

## Comparison of the first page of *The House of Mirth* with *Commonplace*

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*Abstract.* I observe common ground and differences between the first page of Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* and Christina Rossetti's *Commonplace*.

*Even madness puts up a fence*

*Faced with women of such little sense*

What is it like to read a novel? I am on the first page of Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*. I came upon this sentence:

There was nothing new about Lily Bart, yet he could never see her without a faint movement of interest: it was characteristic of her that she always aroused speculation, that her simplest acts seemed the result of far-reaching intentions. (1990 [1905]: 7)

"This too is nothing new," I thought. "Is it not in Christina Rossetti's novella *Commonplace*?"

Here is a quotation from *Commonplace*, which I did not have at hand while reading:

A row of houses all alike stands facing the sea – all alike so far as stucco fronts and symmetrical doors and windows could make them so: but one house in the monotonous row was worth looking at, for the sake of more numerous hyacinths and early roses in its slip of front garden, and on several of its window sills. Judging by appearances, and

for once judging rightly, this must be a private residence on an esplanade full of lodging houses. (2005 [1870]: 2)

In both quotations, there is something the same as others but somehow attracting interest

However, then I remembered some differences between the fictions:

- (i) The narrator of Rossetti's novella is talking about houses and Wharton's narrator is talking about a person. There is nothing new about the person Lily Bart.
- (ii) Rossetti, or her narrator, describes a certain house as of interest, whereas the narrator of Wharton's novel does not actually say that Lily Bart is of interest. Bart is nothing new, but she awakens the interest of one of the other characters.
- (iii) The objects of comparison are right next to the interesting object in Rossetti's novella, but so far we are not presented with the comparable "things" in *The House of Mirth*, or so I assume.

Given contrasts (i) and (ii), I am disposed to infer that Wharton is rather bad or her narrator is. But perhaps there is nothing necessarily bad about such a claim within a science fiction. But does not Wharton belong to a non-science fiction school?

## References

Rossetti, C. 2005. *Commonplace*. London: Hesperus Press.

Wharton, E. 1990. *The House of Mirth*. London: Virago Press.