

## *Abstract*

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*Spectral Traces: Writing, Gender and Memory in Edith Wharton's Ghost Stories*

From Cotton Mather's *The Wonders of the Invisible World* to Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, America has always been a land of ghosts, a nation obsessed with the spectral. This essay focuses on the traces and tracks left by phantoms. Edith Wharton's collection of ghost stories *Ghosts* (1937) provides the background for an analysis of spectral traces informed by post-structuralist, feminist and psychoanalytic perspectives. First, the complex relationship between spectral traces, writing, orality, and gender is discussed. Then, following traces as a reading strategy is considered. Finally, the ways in which traces often hint at the re-emergence of individual and collective memory – as well as unconscious desires – are examined.