

**Kovács Ágnes Zsófia. *The Memory of Architecture in Edith Wharton's Travel Writing*.  
New York: Routledge, 2025. 212 pp. ISBN  
9781032580265**

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Ágnes Zsófia Kovács's book is a meticulously researched and elegantly argued monograph that redefines Edith Wharton's travel writing as a relevant segment of her intellectual and aesthetic achievement. In a field long dominated by analyses of Wharton's fiction, this volume argues for the unity, seriousness, and interpretive sophistication of the non-fictional works. Kovács demonstrates that for Wharton, travel was not primarily a pastime or an occasion for picturesque sketching but a sustained form of historical inquiry. The travel books are engagements with architecture, landscape, and visual arts through which the traveler reflects on cultural continuity and moral imagination. *The Memory of Architecture* joins, and significantly extends, the recent turn in international Wharton studies toward global, transnational, and visual-cultural approaches. Referencing the work of Hermione Lee, Alan Price, Emily Orlando, and Sarah Bird Wright, Kovács offers a fresh discussion grounded in art history and the study of visual culture. Her central claim that Wharton develops an "architectural vision" which shapes her understanding of the Old World across decades and continents is original and thoroughly documented. At the same time, the study demonstrates the ongoing revitalization of Hungarian American Studies, with its long-standing strengths in visuality, philological precision, and interdisciplinary cultural analysis.

The volume is organized chronologically around Wharton's major travel books, beginning with the Italian travel books published at the beginning of the century and concluding with the Spanish travel fragments of the 1920s. The "Introduction" lays out the book's premise: travel writing must be understood as a cultural artifact whose meaning develops in the process of production, circulation, and reception. Travel writing, when read as a corpus, reveals the author's consistent preoccupation with architecture as a carrier of memory. Its forms and surface, Kovács explains, features encoded layers of historical experience that can be decoded through a knowledgeable observer's eye. Rejecting the picturesque tradition of Irving and Hawthorne, Wharton cultivates a technical mode of "seeing" shaped by Ruskin's observational method, Goethe's aesthetic pedagogy, and the nineteenth-century debate between cultivated amateurs and trained experts (40-41).

The first two chapters examine the Italian travel books, foundational texts that articulate her early architectural sensibility. In *Italian Villas and Their Gardens*

(1904), Wharton traces the aesthetic principles underlying Renaissance and Baroque villa design. Kovács notes that although the itinerary is not historically ordered, the argument implicitly charts a development from Renaissance harmony toward Baroque theatricality, emphasizing adaptation and continuity rather than antiquarian reconstruction (51, 53). In *Italian Backgrounds* (1905), Wharton enters into dialogue with Ruskin, relying on but also resisting his moralized aesthetic judgments. She critiques Ruskin's privileging of Italian Gothic, and rethinks art history as a comparative project attentive to local variation and stylistic assimilation. Here, Kovács's reading is particularly strong: she shows how Wharton's architectural vision is always both technical and affective, balancing form with emotion (64, 72).

The following two chapters on France trace Wharton's transition from aesthetic contemplation to wartime witnessing. *A Motor-Flight Through France* (1908) uses Gothic cathedrals, particularly Reims, Bourges, and Chartres, to model a historical continuity that is emotional rather than didactic. Wharton "silently" applies Ruskinian principles while developing her own vocabulary of temporal experience (110). In the wartime *Fighting France* (1915), architecture becomes a medium of loss and resilience. Instead of focusing directly on human suffering, Wharton records the war's devastation through ruined towns, facades, and cathedral shells. Kovács reads these passages alongside contemporary propaganda discourses about cultural destruction, especially after the burning of Reims Cathedral (118-122). The result is a nuanced interpretation of Wharton's complex relation to war, memory, and national endurance.

Chapter 5, which discusses Wharton's *In Morocco* (1920), presents the writer's engagement with a non-European architectural landscape. Kovács treats this North African travel book as both an extension and a transformation of Wharton's visually driven travel practice. Morocco appears both as a dream-like vision of the medieval past framed in "golden light" (149) and as a place of contemporary cultural disorientation: the "Arabian Nights" allure transformed by colonial modernizing ambitions. Kovács points out the Orientalist elements of Wharton's prose and demonstrates how the writer's architectural imagination persists even here. The juxtaposition of bazaars, palaces, ruined gates, and French administrative buildings inspires reflections on historical continuity and rupture, while Wharton also draws on her earlier language of war propaganda. (Kovács's article in this issue elaborates on the publishing contexts of Wharton's *In Morocco*.)

The later chapters (6 and 7) examine *The Cruise of the Vanadis* (1888), the *Osprey Notes* (1926), and the Spanish manuscripts. Kovács treats these as keys to understanding Wharton's late style and her lifelong quest for cultural continuity. In the Aegean writings, Wharton's impressions of ruins, landscapes, and classical sites take on an almost mystical cast; in the Spanish fragments, Romanesque sculpture becomes a medium of affective understanding that overwhelms her capacity to write. These late texts, Kovács argues, reveal the culmination of Wharton's architectural imagination as both technical and contemplative. The book's conclusion synthesizes these insights and outlines further lines of inquiry, including Wharton's relation to Proust, her position within the Genteel Tradition, and the spatial aesthetics of her fiction.

Kovács's contribution to the cross-disciplinary conversation on Wharton's oeuvre is timely and important. Scholarship on Wharton's travel writing has been expanding in the last decade, but studies that treat the travel books as a unified intellectual project remain few. The monograph complements studies by Vernon Lee, Alan Price, Emily Orlando, and Laura Rattray, but adds a solid art-historical and architectural framework that traces the development of Wharton's visual epistemology across sixty years of writing.

For Hungarian readers, the book has an additional layer of significance. Kovács's work exemplifies the strengths of Central European American Studies: philological rigor, deep understanding of intellectual history, and a sensitivity to questions of cultural memory. Her monograph demonstrates how Hungarian Americanists can contribute original perspectives to international debates, not by applying American paradigms but by bringing distinct intellectual traditions into conversation with them. A particularly relevant aspect of Kovács's profile is her earlier editorial work on *Osprey Notes* published in the series AMERICANA eBooks in 2021. This publication, based on Kovács's archival research at the Beinecke Library, and its substantial "Introduction" represent a major contribution to Wharton scholarship. This editorial accomplishment enhances the authority of the present monograph. Kovács does not merely interpret Wharton's travel books; she has helped shape the archive on which such interpretations depend. Her combination of manuscript scholarship and interpretive criticism positions her within the recognized lineage of Wharton editors.

*The Memory of Architecture in Edith Wharton's Travel Writing* is a substantial and carefully executed contribution to Wharton studies and to the broader field of transnational American literary scholarship. It restores Wharton's travel writing, which is often treated as peripheral to her fictional works, to its rightful place as a significant segment of her intellectual project. The travel writings reveal her as a cultural historian, an art critic, and an interpreter of architectural memory. For Hungarian Americanists, the book is especially important: it showcases a model of interdisciplinary literary scholarship rooted in Central European intellectual traditions: a project of recovering Wharton's visual imagination for twenty-first-century readers.