

## Full Circle by Edith Wharton Part 6

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**Level:** Advanced

**Age:** Young adults / Adults

**Aims:** In this lesson the students will:

1. recall the main events in Part 5;
2. listen for key information;
3. practise reading aloud with attitude;
4. listen for gist;
5. infer information from the text;
6. role play a conversation between Betton and Vyse.

**Materials:** One copy of the worksheet per student; Track 1 (first part of Part 6), Track 2 (extract), Track 3 (second part of Part 6) and Track 4 (full audio) downloaded from onestopenglish; one copy of the full transcript per student

**Summary:** The story is about two writers who were once friends. Their lives have taken very different directions since they left university. One has become a successful novelist; the other is poor and out of work. An advertisement in the paper brings the two together in a new relationship, one that brings to light quite a few uncomfortable truths about the two men. In Part 6, there is a role reversal in the relationship between Betton and Vyse.

### Activity 1

**Aims:** to recall the final event in Part 5; to listen for key information; to discuss hoaxes

1. Ask the students to work in pairs to recall what happened in the previous part. Then, write the closing remarks on the board.

"Why on earth didn't *your* answer come back, too?"

"My answer?"

"The official one – the one I wrote in your name. If she's unknown, what's become of that?"

Ask the students to identify the speaker for each line and to explain what they are talking about (*the letter that Vyse wrote to Hester Macklin and the fact that it was returned by the Dead Letter Office*). Ask them to explain the significance of the letter and its return.

2. Tell the students that they are going to listen to the next part of the conversation between the two men. Hand out the worksheet and ask them to look at Activity 1. Tell them to predict answers to the questions before they listen. Make a note of any predictions on the board.

3. Play Track 1. Students make notes of their answers on the worksheet.

4. Allow the students time to compare their answers with a partner before fielding answers from the whole class. Encourage discussion of the final question in particular, as this feeds in to the listening task for the second instalment of Part 6.

**Key:** 1. *Vyse says that all the letters contain the same expressions and that the letter 'g' is written in the same way in all the letters.;* 2. *He says that he suspects Strett, Betton's valet.;* 3. *because Strett is the person who posts the letters;* 4. *Betton laughs and treats it all as a big joke.*

5. Write the word *hoax* on the board. Ask the students what it means in the context of the story (*it refers to the fan letters received by Betton not being genuine*) and what it means in a more general context (*a trick in which someone deliberately tells people that something bad is going to happen or that something is true when it is not*). Ask them to discuss the following questions in groups and report back to the whole class.

- *Can you think of examples of hoaxes that have been in the news recently?*
- *Why do people set up hoaxes?*

If you have access to the internet, you might want to look up famous hoaxes online. Some

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examples are: the so-called 'Surgeon's Photograph' of the Loch Ness monster; the Piltown man; the Roswell alien-autopsy video; the Cottingley fairies. (See also the suggestions for follow-up activities at the end of the teacher's notes.)

### Activity 2

**Aim:** to practise reading aloud with attitude

1. Ask the students to look at Activity 2 on the worksheet. Ask them to work in pairs. Student A is Betton; student B is Vyse. They should read the speech out loud as dramatically as possible. Encourage them to exaggerate.
2. Tell students to listen to the extract from the story, asking them to compare their performance with the recording. Play Track 2.
3. Prompt a discussion and comparison of their performances and the recording, asking them to compare stressed words, intonation, pitch and attitude.

### Activity 3

**Aim:** to listen for gist

1. Tell the students that they are going to listen to the next part of the story. Ask them to look at Activity 3a on the worksheet and predict which events they think will happen before they listen. Make a note of their answers on the board. You may want to simply ask for a show of hands and write the number of students who think they will, or won't, happen.
2. Play Track 2. Students make notes of their answers on the worksheet.
3. Ask the students to compare their answers in pairs. Ask them to recall as much as they can about each event. Feed back on their answers and discussions as a whole class.

**Key:** 1. *Betton thinks that Vyse suspects him.*; 2. *Betton does not continue to write letters.*; 3. *The letters stop for a short while.*; 4. *The letters start up again.*; 5. *Vyse keeps his job but Betton starts to look for something new for him to do.*; 6. *Betton enjoys receiving the second spate of letters.*

4. Ask the students to look at Activity 3b and discuss their answers to the questions. When

they are ready, give them the transcript and let them check their answers.

**Key:** 1. *He has accepted that the novel is a failure but feels embarrassed that Vyse should witness its failure.*; 2. *Vyse says that people who read carefully read slowly and so will not yet have finished reading the novel.*; 3. *Their opinions and reasons for liking the book are very different; one is a college professor, the other a young woman.*; 4. *He is flattered.* 5. *He feels possessive of his new fans and he does not want Vyse to start a correspondence with the young woman.*

### Activity 4

**Aim:** to role-play a conversation between the two main characters

1. Ask the students to read the final paragraph again and discuss what Betton is going to do to resolve the situation. Tell them that they are going to act out the scene between Betton and Vyse when Betton explains that he wants to answer the letters himself. Ask them to think about the questions on the worksheet first.
2. The students act out the scene in pairs. You could then invite one or two pairs to perform the scene for the whole class, or encourage discussion of what happened in each scene.

### Follow-up activities

1. Ask students to research famous hoax stories online, to choose one and prepare to present it to the class in the next lesson.
2. Suggest that students write up the dialogue from their role-play in Activity 4.
3. Ask the students to continue the summary of the story, this time from Betton's point of view.

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### Activity 1

Read the introduction. Then, listen to the first instalment and answer the questions.

In the last part of the story, Vyse's suspicions had been aroused when a letter he wrote to a young lady called Hester Macklin was returned to him by the Dead Letter Office. In the next instalment, Vyse explains his suspicions to Betton and names the person who he thinks is guilty of the hoax.

1. What evidence does Vyse point to?
2. Who does he suspect?
3. Why?
4. What is Betton's reaction?

### Activity 2

Read the speech out loud as dramatically as possible.

“Look here – I believe *all* these letters are a hoax,” he broke out.  
Betton stared at him with a face that turned slowly red and angry. “What are you talking about? All what letters?”  
“These I’ve spread out here: I’ve been comparing them. And I believe they’re all written by one man.”  
Betton’s redness turned to a purple that made his ruddy moustache seem pale. “What the devil are you driving at?” he asked.

### Activity 3

a. Predict which things will and will not happen in the next instalment. Mark the events with a X or a ✓.

1. Vyse suspects Betton.
2. Betton continues to write letters.
3. The letters stop completely.
4. The letters start coming again.
5. Vyse starts a new job.
6. Betton starts to enjoy receiving letters again.

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### b. Discuss your answers to the questions.

1. How does Betton feel about the failure of his novel *Abundance*?
2. What reason does Vyse give to Betton not to give up hope?
3. In what ways are the two main correspondents different from each other?
4. How does Betton feel about this new spate of letters?
5. Why does he want to answer them himself?

### Activity 4

#### Think about the following questions.

1. What other work is Betton going to offer Vyse?
2. How is he going to introduce the subject?
3. How is he going to explain the fact that he wants to answer the letters himself?
4. How will Vyse react?

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Track 1

Betton stared at him with eyes wrinkled by amusement. "Perhaps she hadn't disappeared then."

Track 2

Vyse disregarded the conjecture. "Look here – I believe *all* these letters are a hoax," he broke out.

Betton stared at him with a face that turned slowly red and angry. "What are you talking about? All what letters?"

"These I've spread out here: I've been comparing them. And I believe they're all written by one man."

Betton's redness turned to a purple that made his **ruddy** moustache seem pale. "**What the devil** are you **driving at**?" he asked.

"Well, just look at it," Vyse persisted, still bent above the letters. "I've been studying them carefully – those that have come within the last two or three weeks – and there's a **queer** likeness in the writing of some of them. The g's are all like corkscrews. And the same phrases keep recurring – the Ann Arbor news-agent uses the same expressions as the President of the Girls' College at Euphorbia, Maine."

Betton laughed. "Aren't the critics always groaning over the shrinkage of the national vocabulary? Of course we all use the same expressions."

"Yes," said Vyse obstinately. "But how about using the same g's?"

Betton laughed again, but Vyse continued without **heeding** him: "Look here, Betton – could Strett have written them?"

"Strett?" Betton roared. "*Strett*?" He threw himself into his arm-chair to shake out his **mirth** at greater ease.

"I'll tell you why. Strett always posts all my letters. He comes in for them every day before I leave. He posted the letter to the misunderstood party – the letter from you that the Dead Letter Office didn't return. I posted my own letter to her; and that came back."

A measurable silence followed the emission of this ingenious conjecture; then Betton observed with gentle irony: "Extremely neat. And of course it's no business of yours to supply any valid motive for this remarkable attention on my valet's part."

Vyse cast on him a **slanting** glance.

"If you've found that human conduct's generally based on valid motives – !"

"Well, outside of mad-houses it's supposed to be not quite **incalculable**."

Vyse had an odd smile under his thin moustache. "Every house is a mad-house at some time or another."

Betton rose with a careless shake of the shoulders. "This one will be if I talk to you much longer," he said, moving away with a laugh.

Betton did not for a moment believe that Vyse suspected the valet of having written the letters.

"Why the devil don't he say out what he thinks? He was always a **tortuous** chap," he grumbled inwardly.

Track 3

The sense of being held under the lens of Vyse's mute **scrutiny** became more and more exasperating. Betton, by this time, had **squared his shoulders** to the fact that "Abundance" was a failure with the public: a confessed and glaring failure. The press told him so openly, and his friends emphasized the fact by their **circumlocutions** and

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evasions. Betton minded it a good deal more than he had expected, but not nearly as much as he minded Vyse's knowing it. That remained the central twinge in his diffused discomfort. And the problem of getting rid of his secretary once more engaged him.

He had set aside all sentimental pretexts for retaining Vyse; but a practical argument replaced them. "If I **ship him** now he'll think it's because I'm ashamed to have him see that I'm not getting any more letters."

For the letters had ceased again, almost abruptly, since Vyse had hazarded the conjecture that they were the product of Strett's devoted pen. Betton had reverted only once to the subject – to ask ironically, a day or two later: "Is Strett writing to me as much as ever?" – and, on Vyse's replying with a neutral head-shake, had added with a laugh: "If you suspect *him* you might as well think I write the letters myself!"

"There are very few to-day," said Vyse, with his irritating evasiveness; and Betton rejoined **squarely**: "Oh, they'll stop soon. The book's a failure."

A few mornings later he felt a rush of shame at his own **tergiversations**, and stalked into the library with Vyse's sentence on his tongue.

Vyse started back with one of his anaemic blushes. "I was hoping you'd be in. I wanted to speak to you. There've been no letters the last day or two," he explained.

Betton drew a quick breath of relief. The man had some sense of decency, then! He meant to dismiss himself.

"I told you so, my dear fellow; the book's a flat failure," he said, almost gaily.

Vyse made a deprecating gesture. "I don't know that I should regard the absence of letters as the ultimate test. But I wanted to ask you if there isn't something else I can do on the days when there's no writing." He turned his glance toward the book-lined walls. "Don't you want your library catalogued?" he asked **insidiously**.

"Had it done last year, thanks." Betton glanced away from Vyse's face. It was piteous, how he needed the job!

"I see. ... Of course this is just a temporary lull in the letters. They'll begin again – as they did before. The people who read carefully read slowly – you haven't heard yet what *they* think."

Betton felt a rush of **puerile** joy at the suggestion. Actually, he hadn't thought of that!

"There *was* a big second crop after 'Diadems and Faggots,'" he mused aloud.

"Of course. Wait and see," said Vyse confidently.

The letters in fact began again – more gradually and in smaller numbers. But their quality was different, as Vyse had predicted. And in two cases Betton's correspondents, not content to compress into one rapid communication the thoughts inspired by his work, developed their views in a succession of really remarkable letters. One of the writers was a professor in a Western college; the other was a girl in Florida. In their language, their point of view, their reasons for appreciating "Abundance," they **differed** almost **diametrically**; but this only made the unanimity of their approval the more striking. The rush of correspondence evoked by Betton's earlier novel had produced nothing so personal, so exceptional as these communications. He had gulped the praise of "Diadems and Faggots" as indiscriminately as it was offered; now he knew for the first time the subtler pleasures of the **palate**. He tried to feign indifference, even to himself; and to Vyse he made no sign. But gradually he felt a desire to know

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what his secretary thought of the letters, and, above all, what he was saying in reply to them. And he resented acutely the possibility of Vyse's starting one of his clandestine correspondences with the girl in Florida. Vyse's notorious lack of delicacy had never been more vividly present to Betton's imagination; and he made up his mind to answer the letters himself.

He would keep Vyse on, of course: there were other communications that the secretary could attend to. And, if necessary, Betton would invent an occupation: he cursed his stupidity in having betrayed the fact that his books were already catalogued.

Transcript and glossary

### Glossary

**ruddy** (literary) red

**what the devil** (old-fashioned) used for asking *what* in an angry way

**drive at** to be really trying to say

**queer** (old-fashioned) strange

**heed** (old-fashioned) listen, pay attention to

**mirth** (old-fashioned) amusement

**slanting** not straight, to one side

**incalculable** not be expected and planned for

**tortuous** difficult to understand

**scrutiny** observing something carefully

**squared his shoulders** accepted

**circumlocutions** speaking indirectly as if to avoid saying something offensive

**ship him** get rid of him

**squarely** directly

**tergiversations** (formal, old-fashioned) evasions and ambiguities

**insidiously** seemingly innocent but, actually, dangerous

**puerile** childish

**differ diametrically** be completely different from each other

**palate** literally, the roof of the mouth; here, refers to the ability to enjoy tastes and flavours, however subtle