titled *The Writing of Fiction* (6), in

and assured himself that the little gold circlet (engraved inside: Newland to May, April --, 187-) was in its place; then, resuming his former attitude with his pearl-gray glove with black stitching and his tall hat grasped together in his gloved hand, he stood looking at the door of the church" (2, pp.301) was altered for this reason. The second section of the line differs in the typescript and final publication as "resuming his former attitude, his tall hat and pearl-gray gloves with black stitchings grasped in his left hand, he stood looking at the door of the church" (3, pp.168) (4, pp.110). Not all first-draft prose flows smoothly, even though the final product comes out sounding rather polished and concise. To see these differences between the manuscript and typescript removes some of the mystery behind the construction of prose. While Wharton is clearly a seasoned writer, the revision process is a part of her technique. Her craft matures as she writes. Revision is necessary to perfect the

methods approach to analyzing process is often viewed as secondary. The result of this project, however, proves that such a notion is highly invalid. With an adequate amount of original documents available, a research study in textual scholarship is possible. Manuscript and archive collections are the foundation for this type of