

Part I

Edith Wharton

CHAPTER I

THE BIOGRAPHY OF EDITH WHARTON (1862-1927)

Edith Wharton, a leading American woman novelist, was formerly Edith Newbold Jones who was born in New York City in 1862. The date and the place of her birth were recorded identically by all the critics who wrote about her. This may be because she belonged to a rather wealthy and historically well-known family, of the kind that habitually keeps the records of family members. The established status of her family was unquestionable since a great number of her critics as well as her admirers made different remarks that her family was well to do and possessed ancestors going back to the Revolution¹ and according to Arthur Hobson Quinn, she was born

in an atmosphere of secure social standing based upon financial and commercial supremacy in New York City.... Her ancestors were mainly merchant shipowners, although her great grandfather, General Stevens, had been a valiant soldier in the Revolution. Her father, George Frederic Jones, was wealthy.²

Further report was made interestingly that:

She herself said she came of middle-class stock. Middle class her forbears may have been, but they were sufficiently prudent to take their places in the gallery of the old families of Manhattan. Her mother, Lucretia Stevens Rhineland, was a grand-daughter of Ebenezer Stevens, a patriot in the Revolutionary War who eventually amassed a handsome capital as an East India merchant. Her father, George Frederic Jones, had a Schermerhorn for a mother, and a pleasant income of his own.³

Even in her charming autobiography, A Backward Glance, she drew a clear picture of that life, with affectionate recognition of its limitations and appreciation of its standards.⁴

The prosperous standard of the family gave her many advantages since it enabled her, in her childhood and girlhood, opportunities of travel in Europe which formed a great

part of her education. Besides it is often said that because her childhood was protected and monotonous she, as a little girl, lived mainly in the world of her imagination. This is probably true since we know from Arthur Hobson Quinn that she was a constant reader. This is unusual for a child but it gave her the solid background that helped to develop her into a distinguished writer. More than this, she was strictly forbidden to read the trashy popular fiction of the day. As a result she took up, instead, the works of famous American and English poets like Irving, Longfellow, Shelley and Browning⁵. The magnificent and apt phrasing which she used to express her ideas showed her poetic talent, which might have been inspired by her early reading.

Although she was born into a little world well ordered and well-to-do, at least some of her intimate friends believed that she was illegitimate and there was a legend, as yet unverified, that she once tried—in vain—to trace her real father in England. Whatever the truth, Mrs. Wharton was haunted by the problem of illegitimacy. She made it the theme of her novelette The Old Maid, and this same sort of theme made her short story, Roman Fever more pungent⁶.

In 1885, at 23, she married Edward Robbin Wharton, son of an aristocratic Boston family. Mr. Wharton was about twelve or thirteen years her senior. At first they had their residence in New Port but later moved to Lenox, Massachusetts where they had "The Mount House" built. However they also had a small house in New York which enabled them to go back and forth between Lenox and New York. He enjoyed travelling and, therefore must have made her a good companion when they travelled to different places after their marriage. Mrs. Wharton soon began to spend long periods of time in Europe, mostly in Italy and France.

From living abroad she learnt to appreciate European especially Italian architecture and decoration. Since she became convinced that architecture and decoration could be set right only by a close study of the best models and these models were chiefly to be found in building erected in Italy

after the beginning of the sixteenth century, and in other European countries only after the full assimilation of Italian influence, she wrote The Decoration of Houses, published by Scribner's in 1897. Though this book is not very popular now, it is still a classic of American architectural history.⁷ Knowing Italy and France well she also subsequently used these countries as settings for a number of novels, novelettes and short stories: for example Souls Belated, a short story in her first volume of stories, The Greater Inclination (1899), is laid in Europe; The Valley of Decision (1902), her first long novel after several short stories is laid in her beloved Italy, and Madame de Treymes (1907) in France.

But so far as Mrs. Wharton was concerned her marriage had a disadvantage: Mr. Wharton was not very intellectual. Mrs. Wharton herself admitted that he was positively frightened by her literary activities and she even believed that he thought they were a kind of witchcraft.⁸ But though Mr. Wharton did not approve of her literary activities and did not encourage her, he could not prevent her from practising her profession, for a few years after her marriage the first of her poems appeared in Scribner's Magazine and in 1891 the first of her short stories, Mrs. Manstey's View appeared in the same magazine. It was not one of her best stories but it showed that she had made up her mind to become a novelist and after that she continued to write short stories, novelettes and novels with determination, basing her themes and settings mainly on her own experiences. It was around the turn of the century, when she was living alone in Paris, that she turned to serious writing: her first collection of stories, The Greater Inclination appeared in 1899 and her first novel, The Valley of Decision, in 1902. Mrs. Wharton established a residence in Paris in 1907; therefore most of her American novels were written in France from memory.

It is a question whether her marriage was successful because Mr. Wharton was not only uninterested in ideas and indifferent to her aspirations but he also began to deter-

iorate mentally around 1900 and by 1906 his condition was hopeless. In 1910 he had to be placed in the care of psychiatrists at Kreuzlinger on Lake Constance and in 1913 she divorced him. No clear evidence has been given to reveal why Mrs. Wharton decided to get a divorce though divorce in those days was not a trivial matter, for society considered it scandalous. But although her divorce was a personal disadvantage, one notices that it is frequently treated from different points of view in quite a number of her books e. g. The Custom of the Country (1913) The Age of Innocence (1920), The Glimpses of the Moon (1922) The Children (1928) and Autre Temps.

There was, however, an interesting story reported by Wayne Andrews, that later, with Walter Van Rennselaer Berry, an attorney who sat as a judge on The International Tribunals of Egypt and settled in Paris for the rest of his life, Mrs. Wharton believed her own chance for happiness had come back. Andrews based his point of view on Mrs. Wharton's own remark:

"he was the friend of all my life, the wisest, the kindest, most stimulating; for though I have known intimately two or three great creative intelligences, like Henry James, I have never known a mind so wide in its range and at the same time as impartial and sane in its response to all that was intellectually of the best."⁹

But in her diary written in German on June 12th 1908 she was positive that :

" ... leagues beyond leagues of distance seem to have widened All hope forsook me, and I sent you back a desperate word : 'Don't write to me again! Let me face at once the fact that it is over. Without a date to look to, I can't bear to go on, and it will be easier to make the break now, voluntarily, than to see it slowly, agonizingly, made by time and circumstance."¹⁰

This is quite astonishing that even if she loved Berry, she

would not dare to marry again. Perhaps, as Andrews remarked, it was because she dreaded the very thought of the illicit as deeply as Lydia Tillotson in Souls Belated. The same notion of a divorcée who would not marry again for fear of scandal appeared at intervals in some of her well-known novels and short stories like The Age of Innocence and Autre Temps. Whether her love story with Berry influenced the themes of those works has not been proved as yet, but it was a part of her life worth noticing, which may lead her audience to understand certain motives lying behind her stories.

After her establishment in France in 1907, the country became her home or place of exile, as some critics put it. She even sold her estate in Lenox in 1910 and in August 1914 the declaration of the First World War came as a profound shock to her. She was deeply distressed when France and Germany resumed the quarrel of 1870¹¹ and felt that she was bound to express her loyalty to the country in which she was to spend the rest of her life. Consequently she spent herself in the work of the American Hostels for Refugees (L'acceuil Franco-Américain aux Réfugiés Belges et Français) and of the Children of Flanders Relief Committee (L'oeuvre des Enfants de Flandres). With Mrs. Royall Tyler, the closest of all her friends, she cared for the victims of tuberculosis and founded a number of sanitariums. For this she and Mrs. Tyler were decorated by Poincaré. And for this and for her achievement as a writer she was made an officer of the Legion of Honor.¹² Mrs. Wharton's war experiences enabled her to produce quite a collection of war stories but the information of the war is often criticized to be second-hand but which showed her superb imagination, and since she realized her inability to give a first-hand picture of the front line, she compensated her readers with something finer ideala, culture and good taste. A Backward Glance, Fighting France (1915), Coming Home (1916), The Marne (1918), A Son at the Front (1923) and The Refugees undoubtedly prove this statement.

At the war's end Mrs. Wharton had given up her apartment in the rue de Varenne but moved into Pavillon Colombe, a comfortable house with a pleasant garden, in the suburb of Saint Brice. When winter came she went down to Sainte Claire-le-Château, a villa at Hyères from which she could enjoy looking out over the Mediterranean. At these two places she spent the last part of her life until her death on the eleventh of August 1937, at the age of seventy five.

It is worth noticing that though Mrs. Wharton spent most of her life in France she is best well known for her critical novels based on her memories of Old New York in the eighteen nineties. The Age of Innocence (1920) placed her among America's first novelists. For it she was awarded the Pulitzer Prize as a result of which she returned home once in 1923 to receive a doctor of letters degree at Yale University, an honour that was hoped for by all writers. This showed that however far Mrs. Wharton might be from her beloved country, she was always devoted to America. The Age of Innocence and all of her important novels were based on America and had American settings and American characters. With vivid phrasing she was able to present to her readers not only Old New York society but also common people both in New England and in New York as in The House of Mirth (1905), Ethan Frome (1911) and The Bunner Sisters (1916).

Mrs. Wharton was often called Henry James's most important disciple. It was said that she modeled her style after that of Henry James. Every critic who states this belief always bases his analysis on her little book, The Writing of Fiction (1925) where she had shown the method of selection of material that her interest, like James's, was in the external data of life in so far as they provided material for internal analysis.¹³

It is true that she might have learnt much from James, perhaps less from his works than from his conversations, at which she was frequently present since the two writers were great friends. Nevertheless, according to Hoffman, she was not actually his disciple, but an individual artist working

with similar matters and similar concern over a precisely formulated moral evaluation; moral, as distinguished from social, political or economic but she was less willing than James to persist in the implications of a technical strategy.¹⁴ Mrs. Wharton herself had great admiration for that great writer and appreciated knowing him but did not care to be cast in the role of his disciple. She once wrote to a friend describing James on his visit to the Whartons in England saying that the master talked more lucidly than he wrote and later she complained to Brownell of Scribner's Magazine, that :

"The continued cry that I am an echo of Mr. James whose books of the last ten years I can't read much as I delight in the man, and the assumption that the people I write about are not real because they are not navvies and char-women, makes me feel rather hopeless. I write about what I see, about what I happen to be nearest to, which is surely better than doing cowboys de chic."¹⁵

Since Edith Wharton and Henry James both came from a similar social background therefore it is not strange that they should have written more of the upper class people. Moreover they are both interested in this theme : the trapping of young and innocent people by society. But what is significant is that in spite of this seeming similarity, their treatment was different. James was obsessed by moral complexity and interested in the evaluation and dramatization of the opposing cultures of Europe and America:

"He is not interested in presenting a complete and balanced view of life, including its vulgar life ... He is concerned with psychological subtleties, and thus his technique requires superior minds — in his readers as well as in his character."¹⁶

"James's admiration for European culture led him to a lifelong interest in the conflict of the American and European personalities, i. e. in the problem of 'The American in Europe'. He saw that Europeans were often regarded as overrefined, degenerate, and artificial by Americans, and that Americans were considered naive, vulgar and ignorant by many Europeans. The misunderstanding caused personality conflicts, and even where the two races found each other agreeable (as in the many love stories involving Europeans and Americans) the national differences provided opportunity for piquant contrasts of character."¹⁷

But, Mrs. Wharton specializes in tales of victimization. Her protagonists are often sensitive, artistic, highly moral persons who are influenced by their social environment and by artificial conventions. Their disposition and motives are clearly drawn and can be easily traced. Unlike James, she deals little with the problem of The Americans in Europe but presents mainly the biography of her own class : the retrospect of New York in the eighteen seventies.

In style, if Edith Wharton followed James, she probably was influenced only by his early realistic stage (comprising his novels from A Passionate Pilgrim (1871) through Washington Square (1880) in which his style is characterized by a straightforward, external and relatively simple — but she refused to imitate James in his later mature second period of "psychological realism" (beginning with The Portrait of a lady (1881) and The Tragic Muse (1890) and particularly in his final "difficult" or "experimental" period (opening with The Spoil of Poynton (1897) and including most of his later novels and tales) — a period characterized by intricate syntactical experiments and subtleties of diction, dialogue and point of view.¹⁸

Blake Nevius in his introduction to The Custom of the Country also stated that though Henry James and Edith Wharton were united by the strongest ties of friendship and art and were products of roughly the same social class and environment, and finally both turned toward Europe and European values, still Henry James should not be considered Edith Wharton's master :

"But the influence of James on Edith Wharton's development has frequently been overestimated. From him she may have learned certain devices of style and a respect for the controlled point of view. But she refused to follow James into the labyrinth of his "third manners,"¹⁹ and in general her strongest work, like The Custom of the Country, is her least Jamesian. It is no disparagement of either novelist to say that Edith Wharton's mind was more direct, more masculine and less subtle than James's."²⁰

Therefore, if one believes Hoffman, Nevius and Mrs. Wharton herself, one will see that it is hardly fair to say that she is Henry James's disciple. She may perhaps have the same artistic aim as James but her treatment of the subject matter is quite different. Her works can be considered original. One has to admire her for her strong determination to become a writer. Whatever her underlying motive was, she did become a successful writer who sought to understand the drama of life in moral terms. An intensive study of her works helps to make one realize how significant she is in the realm of modern American literature.

CHAPTER II

The Importance of Background in Her Works

Mrs. Wharton was intimately familiar with New York society, into which she was born and in which she lived. It is, therefore, not strange that her most typical novels are laid in this society. In order to appreciate these works more fully and to gain a deeper insight into Mrs. Wharton's underlying motives, it is essential to have some understanding of this society — the society of little Old New York which existed from even before the Civil War (1861-1865) to the turn of the century.

Old New York Society and Its Convention

According to Alfred Kazin in his book, On Native Grounds, the society into which Edith Newbold Jones was born was still in the eighteen-sixties, the predominant American aristocracy. It was a warm and gracious world of a colonial society which paid little attention to the life of the frontier¹ but was proud in its breeding and satisfied with its inherited wealth. He says :

It was a society so eminently contented that it had long since become nerveless, for with its pictures, its "gentlemen's libraries," its possession of Fifth Avenue and Beacon Hill, its fine contempt for trade, it found authority in its own history and the meaning of life in its own conventions?²

The development of convention in America is worth noticing because it differs from that of Europe. American convention is less firmly rooted than European convention. Lyde, in her book Edith Wharton : Convention and Morality stated that American convention was easily corrupted by the rapid accumulation of wealth and finally extinguished by the effect of world War I. Generalizing from the implications



of Mrs. Wharton's works, the pattern is drawn something like this.

In the first stage, the standards of convention were still high, probably because they were still close to the conditions that formed them and little was needed to help form or better individual morality. This was the colonial period, the age of the 'churchgoing merchant class', when aesthetically, Americans were still "the heirs of an old tradition of European culture" and, ethically, they stood for a high standard of honor in both business and in private life.³ As this period progressed into the nineteenth century, social convention became increasingly inflexible, increasingly fearful of innovation. This was the pre-Civil War period, a time marked by accumulation of wealth and the subsequent transformation of the merchant class into a genuine aristocracy since they were then wealthy and so had more leisure which resulted in the strengthening of manners and culture. This was the moment at which such families as the Dagonets, in Mrs. Wharton's The Custom of the Country, the Van der Luydens, and the Mingotts in The Age of Innocence reached the peak of their power.

The first change came in the eighties, with the earliest detachment of big money-makers from the West, soon to be followed by the lord of Pittsburgh;⁴ and Lyde was sure that this undermined social customs. Manners, unlike honor, flourished primarily among the rich. Consequently as more and more emphasis was placed upon mere etiquette, the lower classes came to regard money as the chief prerequisite of aristocratic respectability. The new class of businessmen believed that entrance into the stronghold of the aristocracy required only the accumulation of sufficient money. Aristocracy, therefore, lost its genuine meaning because of the misinterpretation of the newly rich and also of the snobbish illusion of the aristocrats themselves: moral value and honor were no longer their primary concern.

The acquisition of wealth did not however, preoccupy New York City as it did the West. They even looked down upon the frontiersmen who were grabbing the West, building its railroads and occupying themselves with the stock exchange. Even in New York, "a city committed to a commercial destiny,"⁵ ladies and gentlemen gathered for elaborate luncheon parties where only refined conversation was allowed and money matters were not discussed. But in spite of the slow corruption of the aristocracy of little Old New York by the intrusion of vulgar wealth, the gentlemen and ladies of the sixties and seventies remained exclusive. They were still preoccupied with splendour, and lived soundlessly and with impeccable taste. Formal dinners, whispered conspiracies and gossip filled the years.

They visited in their own circle, left cards and read the works of approved famous writers like Mr. Hawthorne, Mr. Irving or Mr. Edward Bulwer-Lytton. Theirs was a gracious but lifeless severely conservative society, that desired to avoid innovation, scandal and restless minds. "Society" in the narrow sense guided itself almost entirely by a set of arbitrary and artificial conventions. It **did** not matter what vices or crimes an individual committed so long as he did not openly attack the conventions. In other words, "high society" had become a separate world of hypocrisy. In fact it was a dying class—a class that was gradually yielding to the rising class of aggressive post-Civil War (1861-1865) capitalists.

Old New York in Her Works

Against the background of Old New York Mrs. Wharton produced a series of novels which made her well known as one of America's leading novelists. They are : The House of Mirth (1905), The Custom of the Country (1913), The Age of Innocence (1920) and Hudson River Bracketed (1929) which has its sequel in The Gods Drive (1932). In this set of novels Mrs. Wharton presents the fashionable society of New York in the eighteenth seventies and principally the moral crises this society causes because of its artificial conventions. She reveals moral conflicts with clarity, demonstrates the effects of social influence on people's lives with strong emotion and genuineness and draws her fictitious characters so vividly that the reader sees Old New York society as Mrs. Wharton wished—without illusion or prejudice.

The House of Mirth, written in 1905, is one of Mrs. Wharton's important novels. It is typical in that in this as in all her important novels similar problems are discussed and simultaneously there is revealed the New York society in which she was thoroughly at home.

This novel, which has been described as "one of the most telling indictments of the whole of American society, of a whole social system based on the chance distribution of wealth, that has ever been put on paper,"⁶ powerfully describes the compelling attractiveness of wealth and reveals how keenly Edith Wharton herself felt this attractiveness.

Lily Bart, an orphaned young woman, lives with her aunt, Mrs. Peniston. Paying little attention to her niece Mrs. Peniston provides her only with lodging and occasional gifts and gives her remarkable freedom to go wherever she likes. Lily, in her girlhood, had constantly been instructed by her worldly mother to abhor poverty in life therefore reaching maidenhood, she is determined to find a husband who will be able to provide her with the luxury she craves, the luxury that she believes should be hers since she was born beautiful, charming and with impeccable social and artistic taste. But at twenty-nine she still remains single and has automatically

become an "extra woman", who is getting less and less important in high society because fewer men are interested in her and her friends are growing bored with her single status. Lily herself tries to love and marry any well-to-do gentleman of her own class but always fails because, in spite of all the rich suitors, she finds that she can only give them friendship, not love. What is worse is that she finds it increasingly difficult to find money to maintain her position : to be always well dressed and to gamble in order to keep up with the people of her own set, etc. In fact, she is dissatisfied, feeling herself to be in a contemptuous and unworthy condition. Her financial situation compels her to confide her difficulty to Gus Trenor, Judy Trenor's husband, who is a wealthy society host. Unwittingly she allows him to pay her gambling debts and accepts his offer to invest her little savings for her and it is not until he treats her 'very intimately' and tries to make advances that Lily is forced to realize that she is accepting money from a man and that the money Gus gave her was not from her invested savings but from him.

At this stage, however, Lily is not altogether without men who are deeply interested in her. Lawrence Selden, a charming and practical young lawyer, loves her and feels that she has something good in her but he does not have the money which Lily feels is essential in her future husband. For this reason Selden reveals to her his affection, but hesitates to ask her to marry him. Lily herself, in spite of her love and great admiration for Selden, is being held back by her long-standing determination to marry a wealthy person. Another suitor, Simon Rosedale a typical wealthy Wall Street broker, wishes to marry her to strengthen his social position, but Lily finds him personally repugnant.

Selden, having heard scandalous gossip about Lily and Gus Trenor begins to doubt whether the "real" Lily is as fine as he thought. His doubt changes to certainty when he accidentally sees Lily, who was deceived by Gus Trenor's trick leaving the Trenor town house on the same night that Selden had revealed his love to her. Disillusioned he leaves New York

abruptly even though he has promised her a visit on the following day. Not knowing what has happened, Lily is left stunned; even more, when Rosedale so suddenly asks for her hand. To postpone the decision, she accepts instead an invitation to go on a yachting cruise with her friends, the Dorsets. She fails to realize that, like her previous encounter with Gus Trenor, the acceptance will bring ruin to her social reputation because Dorset's wife, Bertha, is engaged in an affair with a younger man, and she has invited Lily for no other purpose than to distract her husband. In no time a quarrel breaks out and Lily finds herself rudely abandoned in Europe. Her rescue by Selden who comes to the scene just in time does not help much to improve the condition. The Dorsets, returning to New York before Lily does, spread a misleading story about her behavior on the cruise and when Lily returns to America she finds herself shut out by polite society that cannot stand scandal. Her wealthy suitor Rosedale rejects her, and her aunt, who died just before Lily's return to America, disinherits her.

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Lily could reenter polite society by blackmailing Bertha Dorset because she happens to possess certain letters which Bertha wrote to Selden. But she cannot lower herself to do such a thing. Being without money, Lily at the suggestion of her friend, Mrs. Fisher, has to associate with the rather vulgar newly-rich families who need her counsel concerning etiquette and social procedure. Therefore Lily is snubbed by her former friends and she sinks lower in society's estimation. As a last effort, she tries to work as a milliner's apprentice but is a failure. In desperation she goes to see Selden to thank him for his kindness to her in Europe, and at his apartment she burns Bertha's letters without letting Selden know what they are about, an act which shows how deep a feeling she had for Selden. Then she returns to her boarding house, straightens out her affairs using her aunt's legacy to repay Trenor, and half-intentionally takes an overdose of sedative. Selden arrives the next morning to ask her to marry him only to find her dead and to learn the truth of her inno-

cence from her mementoes.

The characterization of Lily Bart is the clue to the problem which must have haunted Mrs. Wharton since she had begun to observe her own class critically. The thing that annoyed Mrs. Wharton most was not "the pleasure-seeking society of fashionable New York at the turn of the century" but the search for "typical human significance" in her own class. Therefore she moulded Lily Bart as a representative of that pleasure seeking society, but she has endowed her with certain qualities which raised her above the others and made her distinctly worth saving. A great number of critics believe that Mrs. Wharton herself had the answer to her own question when she wrote in her autobiography :

"... a frivolous society can acquire dramatic significance only through what its frivolity destroys. Its tragic implication lies in its power of debasing people and ideals."

The novel itself and this quotation enable one to appreciate Mrs. Wharton's objectivity. If one changes the word "frivolous" to "materialistic" the novel assumes a larger significance and gives a true picture of the rise of capitalism and the decline of aristocracy. Through Lily Bart, again Mrs. Wharton is successful in giving a picture of a human being who is the "real aristocrat" and the victim of convention and is being made to suffer for virtues. Lily's death is tragic. Alone, miserable and friendless she dies in sordid surroundings, but retains to the very last moment of her life her dignity and high moral standards, and never lowers herself to the corrupted standard of the new society. If Mrs. Wharton has made Lily represent the people of her own class then Lily's death has a deeper significance : with the rise of the materialistic class, new traditions and attitudes replaced the old ones; therefore, unable to cope with the rapid change and to struggle with new hostile environmental forces, Old New York society whose point of view was generally

conservative and virtuous, gradually submitted to defeat. Yet in spite of this decline, one still feels that the value of principles and attitudes in that old life could never be destroyed by the new one. Lily's death is therefore symbolic and points up Mrs. Wharton's belief that the defeat of the older régime was in fact a victory for it. Like Lily, the noble aristocrats gradually disappeared from the scene of society but left a dignity and glory that are still respectfully appreciated.

Mrs. Wharton was fully aware of a new class for she introduced Simon Rosedale, symbol of this aggressive new wealth, to mingle in the world of aristocracy. He typified the new socially ambitious class and represented the new Wall-Street brokers whose material power was, then, threatening the aristocratic class. Being an aristocrat herself, Mrs. Wharton could not help feeling contemptuous toward the undignified nouveau riches, yet she knew from experience that one dynasty had to succeed another in American life. Consequently, her readers notice that though she wrote about 'the Rosedales in aristocratic New York society' she was not so much interested in the accession of the new class as she was in the destruction of the old, especially of its finest spirit as represented by Lily Bart.

The House of Mirth reveals the social life of New York City and is Mrs. Wharton's successful social satire. It has been generally agreed that with the publication of The House of Mirth, Mrs. Wharton's reputation was made. This is her first successful novel even though prior to this she had written several novels and short stories. Well-known critics like Frederick J. Hoffman, Arthur Hobson Quinn and Donald Heiney all agree that her principal stories are those published from 1905 to 1920?

Like The House of Mirth, The Custom of the Country (1913), Mrs. Wharton's second novel has the same theme : the moral decline of Old New York society which^{is} being attacked by the raw new industrial and financial world. In The House of Mirth, the presentation of Simon Rosedale, Lily Bart's rich suitor, had already foreshadowed the new financial "barbarian", Elmer Moffatt of Apex City, who was much more aggressive than Rosedale. And with the selfish and ambitious heroine, Undine Spragg, Mrs. Wharton introduced a new type of heroine into modern American literature : an insipid woman who came from the newly rich class which, at the turn of the century, was shaping the new America.

Undine Spragg of Apex City, a small midwestern town, comes to New York when her father suddenly makes a fortune. To get their daughter away from Elmer Moffatt with whom she had eloped and to enable her to rise in society, the Spraggs leave Apex and take their daughter to New York to live in a West Side hotel which Mrs. Mabel Lipscomb, Undine's former boarding school friend from New York had suggested. Mabel helps to introduce Undine to her set but soon Undine realizes that it has brought her no nearer to Fifth Avenue which, to Undine, is the centre of the aristocracy of the eighties seventies. Nevertheless Mabel introduces her to Claude Walsingham Pople, a snobbish portrait painter, who enables her to enter the aristocratic world about which she knows very little : he introduces her to Ralph Marvell, a son of one of the oldest aristocratic families, who is immediately attracted by Undine's beauty but whom Undine finds too polite, sweet and humble. She had never imagined a real aristocrat would be like that. However, having been convinced that marriage to Ralph would bring her to acquire the highest social distinction, she contrives to conceal her own history of broken engagements and previous divorce, and marries him. Their marriage is not successful since Undine is too extravagant and, through her ignorance, completely kills Ralph's desire to mold her tastes after his and to help her through the maze of social custom. Her extravagance soon forces him

to renounce his plan to become a professional poet and Ralph has to enter instead a business for which he has no taste at all. So far as Ralph is concerned his marriage is a failure. His only consolation is his delight in Paul, his only child.

As for Undine, bored by her husband's literary interests and the cultivated conversations of his family and friends, she moves on to a set of undignified 'nouveaux riches' and very soon gets herself into financial difficulties. She borrows money from a married admirer Peter Van Degen and later, selfishly leaving her husband and son behind, follows him to Paris where she becomes his mistress. Thinking that her beauty and charm have already trapped the rich Van Degen into abandoning his aristocratic wife, she divorces Ralph on the pretext of his neglect. To avoid scandal, Ralph acquiesces. For this reason, even though Undine is not interested in Paul, she obtains custody of him but she still leaves Paul with his father and paternal relatives.

Van Degen, however, does not want to divorce his wife to marry Undine especially when he learns of her extreme selfishness, in not going to see Ralph who, then, was severely ill with pneumonia. Undine, therefore, finds herself adrift in Paris society, but she is not long helpless, for she soon makes the acquaintance of Count Raymond de Chelles who longs to marry her. However first her divorce must be annulled and this would require a lot of money. Unexpectedly she meets Moffatt in Paris. Following his advice in order to get money from Ralph, she claims the custody of their son. Ralph whose life is now centered around Paul, fights this scheme vigorously. He even tries to buy her off which suits her purpose. Meanwhile, he learns many disgusting facts about her behavior and her lying and, worst of all, from the vulgar and offensive Elmer himself he learns that she had previously been married to him. Ralph who is a refined and sensitive man is so shocked by these vulgar facts that he takes his own life.

The death of Ralph Marvell leaves Undine a widow and thus enables her to marry Raymond, but in spite of the title she gets by marrying a French nobleman, Undine is not satisfied. The excellent aristocratic circles in which she now moves turn out to be excessively refined and rather dull. Craving excitement she returns once more to her friends and to fresh extravagances. But unlike Ralph, Raymond de Chelles refuses to cater to her and is unmoved by her tricks. He is firm about adhering to the noble old family traditions. Undine does all sorts of things to annoy him and his old mother, the Old Marquise de Chelles, but finds that she can not overcome his newly developed indifference toward her. She attempts to sell some tapestries from the family mansion to a dealer, and discovers by accident that the dealer is actually an agent for her former husband Elmer Moffatt. Raymond discovers her intrigue and there is a scene. But this time Undine realizes that she cannot bully the aristocratic Raymond into conceding to her wishes as she had her poor father and Ralph.

Undine seeks sympathy from Moffatt who is still in Paris, telling him lies about how badly she is treated by her husband, how unfaithful he is and in a round-about speech she offers herself as Moffatt's mistress but Moffatt insists that she first divorce Raymond so she can marry him. Although reluctant to give up her title, Undine decides to do so and the divorce case is settled easily because of the power of Moffatt's money. She is once more accepted into society as the beautiful wife of a billionaire. Her son is well taken care of physically but is so neglected spiritually that he becomes a pitiful lost figure, hardly noticed by his own mother. Now Undine has all she has ever wished for and sometimes more than she had ever dreamt of having. Yet she is not always happy and satisfied. At times she herself in high society is aware of Moffatt's lack of good manners which makes her compare him very unfavorably with his predecessors, Ralph and Raymond.

Through the heroine of this story, Mrs. Wharton conditioned the public to meet, as Nevins puts it, "the most egocentric and dehumanized female in American fiction"⁹

Undine was the perfect flowering of the new materialism which was rootless, vain and opportunistic. She had one motive similar to Lily Bart of The House of Mirth : she felt luxury necessary to her temperament. But Lily Bart was basically good while Undine was not. Lily Bart maintained, until her death, her virtues and high moral principles while Undine had no sense of spiritual values and no abiding moral standards. From the beginning to the end of the story she did nothing that was unselfish. ^{Of} those who loved her she took as much advantage as she could and treated them the worst. Her parents had to sacrifice their own comfort to her social advancement but she only thought of them when she was worn out and helpless, Ralph Marvell gave her his love and desired to help her enjoy real aristocracy, but she cruelly destroyed him in return; Raymond de Chelles enabled her to become acquainted with French nobility, but she, in offering herself to Moffatt, betrayed him.

Her selfishness was even more noticeable when she showed her lack of maternal instinct and rebelled at her confinement during pregnancy. She screamed at poor Ralph :

" Sorry — you're sorry ? You're sorry ? Why, what earthly difference will it make to you?" She (Undine) drew back a few steps and lifted her slender arms from her sides. "Look at me — see how I look — how I am going to look! You won't hate yourself more and more every morning when you get up and see yourself in the glass! Your life's going on just as usual! But what's mine going to be for months and months? And just as I'd been to all this bother — fagging myself to death about all these things — " her tragic gesture swept the disordered room — "just as I thought I was going home to enjoy myself, and look nice, and see people again,

and have a little pleasure after all our worries — " She dropped back on the sofa with another burst of tears. "For all the good this rubbish will do me now! I loathe the very sight of it" she sobbed with her face in her hands!0

The Custom of the Country reveals Mrs. Wharton's disgust with the newly rich class not only through Undine Spragg, but also through the aggressive Elmer Moffatt who came from the same place and had the same background as Undine. Mrs. Wharton made him a typical invader who broke into the sacred precincts of old aristocratic society by the cunning and strong determination which characterized the overpowering new class in America at the turn of the century. In the story, Moffatt did everything he could to acquire wealth. Business was his life :

"I guess business is tied to me : Wall Street acts as if it couldn't get along without me. "He gave his shoulders a shake and moved a few steps nearer. "See here, Undine — you're the one that don't understand There are things a man doesn't do. I understand why your husband won't to. His ancestors are his business : Wall Street's mine."1

Moffatt never mingled love with business. When he met the Spraggs in New York he did not meddle with their affairs, for he realized that he was then unable to offer Undine any thing and he seemed to feel that his Apex people (symbol of the new class) should be left to gain as much advantage as possible to raise their own standard. This might be the reason why Moffatt did not attempt to harm Undine even

though he could have. He even watched her move along with her "marrying business" somewhat approvingly; he did not object to her marriage to Ralph Marvell; he made no contemptuous comment about her running away from Ralph to Van Degen nor did he try to rival with Raymond de Chelles in Paris. He, instead, asked for her hand ceremoniously when she sought his help and legally married her after he had become a billionaire accepted by society. He even helped her to betray Ralph and her own son, Paul, by suggesting to her that she claim the custody of the child in order to obtain money from poor Ralph. This was indeed a cruel act since it caused Ralph's misery and death.

Mrs. Wharton satirizes the new class of people and their way of living which merely constituted an artificial society : a society of etiquette and hypocrisy which dominated the New York of the eighteen eighties. Undine's imagination about aristocratic society was limited only to a society of wealth, beauty and splendour which was actually the external appearance of high class society :

... in Apex, Undine's tender imagination
 had been nurtured on the feats
 and gestures of Fifth Avenue. She
 knew all of New York's golden
 aristocracy by name, and the
 lineaments of its most distinguished
 scions had been made familiar
 by passionate poring over the
 daily press. In Mabel's world she
 sought in vain for the originals,
 and only now and then caught
 a tantalizing glimpse of one of
 their familiars . . .¹²

Hitherto Undine had imagined that
 the Driscoll and Van Degen clans and
 their allies held undisputed suzerainty

over New York society. Mabel Lipscomb thought so too, and was given to bragging of her acquaintance with a Mrs. Spoff, who was merely a second cousin of Mrs. Harmon B. Driscoll's. Yet there was she, Undine Spragg of Apex, about to be introduced into an inner circle to which Driscolls and Van Degens, had laid siege in vain!¹³

It was a circle that could not be bought cheaply :

Mrs. Heeny sound a scornful laugh. "Look at here, now, you unbelieving girl! As sure as I'm standing here before you, I've seen Mrs. Harmon B. Driscoll of Fifth Avenue laying in her pink velvet bed with honiton lace sheets on it, and crying her eyes out because she couldn't get asked to one of Mrs. Paul Marvell's musicals. She'd never 'a dreamt of being asked to a dinner there! Not all of her money couldn't 'a bought her that — and she knows it!¹⁴

Alfred Kazin made an interesting comment about Mrs. Wharton's treatment of these people:

It is the grande dame, not the objective novelist, who speaks out in her caricatures of Rosedale and Undine Spragg. To the women of the new class she gave names like Looty Arlighton (a newly rich American girl who married Hubert, Raymond de Chelles' cousin, in order to be a member of a French noble family) and Indiana Frusk (another Apex girl who used to be Undine's rival); to their native habitats, names like Praneville, Nebraska, and Hallelujah, Missouri ; it was the biting old dowager of American letters who snapped at her lower-class characters.¹⁵

Mr. Kazin was positive that the object of Mrs. Wharton's annoyance was the emerging new class of brokers and industr-

ialists, the makers and promoters of the industrial era who were beginning to 'expropriate and supplant' her own class.¹⁶ However, in spite of her dislike for these people, Mrs. Wharton could not help admiring their vigorous determination to win places in the new world. Therefore Moffatt was made aggressive and ambitious — a man who would do anything to achieve his goal to acquire wealth and social status — an aim which he actually accomplished. But his success was acquired not by social background or luck but by trial and error, by both success and failure :

No one in Apex knew where young Moffatt had come from and he offered no information in the subject. He simply appeared one day behind the counter in Luckaback's Dollar shoe-store, drifted thence¹⁷ to the office of Semple and Binch, the coal-merchants, reappeared as the stenographer of the Police Court, and finally edged his way into the power-house of the Apex Water-Works. . . . but he managed to get himself invited to all the picnics and lodge sociables After that he became a leading figure in the youthful world of Apex, and no one was surprised when the Sons of Jonadab, (the local Temperance Society), invited him to deliver their Fourth of July oration.¹⁷

After that he drifted from one job to another, now extolled for his "smartness" and business capacity, now dismissed in disgrace as an irresponsible loafer. His head was always full of immense nebulous schemes for the enlargement and development of any business he happened to be employed in, sometimes his suggestions interested his employers, but proved unpractical and inapplicable; sometimes he wore out their patience or was thought to be a dangerous dreamer.¹⁸

Reno, November 23rd. The Marquise de Chelles, of Paris, France, formerly Mrs. Undine Spragg Marvell, of Apex City and New York, got a decree of divorce at a special session of the Court last night, and was remarried fifteen minutes later to Mr. Elmer Moffatt, the billionaire Railroad King, who was the Marquise's first husband.19

Mrs. Wharton was even angry when she wrote about the, easy conquest of the old group by the new. Ralph Marvell, her guardian of the earlier world, was educated in a way that made him easy to supplant. He lived like a gentleman, with a disdain for mere money-getting. No wonder, he was too weak to fight with the raw, new energy of Apex City's Elmer Moffatts. Like Lily Bart of The House of Mirth, he was a victim of society : he was portrayed as a sensitive, unworldly husband, having a wife who married him merely for his money and position. He was made to suffer because of his own virtues and his wife's selfishness until he met his destruction. The characterization of Ralph Marvell showed Wharton was worried about the people of her own class. In her opinion, they were not able to cope with the materialistic world because they scarcely tried to adapt themselves to the new way of life and the new class of people. Mrs. Wharton seemed to preach that, with the coming of the new materialistic values, it was not practical simply to remain aristocratic and exclusive. One should instead keep up with these newcomers instead of keeping away or running away from them. In this way one would not be destroyed by the new world and might be able to preserve or pass on valuable traditions of the old world to the next generation as she herself was doing.

The Custom of the Country is Mrs. Wharton's complete and powerful novel although it was sometimes criticized as not being realistic. Nobody who has read the book is likely to forget Undine Spragg. She is the personification of selfishness, treachery, frivolity and ambition. But if Undine is made to represent the new class that was then forming modern America, she is not altogether bad since the characteristics she

possesses are significant factors in forming a rapidly developing nation. Mrs. Wharton herself realized that the new world of industrial capitalism was coming and to revolt against it was useless, therefore she resigned herself to silent heroism. Thus she made the defeat of her characters a symbol of victory : "If failure was the destiny of superior men and women in the modern world, failure was the mark of spiritual victory."²⁰

After the social change in old New York in the eighties which had been accelerated and finally completed by World War I, Mrs. Wharton found herself a stranger in a world she hardly knew. Oppressed by a growing sense of alienation from the present, she tried to make her peace by reestablishing a community of spirit with the past. Soon after the war, she set about to reconstruct the world of her childhood and youth, first in The Age of Innocence then in a series of tales entitled Old New York, and finally in A Backward Glance.²¹

With The Age of Innocence (1920), Mrs. Wharton rose serenely to unquestionable priority among the novelists writing in English during the twentieth century.²² In it she animates New York society of the seventies with her sureness of touch and magnificent phrasing. Thus Old New York comes to life to her readers and against this background, she successfully draws a fascinating romance of two lovers's conflict with conventions of polite society. The Age of Innocence is Mrs. Wharton's greatest achievement. In 1921 it was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for literature and even today it is generally considered her masterpiece.

The heroine Ellen Olenska, a young member of an old aristocratic New York family, the Mingotts, has separated from her Polish husband, Count Olenska because of his low moral character. She consequently returns home after having spent many years in Europe. In New York she is introduced to Newland Archer, a young lawyer and a member of another distinguished New York family, who is about to become engaged to her cousin, May Weeland. Back in her own New York circle, Ellen finds it difficult to adjust herself to her people who rally around her to defend her from social condemnation because of her experiences and unconventional independence. Moreover in order to save the family's reputation, they even try every possible way to put a stop to her determination to get a divorce since, in the New York of the eighties seventies divorce is considered scandalous. As a lawyer and prospective member of the family Newland is asked to advise Ellen against divorce. Feeling that Ellen must have been more or less

guilty and fearing scandal, Newland is willing to handle the matter. Unexpectedly he finds himself attracted to Ellen's naturalness and originality. As the marriage approaches he is tortured by the realization that it is Ellen he loves not the proper and conventional May who will never understand his artistic taste and his longing to be free from the chains of convention. But in spite of this realization, aristocratic training teaches him not to violate social convention and Ellen herself persuades him to sacrifice his own happiness for May's.

Newland finds his marriage monotonous, and so burdened with social activities and conventions that he becomes increasingly restless. At the same time Ellen's family presses her to return to her husband. This annoys her terribly; consequently she leaves New York to live in Washington with her somewhat eccentric Aunt Medora. However the illness of a relative calls her back to New York where she and Archer renew their friendship but both find that their love and furtive meetings gives them no peace under the watchful eyes of New York society. They do not know what to do when May, who is quietly watching their relationship, plays her last card, by telling Ellen that **she** is expecting a baby even though her pregnancy has not yet been confirmed. The revelation is a blow to Ellen who, without disclosing her reason to Archer, decides to return to Europe, although not to her husband. At a farewell dinner for her, Newland notices that the assembled group all regard him as Ellen's lover. He also feels deeply the failure of his marriage and the impossibility of living happily with May; therefore he plans to follow Ellen, but must finally renounce his love and plan and is forced to live the rest of his life without joy and happiness, for he learns from May of her pregnancy which at last has become a fact.

For the remainder of his life Newland is a good husband and father to his three children until the death of May who spent over twenty years of life with him. He moves through a familiar routine, witnessing things that would have been

considered impossible in his youth: his daughter, Mary, marries a man whom her grandparents would have objected to since he belongs to a newly rich and less refined class; his son, Dallas, marries a rich, pretty and independent daughter of a family that had previously been condemned by the old New York society because of her parents' misconduct. Newland himself enters liberal politics, but is thought too honest for politics. He gives the public all sorts of philanthropic services instead. Although he feels he has missed happiness and his marriage is a dull duty, he is not sorry because he finds compensation for his sacrifice in the dignity and satisfaction of having done his duty. Years later, after the death of May, he accompanies his grown-up son, Dallas, to Paris, where he has an opportunity to see Ellen. But after careful reflection he allows his son to go to her alone because although he and Ellen now have a chance to make a life together, he realizes he prefers his memory of her to a meeting with a woman who probably with the passing of time, has become a stranger to him.

In The Age of Innocence (1920), Mrs. Wharton again as in The Custom of the Country (1913), uses old New York of the nineteen seventies and her own experience as the setting for her story. But although The Age of Innocence basically treats a similar theme: the destruction of her own class and the rise of a new class at the turn of the century, this novel lacks the cutting satire of The Custom of the Country. It emphasizes instead the traditions and conventions which go to make up the eighteen seventies in New York. This is probably, with the passing of time she realized that to fight with the new world was useless or it was because she had become quite used to both the manners and attitudes of this new class.

Like her hero, Newland Archer, who "cherished his old New York even when he smiled at it,"²³ Mrs. Wharton in writing this novel showed that she missed the life that no longer existed in the nineteen twenties. It was the kind of nostalgia that made Blake Nevins, in his careful analysis and appraisal of Mrs. Wharton's novels and stories, remark :

It was the nostalgia evoked by the setting and manners familiar to her childhood, a nostalgia that was to grow with the years until it effaced what bitterness remained.²⁴

Thus in the opening lines one begins to notice that in talking about New York's Academy of Music Mrs. Wharton was trying to create for her readers the old atmosphere :

On a January evening of the early seventies, Christine Nilsson was singing in Faust at the Academy of Music in New York.

Though there was already talk of the erection, in remote metropolitan distances "above the Forties," of a new Opera House which should compete in costliness and splendour with those of the great European capitals, the world of fashion was still content to reassemble every winter in the shabby red and gold boxes of the sociable old Academy. Conservatives cherished it for being small and inconvenient and thus keeping out the "new people" whom New York was beginning to dread and yet be drawn to; and the sentimental clung to it for its historic associations, and the musical for its excellent acoustics, always so problematic a quality in halls built for the hearing of music.²⁵

Through long association Newland Archer knows exactly how to act at the opera. He is a gentleman and knows about all good manners and etiquettes :

When Newland Archer opened the door at the back of the club box the curtain had just gone up on the garden scene. There was no reason why the young man should not have come earlier, for he had dined at seven, alone with his mother and sister, and had lingered afterward over a cigar

in the Gothic library with glazed black-walnut bookcases and finial-topped chairs which was the only room in the house where Mrs. Archer allowed smoking. But, in the first place, New York was a metropolis, and perfectly aware that in metropolises it was "not the thing" to arrive early at the opera; and what was or was not "the thing" played a part as important in Newland Archer's New York as the inscrutable totem terrors that had ruled the destinies of his forefathers thousands of years ago.²⁶

And from the beginning to the end of the story Mrs. Wharton never hesitated to record carefully Old New York's traditions and conventions as well as its hypocrisy. She gave a vivid picture of the Mingotts, headed by old Mrs. Manson Mingott, and the van der Luydens at the peak of their power. Notice how the Mingotts felt great concern about restoring the social reputation of their member, Ellen Olenska, which marked the impressive clan solidarity and how Newland Archer and his mother considered the significance of the same case and sought for help from their powerful aristocratic relatives, the van der Luydens :

.... New York has always been a commercial community, and there are not more than three families in it who can claim an aristocratic origin in the real sense of the word Mrs. Archer and her son and daughter, like every one else in New York, knew who these privileged beings were : the Dagonets of Washington Square, , the Larnings, and the van der Luydens, direct descendants of the first Dutch governor of Manhattan, and related by pre-revolutionary marriages to several members of the French and British aristocracy.²⁷

They (the van der Luydens) were the arbiters of fashion, the Court of Last Appeal, and they knew it, and bowed to their fate.²⁸

(Newland Archer to the van der Luydens):
 "Everybody in New York knows
 what you and cousin Louisa
 represent. That's why Mrs. Mingott
 felt she ought not to allow
 this slight on Countess Olenska to
 pass without consulting you.²⁹

Another important family, the Beauforts, represented the mercantile aristocracy who by their wealth and leisure, observed social manners most strenuously and after over twenty years succeeded in making people forget their undignified past : Mr. Beaufort for a scandalous rumour of his leaving England and his wife for having been a dull penniless beauty :

Mrs. Julius Beaufort, on the night of her annual ball, never failed to appear at the Opera; indeed, she always gave her ball on an Opera night in order to emphasize her complete superiority to household cares, and her possession of a staff of servants competent to organise every detail of the entertainment in her absence.³⁰

Mrs. Beaufort, then, had as usual appeared in her box just before the Jewel Song; and when, again as usual, she rose at the end of the third act, drew her opera cloak about her lovely shoulders, and disappeared, New York knew that meant that half an hour later the ball would begin.³¹

But in spite of the well established society in the eighteen-seventies, values changed and mores gradually relaxed. A married man might keep a mistress but appearance must be maintained. Thus his act would provoke only light clubroom gossip :

"I'm certain of it, sir. Larry (Lawrence Lefferts) has been going it rather harder than usual lately — if cousin Louisa won't mind my mentioning it — having rather a stiff affair with the postmaster's wife in their village, or someone of that sort; and whenever poor

Gertrude Lefferts begins to suspect anything, and he's afraid of trouble, he gets up a fuss of this kind, to show how awfully moral he is, and talks at the top of his voice about the impertinence of inviting his wife to meet people he doesn't wish her to know. He's simply using Madame Olenska as a lightning-rod; I've seen him try the same thing often before."³²

The novel also included an expert analysis of the part played by clan solidarity in public morals. Thus the Archers and the van der Luydens, who would automatically become related to the Mingotts by the marriage of Newland to May, were most eager to rescue Ellen Olenska from sinking lower because of social scandal since a wife would be ostracized for openly abandoning a husband, though with him life had become intolerable. The family stood behind a member whose personal misbehavior threatened to cause a scandal, but at the same time it cast out the any member who was unable to support himself financially. Ellen, who refused to go back to her rich husband Count Olenska, was therefore rejected. Thus, as Donald Heiney puts it, tribal loyalty is curiously confused with bourgeois materialism.³³

The characterization of her leading protagonists, Newland Archer, Countess Ellen Olenska and May (Weeland) Archer is superb. Newland was born an aristocrat who was taught by early training to appreciate and to value the forms and etiquette of polite society. Little wonder then, that he had so much admiration for May Weeland whom he found a concrete expression of the New York of the eighteen seventies. But until he met Ellen Olenska, Newland did not realize his inner self which was composed of naturalness and liberalism. The two souls were brought into one by their common appreciation of art and literature to which their clan was deaf. Their few hours together brought before them the real life that both never really lived. Their deeper feeling, their judgments, and their visions, were shown through their conversation. Newland, through Ellen's comments, found the

truth he had subconsciously felt himself about old New York society that in spite of its rigid performances of traditional rituals and ceremonies, it was dull :

"How do you like my funny house?" she (Ellen) asked. "To me it's like heaven"

.....
 "You've arranged it delightfully," he rejoined,

.....
 "Oh, its a poor little place. My relations despise it. But at any rate it's less gloomy than the van der Luydens'." The words gave him an electric shock, for few were the rebellious spirits who would have dared to call the stately home of the van der Luydens gloomy. Those privileged to enter it shivered there, and spoke of it as "handsome." But suddenly he was glad that she had given voice to the general shiver.³⁴

Newland's artistic sense was roused when he made the acquaintance of Ellen. In paying a visit to Ellen's humble quarters which was condemned by old New York as "des quartiers **eccentriques**", Newland could not help admiring her taste and simultaneously compared it with that of his betrothed, May Weeland :

The atmosphere of the room was so different from any he had ever breathed that self-consciousness vanished in the sense of adventure. He had been before in drawing-rooms hung with red damask, with pictures "of the Italian School"; what struck him was the way in which Medora Manson's shabby hired house, with its blighted background of pampas grass and Rogers statuettes, had, by a turn of the hand, and the skilful use of a few properties, been transformed into something intimate, "foreign," subtly suggestive of old romantic scenes and sentiments. He tried to analyse the tricks, to find a clue to it in the way the chairs and tables were grouped, in the fact that only two Jacqueminot roses (of which nobody ever bought less than a dozen) had been placed in the slender vase at his elbow, and in

the vague pervading perfume that was not what one put on handkerchiefs but rather like the scent of some far-off bazaar, a smell made up of Turkish coffee and ambergris and dried roses.

His mind wandered away to the question of what May's drawing-room would look like. He knew that Mr. Weeland, who was behaving "very handsomely," already had his eye on a newly built house in East Thrity-ninth Street. The neighbourhood was thought remote, and the house was built in a ghastly greenish-yellow stone that the younger architects were beginning to employ as a protest against the brownstone of which the uniform hue coated New York like a cold chocolate sauce; but the plumbing was perfect. Archer would have liked to travel, to put off the housing question; but though the Weelands approved of an extended European honeymoon (perhaps even a winter in Egypt), they were firm as to the need of a house for the returning couple. The young man felt that his fate was sealed : for the rest of his life he would go up every evening between the cast-iron railings of that greenish-yellow doorstep, and pass through a Pompeian vestibule into a hall with a wainscoting of varnished yellow wood. But beyond that his imagination could not travel. He knew the drawing-room above had a bay window, but he could not fancy how May would deal with it. She submitted cheerfully to the purple satin and yellow tuftings of the Weeland drawing-room, to its sham Buhl tables and gilt vitrines full of modern Saxe. He saw no reason to suppose that she would want anything different in her own house; and his only comfort was to reflect that she would probably let him arrange his library as he pleased — which would be, of course; with "sincere" Eastlike furniture, and the plain new book-cases without glass doors.³⁵

Ellen gradually became to Newland the romance that his life had missed. In her he detected naturalness and intelligence

none of which he could get from his 'innocent' May. Notice how perfect a description Mrs. Wharton gave of Ellen :

In the middle of the room she paused, looking about her with a grave mouth and smiling eyes; and in that instant Newland Archer rejected the general verdict on her looks. It was true that her early radiance was gone. The red cheeks had paled; she was thin, worn, a little older-looking than her age, which must have been nearly thirty. But there was about her the mysterious authority of beauty, a sureness in the carriage of the head, the movement of the eyes, which without being in the least theatrical, struck him as highly trained and full of a conscious power.³⁶

Yet in spite of their love, both Newland and Ellen knew that their love must not conflict with any convention or clan. Therefore their separation was inevitable. It was tragic but in a way it was a spiritual victory :

"Then what, exactly, is your plan for us?" he (Newland) asked.

"For us? But there's no us in that sense! We're near each other only if we stay far from each other. Then we can be ourselves. Otherwise we're only Newland Archer, the husband of Ellen Olenska's cousin, and Ellen Olenska, the cousin of Newland Archer's wife, trying to be happy behind the backs of the people who trust them."³⁷

May Weeland was as remarkable a character as her cousin and her fiancé. In each of the crises in their love story she struck surely but mercilessly to prevent the loss of the man she loved. She fought with her "innocence", never letting Newland know that she suspected him, but, with perfect strategy partly resulting from good breeding, she shut for him all means of escape. Mrs. Wharton's mastery of technique and the cutting phrase were forcefully revealed when she made May appear at a critical moment to announce her

pregnancy to Ellen and later to Newland. This announcement imprisoned Newland with her for a life time. It would have been quite normal if she had not later admitted to Newland that she had told Ellen before she herself even knew she was pregnant. This shows how fierce and determined pure May Newland was :

" ... You (May) say you're not tired: well, I am. Horribly tired ..."

In an instant she was all tender anxiety. "Oh, I've seen it coming on, Newland! You've been so wickedly overworked —"

"Perhaps it's that. Anyhow, I want to make a break —"

"A break? To give up the law?"

"To go away, at any rate — at once. On a long trip, ever so far off — away from everything —"

He paused, conscious that he had failed in his attempt to speak with the indifference of a man who longs for a change, and is yet too weary to welcome it. Do what he would, the chord of eagerness vibrated. "Away from everything —" he repeated.

"Ever so far? Where, for instance?" she asked.

"Oh, I don't know. India — or Japan."

She stood up, and as he sat with bent head, his chin propped on his hands, he felt her warmly and fragrantly hovering over him.

"As far as that? But I'm afraid you can't, dear ... " she said in an unsteady voice. " Not unless you'll take me with you." And then, as he was silent, she went on, in tones so clear and evenly-pitched that each separate syllable tapped like a little hammer on his brain:

"That is, if the doctors will let me go

...but I'm afraid they won't. For you see, Newland, I've been sure since this morning of something I've been so longing and hoping for —"

He looked up at her with a sick stare, and she sank down, all dew and roses, and hid her face against his knee.

"Oh, my dear," he said, holding her to him while his cold hand stroked her hair.

There was a long pause, which the inner devils filled with strident laughter; then May freed herself from his arms and stood up.

"You didn't guess ____?"

"Yes — I; no. That is, of course I hoped ____"

They looked at each other for an instant and again fell silent; then, turning his eyes from hers, he asked abruptly: "Have you told any one else?"

"Only Mamma and your mother." She paused, and then added hurriedly, the blood flushing up to her forehead: "That is — and Ellen. You know I told you we'd had a long talk one afternoon — and how dear she was to me."

"Ah ____" said Archer, his heart stopping.

He felt that his wife was watching him intently. "Did you mind my telling her first, Newland?"

"Mind? Why should I?" He made a last effort to collect himself. "But that was a fortnight ago, wasn't it? I thought you said you weren't sure till today."

Her colour burned deeper, but she held his gaze. "No; I wasn't sure then — but I told her I was. And you see I was right!" she exclaimed, her blue eyes wet with victory.³⁸

Since "one can't make over society," Newland could not overcome the conventions, and in the end he was forced to live in accord with them. He remained in the grip of nineteenth-century convention until the end of his days:

Something he knew he had missed: the flower of life. But he thought of it now as a thing so unattainable and improbable that to have repined would have been like despairing because one had not drawn the first prize in a lottery. There were a hundred million tickets in his lottery, and there was only one prize; the chances had been too decidedly against him. When he thought of Ellen Olenska it was abstractly, serenely, as one might think of some imaginary beloved in a book or a picture: she had become the composite vision of all that he had missed. That vision, faint and tenuous as it was, had

kept him from thinking of other women. He had been what was called a faithful husband; and when May had suddenly died—he had honestly mourned her. Their long years together had shown him that it did not so much matter if marriage was a dull duty, as long as it kept the dignity of a duty; lapsing from that, it became a mere battle of ugly appetites. Looking about him, he honoured his own past; and mourned for it. After all, there was good in the old ways.³⁹

After her greatest achievement from The Age of Innocence (1920) and except for Old New York, a collection of four novelettes dealing with New York from the forties, to the seventies, Mrs. Wharton returned to her New York background in Hudson River Bracketed (1929) and its sequel, The Gods Arrive (1932).

Since these two novels are not available anywhere at all in Bangkok, the following synopsis of these stories and their critical studies are taken from certain secondary resources locally obtainable at the present moment.

Vance Weston (Advance G. Weston) is a young writer from a mid-western town beyond the Alleghenies : Euphoria, Illinois. His family moves from Prunecville, Nebraska, to Hallelujah, Missouri, then to Advance and finally Euphoria, Illinois, where the grandparents occupy a colonial cottage and the younger Westons a modern suburban-style home. Disillusioned with Euphoria, Vance travels east, to Paul's Landing on the Hudson, and lives at his cousins' home, the Willows, an aristocratic old house where he meets Halo Tarrent a young married woman. The spell of the Willows and the charm of Halo inspire Vance to think of the value of the past. The Willows gives him the atmosphere of the nineteenth century while Halo represents the older civilization of the East. In New York Vance struggles with the mechanics and accidents of publishing but more important, he realizes that his earlier life was incomplete partly because of the drebness in taste of Euphoria partly owing to his blunder in marrying his cousin, Laura Lou Tracy, a sickly, ignorant and remorselessly dependent girl who cannot comprehend his world. This inspiration and realization cause him to try writing a short novel, "Instead", a historical novel, a nostalgic evocation of the past. In spite of its immediate critical success, the critics consider it a "sideshow" and the past appears to the novelist as no more than a convenient refuge from the reality which threatens him on every side : his ailing, slatternly wife, his shabby quarters, his debts, and his stifling employment at the office, to say nothing of his hopeless passion for Halo Tarrent. As a result Vance abandons

New York and the artistic circle to rent a shack in the country, and to set to work on a big novel. Once he has brought himself to accept reality, the combination of poverty, isolation, and the responsibility of caring for a sickly wife stimulate, rather than defeat, the recovery of his creative powers. The new novel is going ahead successfully when Laura Lou's health takes a critical turn for the worse and she dies of tuberculosis. The following week, Halo Tarrant, ignorant of Laura's death, seeks out Vance to tell him she is free of Lewis Tarrant, her husband, and that they can resume the platonic relationship. He informs her of his wife's death, and Hudson River Bracketed ends on presumption that they will come to a deeper understanding.⁴⁰

Blake Nevius stated that this novel bore many signs of a valedictory performance and because Mrs. Wharton had so ambitious a scheme, it had to be extended to a second volume, The Gods Arrive (1932).⁴¹ Arthur Hobson Quinn similarly remarked that because Edith Wharton evidently felt that one novel was too brief for the development of Vance Weston's character, she wrote The Gods Arrive as a sequel to Hudson River Bracketed and regarded as a single unit, Hudson River Bracketed and its sequel are her longest works of fiction which taken together, she believed, would include almost anything she might have to say about the relative claims on the artist of the real and the ideal, the present and the past. However, Blake Nevius thinks that they are not very well written. He says that her plans are distinct in Hudson River Bracketed but progressively blurred in The Gods Arrive.⁴²

Halo Tarrant has not waited for her divorce from her husband but departs for Europe with Vance. At this stage the book becomes an implicit argument against love without marriage. Vance and Halo are no longer welcome at home because of the scandal they have caused, therefore they stop in Spain. During this time Vance finds his creative faculties paralyzed,

yet he attempts to write a new novel, "Colossus" which is another failure. Halo is no longer his muse since the flattery of readers he formerly despised and a certain self-distrust have combined to destroy her influence. Halo subsequently withdraws voluntarily into the background, content like the heroine of a sentimental novel to suffer nobly and uncomplainingly. Ultimately, Vance deserts her for Floss Dolaney, a deceitful seductive beauty from Euphoria who formerly had betrayed him but who now has come into money and in dragging her father about Europe. Yet his life with Floss soon falls to pieces and Vance is reconciled with Halo and returns to safe ground and to the rational ideal.⁴³

Blake Nevius commented that taken together, the two novels proposed to carry Vance Weston, who was born into a world in which everything had been or was being renovated, backwards in time and space by carrying him from Euphoria, Illinois, to the banks of the Hudson and then to Europe, so that he would be exposed to successively deeper influences from the past.⁴⁴ Having lived a long time in France Mrs. Wharton appreciated the sense of continuity which is basic to the French view of life. She believed that this sense helped preserve the vigor of a culture :

" France may teach us that, side by side with the qualities of enterprise and innovation that English blood has put in us, we should cultivate the sense of continuity, that sense of the Past which enriches the present and binds us up with the world's great stabilizing traditions of art and poetry and knowledge."⁴⁵

Thus Hudson River Bracketed and its sequel The Gods Arrive are given over in large part to Vance Weston's love of the past.⁴⁶ It is the reason why Vance is in love with the Willows, for the Willows symbolizes a place in which the old active life spanned the period. It is the place where Mrs. Wharton's

parents and their friends whose friendship meant so much to her, were born, grew up, married and had families. The library at the Willows, described by Hale as "a fairly good specimen of what used to be called a 'gentleman's library' in my grandfather's time," is the library of George Frederic Jones. The books which Vance discovers there, and which open up for him the rich treasure house of the past, are the books with which Edith Jones as a lonely child "in the kingdom of my father's library" fed the imagination. It is in this old atmosphere that Vance realizes the significance of life :

"This is the Past," Vance Weston, musing in the library at the Willows, decides, "if only I could get back into it"

"What interests me," remarks Vance, in explaining the early chapters to his collaborator, "would be to get back into the minds of the people who lived in these places — to try and see what we came out of. Till I do I'll never understand why we are what we are."

Vance is the spokesman for a rootless, traditionless generation of young Americans stand alone, in an isolated and meaningless context ;⁴⁷

You see, from the first day I set foot in this house I got that sense of continuity that we folks have missed out of our lives — out where I live, anyway — and it gave me the idea of a different rhythm, a different time-beat: a movement without jerks and breaks, flowing down from ever so far off in the hills, bearing ships to the sea⁴⁸

But the past culture that Mrs. Wharton was trying to explain is that of the American east coast and of Europe. According to Blake Nevius in the early chapters of Hudson River Bracketed and some of the later chapters of The Gods Arrive, Mrs. Wharton showed her contempt of the Midwest and her treatment of Midwestern culture was a burlesque : a disclosure of narrow religion,

droll philosophy and bad taste in architecture, cookery and speech. He criticized her for knowing nothing about the Midwest and said that her Euphoria was visualized after Sinclair Lewis's Main Street and Arrowsmith.⁴⁹ Moreover, both Blake Nevius and Frederick J. Hoffman, an Associate Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin share the opinion that judging from these two novels Mrs. Wharton was not at her best when exploring the human situation behind the work of art, that her attempt to illuminate the writer's special problems and frustrations and her view of the artistic life remained essentially the romanticized version of an outsider, that most of the artists in her books were self-consciously devoted to an ideal of art which exists mainly in sentimental fiction. Therefore, they concluded that :

Hudson River Bracketed is a courageous attempt to describe a world to which she (Mrs. Wharton) was inadequately adjusted.⁵⁰

In 1924, four years after Mrs. Wharton had written The Age of Innocence, she wrote four novelettes dealing with New York in the period from the eighteen forties to the seventies. They are False Dawn, The Spark, New Year's Day and The Old Maid which are collected under the title Old New York.⁵¹ The period she had chosen to write about and the name given to the collection show that Mrs. Wharton was once again interested in the various subjects of her past old New York. The evocation of the New York past is also seen in After Holbein, one of Mrs. Wharton's short stories written in 1928.

After Holbein is the story of Anson Warley, a bachelor of sixty-three and old New York's most indefatigable dinner-out, who has been suffering from dizzy spells. On a raw winter evening he, disregarding his valet's plea that he remain at home, started on foot to keep a dinner engagement, had a lapse of memory en route, and turned in by mistake at the Fifth Avenue mansion of Mrs. Evelina Jasper, once the most influential of New York hostesses who was now a victim of softening of the brain. He was greeted formally by Mrs. Jasper, escorted her in to dinner, and together, at a table set with kitchen crockery, they performed the scene of her former glory carrying on ludicrous conversation, turning to each other, bowing and touching glasses. After dinner, the hostess retired, presumably abandoning her guest to his cigar. Warley, as he was leaving, suffered a fatal stroke.

It is a tragic story of deterioration in old age. Old Warley often got angry with his valet because he resented the valet's interference. Old Mrs. Jasper always got emotional if she was not dressed up to receive her guests who never came. She had to wear her jewels and a purple wig, stood in the empty hallway and tottering on swollen feet, received the imaginary guests or divided her conversation between the vacant chairs on either side. All those constituted the gravest picture.

Blake Novius was positive that this story was an outlet of the writer who felt herself betrayed by the past and by the tradition in which she was reared,⁵² thus she laughed at her

past through her tears. But it is worth noticing that the name Mrs. Wharton has given as her title suggests something else. Holbein is the name of a famous German artist who often painted portraits in which there are signs of deep and often bitter experiences. It is likely that in choosing this title and writing this short story, Mrs. Wharton is trying in the same manner as Holbein, to paint the past experiences of her deteriorated protagonists, Old Anson Warley and Old Mrs. Jasper who after a life of vigorous social activities in old New York in their old age come to nothing but the mockery that the old society has left behind. The presentation of these two old protagonists is in fact symbolic for if the old couple stand for old aristocratic New York society, their deterioration suggests the decline and the valuelessness of that society at the turn of the twentieth century. However, Mrs. Wharton wrote this story not because she was angry or felt betrayed by old New York or the old tradition, as Mr. Nevius stated but she wrote it nostalgically; she realized that her old world was disappearing and nothing could be done to detain it since this is the way of the world yet she could not help feeling sad over its disappearance.

In writing A Backward Glance (1934) Mrs. Wharton had given her final, balanced judgement of old New York. Its virtues, as she saw them, were "social amenity and financial incorruptibility"; its defects were principally two, "an instinctive shrinking from responsibility" and "a blind dread of innovation."⁵³ Following the Civil War, some of the leisured gentlemen of her class began to interest themselves in municipal affairs to the extent of serving on the boards of museums, libraries and charities, like Newland Archer in Mrs. Wharton's The Age of Innocence, but beyond this they could not bring themselves to go. Politics was out of bounds; consequently, Mrs. Wharton explained, "none of my friends rendered the public service that a more enlightened social

system would have exacted of them." In this book, she criticized American democracy in its failure to utilize the best material at hand :

In every society there is the room, and the need, for a cultivated leisure class; but from the first the spirit of our institutions has caused us to waste this class instead of using it.

For the "dread of innovation", Nevius stated that it characterized old New York completely. He said that Mrs. Wharton even amused her parents' taste in literature. Repeatedly in her stories, she listed the authors who were sanctioned by the parlor censor, they were either ignored or dismissed as vulgar. Mrs. Archer and her daughter in The Age of Innocence, "whose tastes were identical," spoke severely of Dickens who 'had never drawn a gentleman'. Nevius thought Mrs. Wharton's irony was unmistakable and was definite that some critics made a mistake in taking Mrs. Wharton's reference to Melville in A Backward Glance as evidence of her snobbishness ("As for Herman Melville, a cousin of the Van Rensselaers, and qualified by birth to figure in the best society, he was doubtless excluded from it by his deplorable Bohemianism, for I never heard his name mentioned, or saw one of his books.") Mrs. Wharton also wrote of Newland Archer and his contemporaries which shows her clear point of view :

In reality, they all lived in a kind of hieroglyphic world, where the real thing was never said or done or even thought, but only represented by a set of arbitrary signs. 54

New England in Her Works

Ethan Frome written in 1911 is considered Mrs. Wharton's most popular novel although this story is about simple farmers of New England, not people of her own class. These sudden changes of setting and type of characters surprise many of her readers who think of her only as a writer of high society. In fact Mrs. Wharton did not write only about people of her own class, she occasionally wrote about common people of New York who lived far from the wealth and gracious living of Fifth Avenue. Her first published short story, Mrs. Manstey's View, was about an invalid widow of limited means whose main pleasure lay in the view she had from her window of her neighbor's back yards. Later in 1916 Mrs. Wharton published The Bunner Sisters, a novelette, about two maiden sisters in a little millinery shop on a shabby New York street in the days of horse cars. In this kind of stories, Mrs. Wharton, in spite of her high society background, has clearly shown insight into and sympathy with the lives of ordinary people. It is therefore quite clear that dealing with the lives of simple people is not, in fact, a complete departure from her prevailing manner.

It was also reported by Arthur Hobson Quinn that early in the century, Mrs. Wharton had begun to write Ethan Frome as an exercise in French, but had abandoned it. Then a few years later it appeared in her mind as material for fiction.⁵⁵ The complete novelette was, therefore, published in 1911.

This novel has New England as its setting. The selection of the setting also should not surprise her readers if they remember Mrs. Wharton's long period of residence at Lenox, Massachusetts. An observant and keen novelist like Mrs. Wharton would not have missed an opportunity to learn something about the place and the people near her home and it is quite usual, not only with Mrs. Wharton but also with most novelists, that the actual experiences they had had, should appear at one time or another in their works. Mrs. Wharton herself admitted that she had long desired to draw a picture of New England

where she used to live. She wrote in her autobiography :

"For years I had wanted to draw life as it really was in the derelict mountain villages of New England. The snow-bound villages of Western Massachusetts were grim places, morally and physically : insanity, incest and slow mental and moral starvation were hidden away behind the paintless wooden house fronts of the long village streets."

And as one goes through the story, one can see how wise Mrs. Wharton was in choosing New England as the setting to intensify the drama in the lives of the three people condemned to live together in misery.

Ethan Frome, born in a New England farming family, was forced to carry the burden of farm and mill after his father's accident. A lonely life at the farm grew more dreary when his mother fell ill and soon withdrew into taciturnity. He was subsequently pleased to have Zenobia Pierca, a cousin seven years older than he, come to nurse his mother and to cheer him up with her volubility and smartness in household affairs. After a long illness, his mother died and Ethan, out of severe loneliness married Zeena (Zenobia).

It was agreed that as soon as Ethan could straighten out the difficulties, they would sell the farm and saw-mill and try their luck in a large town. Ethan's love of nature did not take the form of a taste for agriculture. He had always wanted to be an engineer, and to live in towns, where there were lectures and big libraries and fellows doing things. A slight engineering job in Florida, put in his way during his period of study increased his faith in his ability and, also his eagerness to see the world; and he felt sure that, with a "smart" wife like Zeena, it would not be long before he made himself a place.

But the domineering and egocentric Zeena, who had let her husband see from the first that life on an isolated farm was not what she had expected, surprisingly chose to live in a place that she could look down on, rather than a place which looked down on her. Consequently, within a year of their marriage she fell silent and developed the "sickness" which impoverished Ethan and thus prevented him from leaving the



bleak New England farm.

Then Zenobia's young cousin Mattie Silver, left destitute by the death of her parents, came to live with them as Zeena's aid. Because Zeena did not have to pay Mattie and as a compensation for the lonely life on the farm, Mattie was permitted to attend an occasional church social in town and it was necessary for Ethan to escort her to these affairs. Tormented by his wife's quiet selfishness and out of pity for the girl, who was continually nagged by Zeena, Ethan came to love Mattie and she returned his love.

But nothing would be kept hidden from the watchful eyes of Zeena. On her return from seeing a new doctor in a neighboring town, she announced that she had hired a stronger girl to replace Mattie. Ethan, in despair, dreamt of fleeing west with Mattie, but was constrained by his sense of duty toward his wife as well as by his lack of means. Ethan and Mattie, tortured, went to the station to meet the new hired girl. The same train was to take Mattie away. Impulsively they stopped at a neighbor's farm and in the midst of desperation, Ethan took Mattie on a sled to coast down a dangerous slope. Mattie was so desperate ----- that she persuaded Ethan to commit suicide with her. Ethan was shocked but when he thought of the severest loneliness in going back to share his life again with Zeena, he willingly steered the sled into a tree. Ironically, they were only mutilated. Ethan was crippled and Mattie's spine was broken. Zeena at once recovered from her "sickness" and took care of Ethan and Mattie, who gradually turned into a querulous neurotic herself.

In all good novels, the background is significant because it helps to develop the story to its highest tension. All efficient novelists know this. Mrs. Wharton herself in The Writing of Fiction showed clearly this point of view :

The impression produced by a landscape, a street or a house should always, to the novelist, be an event in the history of the soul. 56

Thus, in reading Ethan Frome one cannot disregard the vivid

discription of the hard-living farm life in the winter New England. Ethan's farm house and its location give one a sense of distress and oppression :

Abreast of the schoolhouse the road forked, and we dipped down a lane to the left, between hemlock boughs bent inward to their trunks by the weight of the snow the solitary roof showing through bare branches near the bottom of the hill was that of Frome's saw-mill. It looked exanimate enough, with its idle wheel looming above the black stream dashed with yellow-white spume, and its cluster of sheds sagging under their white load About a mile farther we came to an orchard of starved apple-trees writhing over a hill-side among outcroppings of slate that nuzzled up through the snow like animals pushing out their noses to breathe. Beyond the orchard lay a field or two, their boundaries lost under drifts; and above the fields, huddled against the white immensities of land and sky, one of those lonely New England farm-houses that make the landscape lonelier..... The snow had ceased, and a flash of watery sunlight exposed the house on the slope above us in all its plaintive ugliness. The brsck wreath of a deciduous creeper flapped from the porch, and the thin wooden walls, under their worn coat of paint, seemed to shiver in the wind that had risen with the ceasing of the snow.⁵⁷

lonely

How/the place and the natural phenomenon are at the climax of the story when Ethan and Mattie ran their sled toward the elm to die together :

.... he passed from the shade of the spruces into the transparent dusk of the open. The slope below them was deserted. All Starkfield was at supper, and not a figure crossed the open space before the church. The sky, swollen with the clouds that announce a thaw, hung as low as before a summer storm.⁵⁸

The loss of the house's "L" is symbolic and shows that Mrs. Wharton knows the New England farm and its life so well that she can give a realistic and explicit description :

Ethan : "The house was bigger in my father's time : I had to take down the "L," a while back, "

I saw then that the unusually forlorn and slanted look of the house was partly due to the loss of what is known in New England as the "L" : that long deep-roofed adjunct usually built at right angles to the main house, and connecting it, by way of store-rooms and tool-house, with the wood-shed and cow-barn. Whether because of its symbolic sense, the image it presents of a life linked with the soil, and enclosing in itself the chief sources of warmth and nourishment, or whether merely because of the consolatory thought that it enables the dwellers in that harsh climate to get to their morning's work without facing the weather; it is certain that the "L" rather than the house itself seems to be the centre, the actual hearth-stone of the New England farm. Perhaps this connection of ideas, which had often occurred to me in my rambles about Starkfield, caused me to hear a wistful note in Frome's words, and to see in the diminished dwelling the image of his own shrunken body. 59

The subject matter itself and all these examples are evidence that Mrs. Wharton felt her subject deeply enough to be able to charge it with conviction at every point. It is therefore no wonder that this is her most popular work.

After the publishing of Ethan Frome in 1911 Mrs. Wharton stopped using New England as a setting until 1917 when she published Summer, a novel of New England village life. During the interval she turned to a foreign setting in The Reef (1912), Old New York in The Custom of the Country (1913) and French front line in World War I in Fighting France (1915).

Both Blake Nevius and Arthur Hobson Quinn are of the opinion that Mrs. Wharton wrote this novel as a sort of relaxation from the pressures of her war activities.⁶⁰ However from their remarks about the novel, Summer does not seem delightful. From Quinn's short critical study of the book one learns that it is a grim story of a heroine, Charity Royall, the child of a degenerate race that lives on "the Mountain". She has been rescued and brought up by lawyer Royall with whom she later has sordid relations. Realistic details of the hopeless misery of the promiscuous group of outlaws are given. The coming of Charity's illegitimate child by a man already engaged to be married and her desperate impulse to go back to her mother's people are told with unrelenting realism. However Mr. Quinn has concluded that unlike Ethan Frome, Summer is not a great novel though it has the makings of a great novel — squalor and misery in the lives of characters who are victims of moral weakness and inherited evil.⁶¹

Unlike Quinn, Nevius finds this novel salutary and he thinks that, as in Ethan Frome, Mrs. Wharton, by her imagination, is able to bring about a fusion of all the elements of her tale on a symbolic level. The cycle of the human drama is adjusted to the cycle of the seasons : the promise of spring and the fulfillment of summer are followed by the bitter harvest of autumn and the approaching chill of winter. He praises Mrs. Wharton saying that in no other story is her attachment to the rich, unconscious life of nature utilized to such advantage.

From Blake Nevius one learns that the setting of Summer and Ethan Frome are roughly the same : in Ethan Frome her theme is enhanced by every feature of the landscape — by the "orchard of atarved appletrees writhing over a hillside

among outcroppings of slate," the truncated "L" of Ethan's farmhouse in which one saw "the image of his own shrunken body," but predominantly by the landscape as a whole, buried under snow, — as silent and incommunicative as the characters. The same method is used in Summer, with its naturalistic symbol of the Mountain and its subtle accommodation of the human drama to the changing seasons.

Nevius appreciates Mrs. Wharton's rare imaginative force with which she was able to project the inner drama and is touched by powerful scenes. He says there is nothing in Ethan Frome to match the dark, unruly passions of lawyer Royall and Charity, his ward, nor any episodes so frankly sordid as the former's invasion of Charity's bedroom or Charity's last visit to the Mountain when she views the corpse of her mother :

" Mary's over there, " someone said; and Mr. Miles, taking the bottle in his hand, passed behind the table. Charity followed him, and they stood before a mattress on the floor in a corner of the room. A woman lay on it, but she did not look like a dead woman; she seemed to have fallen across her squalid bed in a drunken sleep, and to have been left lying where she fell, in her ragged disordered clothes. One arm was flung above her head, one leg drawn up under a torn skirt that left the other bare to the knee : a swollen glistening leg with a ragged stocking rolled down about the ankle. The woman lay on her back, her eyes staring up unblinkingly at the candle that trembled in Mr. Miles's hands.⁶²

Nevius understands, that Mrs. Wharton was attempting to come to terms with racial and subconscious impulses. Thus, when Charity learns that she is pregnant, she sets out on foot for her birthplace :

She supposed it was something in her blood that made the Mountain the only answer to her questioning, the inevitable escape from all that hemmed her in and beset her.⁶³

Nevius knows that the outlaw community with its history of violence, squalor and intermarriage remains a symbol rather than a fact and with powerfully realized scenes he agrees that Mrs. Wharton's inner drama is valid.⁶⁴

Besides Ethan Frome and Summer Mrs. Wharton also wrote some other short stories having New England as their settings. The Recovery, in Crucial Instances, Mrs. Wharton's second collection of short stories, is a story of New England, revealing the development of a painter who, after his visit to Europe, incidentally found faults with the provincialism of New England.⁶⁵ The Angel at the Grave is a story of a woman who devoted her spinster existence to the memory of a celebrated New England ancestor.⁶⁶ Bewitched, another short story, reproduced effectively the older New England belief in witchcraft. The Young Gentlemen was discussed to be a story which revealed the granite of New England character, a moving recital of the stubborn pride of Waldo Cranch, who kept the secret of the existence of his two boys, forty years of age but still children in mind, and killed himself when they were discovered.⁶⁷

Mrs. Wharton may have written some other stories about New England whose books and references are not available at hand. Yet from the discussion of those available one sees that in locating her stories at least New England where she used to spend periods of residence was one of her recurrent settings.

Europe in Her Works

From the discussion of The House of Mirth, The Custom of the Country, The Age of Innocence, Hudson River Bracketed and The God's Arrive the reader can see how important the background of New York in the eighteen seventies is for Mrs. Wharton to develop her themes successfully. In the same way she wrote other fiction using, this time, Europe as the background.

We have already learnt from Mrs. Wharton's biography, that after her marriage to Mr. Wharton, she frequently spent months at a time in Europe and later wrote interesting travel accounts such as Italian Backgrounds (1905) and A Motor-Flight through France (1908). Her experience in Europe later inspired her to write a group of novels having the countries she was interested in as their settings. Besides the novels she also made a direct and careful study of certain aspects of these countries, of their traditions or ways of living as in The Decoration of Houses (1897), Italian Villas and Their Gardens (1904), French Ways and Their Meaning (1919), In Morocco (1920) and an article, Les Francais Vus par une Americaine which appeared in "Revue Hebdomadaire, XXVII (January 5, 1918), p. 5-21. This direct study shows that Mrs. Wharton was interested in the countries where she was a foreigner and from the books written one is convinced that she was mainly interested in Italy and France. It is not surprising then that when she thought of writing novels with foreign settings, Italy and France automatically became her first choice. One notices that The Valley of Decision is laid in Italy whereas Madame de Treymes is laid in France.

The Valley of Decision, written in 1902, was Mrs. Wharton's first long novel. Its setting was eighteenth-century Italy and the book was said to be her only venture into the past beyond her recollection. Nevertheless this novel shows that she was very much interested in that vanished civilization and that she must have made a careful study of that era. Blake Novius quotes Mrs. Wharton as saying that The Valley

of Decision was a laborious study of eighteenth century Italy. Nevius agrees that it was laborious, for in this novel she organized and revived her scattered impressions drawn from literature, art and random observation. She consulted a wide variety of sources and to carry out the plan of the novel pursued special investigations into historical subjects, the domestic arrangements of the Italian nobility, the war of traditions in the theatre, and its influence on Italy. She recorded the details of fashionable drawing rooms and the eighteenth-century preference in house pets; noted details of costumes, musical instruments, and theatrical masks and conventions; made a long list of the scents and toilet waters to be found on the dressing tables of aristocratic ladies; learnt that Bologna monks bred fashionable lap-dogs with their noses broken when puppies and that countesses addressed their maids informally as "mia Sorella." These inquiries helped her to imagine the vivid scene in a lady's antechambers, with the servants idly playing cards and quarreling while the visitor went unattended. Occasional details supplied by other observers helped Mrs. Wharton to bring to life the rich, panoramic setting of The Valley of Decision which provided the model for Piaure, a disguised Lombardy.⁶⁸

Nevius also stated that in the character of Odo, the hero of the story, Mrs. Wharton sought to dramatize the intellectual and spiritual conflicts of the age.⁶⁹ In a letter to W. C. Brownell, February 14, 1902, Mrs. Wharton summarized her approach :

The Valley of Decision is an attempt to picture Italy at the time of the breaking-up of the small principalities at the end of the 18th century, when all the old forms and traditions of court life were still preserved, but the immense intellectual and moral movement of the new regime was at work beneath the surface of things. This work, in Italy, was intellectual rather than political, and found little active expression, owing to the heterogenous character of

the Italian states and the impossibility of any concerted political movement. I have tried to reflect the traditional influences and customs of the day, together with the new ideas, in the mind of a cadet of one of the reigning houses, who is suddenly called to succeed to the dukedom of Pianura, and tries to apply the theories of the French encyclopedist, to his small principality. Incidentally, I have given sketches of Venetian life, and glimpses of Sir William Hamilton's circle at Naples, and of the clerical milieu at Rome, where the suppression of the Society of Jesus, and the mysterious death of Gangavelli, had produced a violent reaction toward formalism and superstition. The close of the story pictures the falling to pieces of the whole business at the approach of Napoleon.⁷⁰

Since the original novel is not available, the writer has had to depend on Arthur Hobson Quinn's short synopsis and his remarks :

The end of the eighteenth century was a dramatic period, and she (Mrs. Wharton) created a hero, Duke Odo, of "Pianura," which is a disguise for Lombardy. He becomes the symbol of liberalism, fighting against both conservatives and radicals, and losing his throne in consequence. This struggle is not allowed to remain abstract; it is personified by the two women, Fulvia his mistress, and his wife, the widow of the former Duke, whom he marries for reasons of state The book shows a thorough study of the conditions in Italy during the period just before the French Revolution. She paints sympathetically the efforts of a prince who is ahead of his time in reforming a situation which was not anyone's fault in particular but was the outgrowth of centuries of changing conditions, abuses which in some cases had their roots in reforms of the past.

The Duke finds himself opposed by the conservatives : he had expected that, but he had not expected the radicals would plot against him, nor that the very people whom all the changes were to benefit would be misled by carefully planned intrigues of the nobility and would block his schemes of reform, incidentally allowing the murder of the one woman he loved. "71

Quinn thought highly of the book as a piece of literature. He said that there was a sense of high purpose and art and that Mrs. Wharton had interpreted Italian life very successfully.⁷²

But Blake Nevius did not think that the novel was altogether successful :

Seldom has a background so deeply felt and so authentic had as its fictional *raison d'être* a story and characters so lifeless and abstract.⁷³

He thought that in order to draw various and often contradictory currents through the hero of the story, Mrs. Wharton had blurred the character of Odo. However, Nevius admired her visualizing power in generalizing and composing the details of her subject with a painter's as well as a traveler's eye; thus the ordinary life of the road was frequently and sharply brought into focus. Not only the everyday background but the brilliant episodes of court life in Turin, the Venetian gaiety and intrigue and the theatrical life were also splendidly described.⁷⁴

Whether Mrs. Wharton was attracted to her subject by any other motives than her love of Italy and her desire to do justice to a period largely overlooked in English historical fiction was the question that interested Nevius. And after a thorough study of the novel he concluded that, like her hero Odo, Mrs. Wharton possessed "a deep moral curiosity that annulled sensuous enjoyment of the outward show of life". She once wrote that in eighteenth-century Italy, "people lived *au jour le jour*, taking pain and pleasure lightly, and without

much sense of the moral issue," and this generalization, Nevius believed, was underlined throughout The Valley of Decision. The following passage referring to Odo and court life at Turin showed Mrs. Wharton's anxious concern over the moral problem :

None was more open than he (Odo) to the seducements of luxurious living the polish of manners, the tacit exclusion of all that is ugly or distressing; but it seemed to him that fine living should be but the flower of fine feeling, and that such external graces, when they adorned a dull and vapid society, were as incongruous as the royal purple on a clown.⁷⁵

If Mr. Nevius is right in his conclusion, one can see that Mrs. Wharton was preoccupied with the moral problem of the upper class from the beginning of her writing career. This same notion was developed into the theme of her principal later novel : The House of Mirth (1905). Lawrence Selden, the hero of The House of Mirth can be compared with Duke Odo in his chance, by birth, to enjoy of luxurious living but, like Odo, Selden is firm in his belief that, "without fine feeling", a gracious society of luxury and manner is valueless. This same belief is felt in The Custom of the Country (1913) and The Age of Innocence (1920), — all of which represent Mrs. Wharton's constant effort to define a good society in moral terms.

To Mrs. Wharton, it was in France that Western civilization was at its highest degree of refinement in the manners and institutions of a people who had been devoted for centuries to an ideal formed of continuity with the past, reverence for tradition, respect for the practical and intellectual abilities of women, taste and intellectual honesty. They were the qualities which Mrs. Wharton thought her countrymen had the least time to acquire.⁷⁶ She had the greatest admiration for the French view of life and this feeling was definitely her main reason for choosing France as her second home.

Mrs. Wharton fully believed in the sense of continuity which helps preserve the vigor and homogeneity of a culture as the French had :

France may teach us that, side by side with the qualities of enterprise and innovation that English blood has put in us, we should cultivate the sense of continuity, that sense of the Past which enriches the present and binds us up with the world's great stabilizing traditions of art and poetry and knowledge.⁷⁷

She was thrilled to discover how the past had constituted a firm base of French culture. With the vision of Amiens Cathedral before her, she wrote :

Reverence is the most precious emotion that such a building inspires : reverence for the accumulated experiences of the past the desire to keep intact as many links as possible between yesterday and tomorrow.

From the same trip she was impressed by Etampes, a town :

.. so typical of the average French country town — dry, compact, unsentimental, as if avariciously hoarding a long rich past ...

Family tradition was strongly rooted in French families. Personal longings, if conflicting with the family's point of view, would have to be sacrificed. From French Ways and Their Meaning the reader learns that marriage in France was regarded as founded for the family and not for the husband and wife. Parenthood, and not the individual happiness of the partners, was its goal.

In the French 'salon', the best school of talk and of ideas that the modern world had known, women were on equal terms with men. Nevius was positive that Mrs. Wharton pointed out that within its charmed circle women were regarded not merely as ornaments but as the social and intellectual peers of the men who frequented it. In fact, the Frenchwoman of this class ruled French life in her triple capacity as mother,

as her husband's business partner, and as "artist," making her contribution in the home and in the 'salon' to the art of living. Thus, given a part in the running of family life, she was less a prey to the dissatisfaction, restlessness, and vain material ambitions of the American woman.

Again from French Ways and Their Meaning Nevius believes that, for Mrs. Wharton, taste is the atmosphere without which art cannot sustain life. It is the principle of all art, of the art of dress and of manners, and of living in general, as well as of sculpture and music. It demands a perception of scale, proportion and suitability and is as markedly a social as an aesthetic requirement.⁷⁸ She found and admired the good taste in French society. One notices that, in all her novels, her well-bred protagonists all have good taste. Lily Bart and Seldon in The House of Mirth enjoyed artistic taste that their contemporaries were deaf to. Newland Archer in The Age of Innocence had great admiration for Ellen Olenska's taste in dress and interior decoration which she got from her experience in Europe. And in Madame de Treymes, Mrs. Wharton showed clearly her appreciation of French taste through the presentation of Madame de Treymes and Fanny de Malrive.

Madame de Malrive, née Fanny Frisbee, renews her friendship with the Durhams who are visiting Paris. John Durhams, an American of forty, and his family had been close friends of the Frisbees before Fanny's marriage to a French nobleman, Marquis de Malrive fifteen years before. John, his mother and sister saw a complete change in Fanny, from a beautiful and independent American girl to a charming typically French woman. This French charm is so attractive to John that he falls in love with Fanny and, having learnt about her separation from her husband, he proposed to marry her. He tried to the best of his ability to gain her consent to marry him but found that she would never leave France because she did not want to lose her son completely to his French relatives. John was willing to leave New York and move to Paris so that she could keep her share of the control over her son but, in spite of his strong determination, John could not persuade

her to consent to his proposal easily because she showed her fear of the de Malrive family power. John thought that with the help of the law, the obstacles could be overcome but Fanny spoke as if she were fighting a clan rather than a family. John suddenly recalled one of the powerful members of the family, Madame de Treymes, who was generally friendly to Fanny. From this lady, John determined to find out by himself what she thought about her sister-in-law's case.

John, his mother and sisters returned Fanny's visit and to their surprise found that the poor environment she was in revealed the great sacrifice she had made in staying on in France. During the visit Fanny introduced John to Madame de Treymes, her husband's sister whom John found indescribable. Later John learnt from his cousins, the Boykins, that Madame de Treymes was an unusual type of person who would only want to get in touch with Americans when she wanted to get their money for charity affairs. John resolved to spend some money on charity to get better acquainted with Madame de Treymes.

John was, as he had wished, invited to tea by Madame de Treymes. At the party John had his first glimpse of the social force of which Fanny had spoken and was even more surprised to be asked in a straightforward manner by Madame de Treymes whether he intended to marry Fanny. They agreed to talk the matter over at the Boykins.

When they met again, John learnt of the impossibility of divorce because of the family's strong repugnance to the idea. But when he ended the conversation abruptly, Madame de Treymes laid her cards on the table, confessing her own difficulty. She wanted money to pay a debt and in her round-about speech John concluded that if he gave her the money she would use her influence to force the de Malrives to accede to John's wish. But John was shocked and disgusted, especially because he secretly learnt that Madame de Treymes did not want the money for herself but for her lover, Prince d'Armillac, a gambler. He thought the whole affair was disgraceful; therefore he refused to buy the right to marry Fanny.

John reported his failure to Fanny but did not reveal Madame de Treymes' secret even though the latter dared him to

do so. He decided to leave Paris at once but Fanny pleaded with him to stay on a few days to cheer her up. Two days later, to his greatest surprise he heard from Fanny of the incredible consent of the de Malrive family. He learnt also that it was because of Madame de Treymes' great admiration for him. The information distressed John because he never thought Madame de Treymes was that generous and he felt sorry for not giving her anything in return. However it was agreed that the divorce was to be arranged quickly and that he would come back again after everything was settled. John, therefore, left for Italy. On his return to Paris, he dropped in to see Fanny and to learn about the progress of the divorce. Fanny told him that Madame de Treymes had suffered a misfortune : her beloved Prince d'Armillac had to leave France to escape arrest. In spite of his determination not to see Madame de Treymes again, John was forced by moral conscience to ask for a meeting with Madame de Treymes who was then staying with Fanny.

When they met, John tried to show his gratitude but she cut him short saying that it was his goodness that had made her see everything clearly. John insisted on rendering her some service, but she accepted none and he did not understand her true motives when she said that she might have got her reward already.

John went to England with the intention of not returning to Paris till after the divorce in September, but early in that month he had to go to Paris on business. During this hasty visit he only exchanged notes with Fanny who, in her last note, asked him to see Madame de Treymes who was spending a few days alone in Paris.

At the meeting, John offered his services again but Madame de Treymes asked why he believed that the de Malrives should consent so easily to the divorce. To show that it was the Malrives who had won, she revealed that it was planned long before when she met John that Fanny would get a divorce and keep her child but once she remarried, by French law the child was to be returned to the de Malrives and this was their sole purpose. John was stunned and angry to have fallen into

such a trap. To the greatest shock of Madame de Treymes, he announced that he could not possibly deceive Fanny because he knew how dear her child was to her. Madame de Treymes was extremely upset that the great plan of the family had totally collapsed and she also would like to see these two good Americans have a happy life together but John could not do anything against his principles therefore he was firm in his determination.

Madame de Treymes shows Mrs. Wharton's deep understanding and appreciations of the French ways. She has presented, in this novelette, a clear picture of a French upper class family with their strong determination to preserve their French ways in the form of clan solidarity.

From the beginning to the end of the story the reader is confronted with a kind of indestructable force rising from the family's desire to maintain their tradition. The members of the de Malrive family may be different in their points of view on various problems but when those problems affect the welfare of the family they sacrifice their personal advantages and immediately write to protect the old tradition, to view on a larger scale, the French social code.

John Durham, was not attracted by Miss Fanny Frisbee but by Madame Fanny de Malrive. This is a striking fact and leads the reader to see how Mrs. Wharton prepared the ground to show her appreciation of how the French attitude successfully developed a personality. Having heard his sister's sharp comment about Fanny de Malrive ("I never saw anything so French!"), John got the answer to his own feelings toward Fanny de Malrive :

Yes, it was the finish, the modelling, which Madame de Malrive's experience had given her that set her apart from the fresh uncomplicated personalities of which she had once been simply the most charming type. The influences that had lowered her voice, regulated her gestures, toned her down to harmony with the warm dim background of a long social past — these influences had lent to her natural fineness of

perception a command of expression adapted to complex conditions She might abhor her husband, Her marriage, and the world to which it had introduced her, but she had become a product of that world in its outward expression.⁷⁹

He also detected with a start how the French ways had influenced Fanny. He sensed that this influence was mysteriously forceful :

There was apparently nothing embarrassing to her in his silence : it was a part of her long European discipline that she had learned to manage pauses with ease. In her Frisbee days she might have packed this one with a random fluency; now she was content to let it widen slowly before them like the spacious prospect opening at their feet. The complicated beauty of this prospect, as they moved toward it between the symmetrically clipped limes of the lateral terrace, touched him anew through her nearness, as with the hint of some vast impersonal power, controlling and regulating her life in ways he could not guess, putting between himself and her the whole width of the civilization into which her marriage had absorbed her.⁸⁰

The description of Madame de Treymes was even more striking. She was typically French in appearance, gesture, manner and attitude, all of which were artistically combined to make such a remarkable and unforgettable personality :

She (Madame de Treymes) was a beauty, if beauty, instead of being restricted to the cast of the face, is a pervasive attribute in forming the hands, the voice, the gestures, the very fall of a flounce and tilt of a feather. In this impalpable 'aura' of grace Madame de Treymes' dark meagre presence unmistakably moved, like a thin flame in a wide quiver of light. And as he (John Durham) realized that she looked handsomer than she was, so,

while they talked, he felt that she understood a great deal more than she betrayed.⁸¹

Arthur Hobson Quinn in his study of Madame de Treymes is correct in saying that it is a novelette which could only have been written by an American fully conversant with the standards of the centre of French aristocratic society, the Faubourg St. Germain. No American has so well portrayed the position of the older French nobility which places the continuance and the unity of the family above all other considerations.⁸² When Fanny de Malrive was trying to make John see French society as she saw it, the reader is aware of Mrs. Wharton's profound comprehension of the significant elements which help to constitute this conventional society :

There is nothing in your experience — in any American experience — to correspond with that far-reaching family organization, which is itself a part of the larger system, and which encloses a young man of my son's position in a network of accepted prejudices and opinions. Everything is prepared in advance — his political and religious convictions, his judgements of people, his sense of honour, his ideas of women, his whole view of life. He is taught to see vileness and corruption in every one not of his own way of thinking, and in every idea that does not directly serve the religious and political purposes of his class. The truth isn't fixed thing : it's not used to test actions by, it's tested by them, and made to fit in with them. And this forming of the mind begins with the child's first consciousness; it's in his nursery stories, his baby prayers, his very games with his playmates!⁸³

John was naturally shocked to hear this but it was not until he had witnessed with his own eyes the gathering of these French nobles at the Hôtel de Malrive that he arrived at a faint intuition of what poor Fanny meant :

It was not in the exquisite mildness of the old Marquise, a little grey-haired bunch of a woman in dowdy mourning, or in the small neat presence of the priestly

uncle, the Abbé who had so obviously just stepped down from one of the picture frames overhead : it was not in the aspect of these chief protagonists, so outwardly unformidable, that Durham read an occult danger to his friend. It was rather in their setting, their surroundings, the little company of elderly and dowdy persons — so uniformly clad in weeping blacks and purples that they might have been assembled for some mortuary anniversary — it was in the remoteness and the solidarity of this little group that Durham had his first glimpse of the social force of which Fanny de Malrive had spoken. All these amiably chatting visitors, who mostly bore the stamp of personal insignificance on their mildly sloping or aristocratically beaked faces, hung together in a visible closeness of tradition, dress, attitude and manner, as different as possible from the loose aggregation of a roomful of his own countrymen. Durham felt, as he observed them, that he had never before known what "society" meant; nor understood that, in an organized and inherited system, it exists full-fledged where two or three of its members are assembled.⁸⁴

The trick that the de Malrives played on Fanny and John to deprive Fanny of her child was definitely mean. One sees in an instant that Mrs. Wharton was cynical about this kind of callous attitude and action of the French; yet at the same time it is another strong evidence of their concern about the unity of the family above all other considerations.

Madame de Treymes is also one of the most valid studies of the contrasts between French and American moral and social codes.⁸⁵ Several wonderful scenes enable the reader to see the competition between the two strong willed personalities : Madame de Treymes and John Durham, each of whom represents the kind of strong determination, characteristic of his own nationality. Each clings to different principles : the French to the old family tradition, the Americans to moral discipline and goodness. Madame de Treymes is devilish, crafty, calculating and wicked, but she is loyal to her French code.

John Durham is just the opposite. He is sincere, straightforward, generous and sympathetic. He subsequently falls easily into the trap of the cunning Madame de Treymes, but in the end it is John Durham who wins, though tragically, by abandoning the idea of marrying Fanny which makes the de Malrives' devilish plan fall apart at a stroke. John's final decision is made not because of his masculine pride but because of his strong moral principles : having learnt the de Malrives' trick, he cannot possibly marry Fanny.

Why did Mrs. Wharton end her story like this? Her answer is obvious : if the French can be loyal to their old tradition, the Americans, having no old tradition, have got to be loyal to their moral standard first so that they may constitute a better tradition later. Thus the tragic separation of the two lovers is inevitable.

The Impact of World War I on Her Works

The threat of the World War in 1914 had actually hung over Europe since the days of the Franco-German War in 1870 and 1871 since each great country was trying to increase its own wealth and power and there had been many clashes. The situation was getting more intense when Great Britain sided with France. This made Germany realize the importance of having military and naval power as well as forming its own alliances. As a result by 1914 two groups of countries faced each other threateningly. On the one side were Germany, Austria, and Italy. On the other were Great Britain, France, and Russia.

No one knew when war might come. Everyone feared war and hoped to avoid it, but all countries wanted to be ready to fight, if necessary. Thus the fear of war became a leading cause of World War I and because all these great countries believed that the threat of force was the way to get what they wanted, they all started to build up as much military strength as possible.

The shooting of the Austrian crown prince, Archduke Francis Ferdinand, and his wife in Austria by a Serb set off the war. The incident provided the best reason for Austria to attack Serbia (present Yuhoslavia), a state lying in the path towards the Aegean Sea on which Austria was hoping to get a port. Russia came to the support of Serbia stating it considered its own interests linked with those of Serbia and the smaller Slav states in the Balkans. Thus to support its ally, Germany declared war on Russia in August 1914.

At the beginning of the war, the world was amazed at the thorough preparation of Germany which had the most powerful army the world had seen. The German General staff planned to ~~overwhelm~~ France within a month or less, then to defeat Russia, in the East, and last of all Great Britain. To end the war quickly Germany asked Belgium for freedom to pass through the Kingdom, as the easiest route to France but received this message as their reply from King Albert : "Belgium is a nation, not a road." Belgium was therefore invaded; the attack

brought Great Britain completely into the war against Germany. Belgium had only 200,000 soldiers to throw against Germany's flood of men, but for two weeks it managed to resist that flood. It was fifteen days after the invasion had begun that Brussels was occupied and soon Germany invaded France, thus a series of open battles took place headed by the First Battle of the Marne in September 1914.

The actual fighting took the form of artillery warfare and a few movements back and forth by both sides from 1915 through 1917. Throughout the early part of the war, the United States had been carefully neutral. But American manufacturers and farmers found both sides eager to buy their goods. Since Great Britain controlled the seas, it was easy to make sure that American goods went only to the Allied nations. Germany therefore saw the United States as a storehouse of materials for the Allies. By the use of submarines the Germans tried to cut off the flow of supplies to the allied countries. Many American ships were sunk, and American lives and property were lost. Therefore on April 6, 1917, the United States declared war on Germany. But it took many months for the United States to get an army into the field.

When the United States entered World War I, most Americans took it for granted that their share in the war would be to provide money,ammunitions and ships. They expected the American navy to take part in the war but not the American troops. But when it was clear that the Allies needed men most of all, the United States got into the "fighting war", sending both the navy and the army to "make the world safe for democracy" and "to end war with a war."⁸⁶ For months, the American Expeditionary Forces engaged in thirteen battles, most of them important and all the operations finally helped to end the great war in November 1918.⁸⁷

The declaration of war in 1914 distressed Mrs. Wharton yet she felt that the fight was necessary and that the war was a mission for her. Because of her great love of the French and French taste she disapproved profoundly of German vulgarity — which, she said, was evident in the German way

of life, form of government, and architecture. To save the French from a Teutonic invasion, she felt, was her task and should be the task of every grateful American.⁸⁸ Thus from her biography one learns that Mrs. Wharton devoted all her energies to various philanthropic activities, organizing the American Hostels for refugees, the Children of Flanders Relief Committee and founding a number of sanatoriums. She drove herself tirelessly, soliciting funds, defending the Allied cause and, most important of all, in a series of books and articles, recorded her experience of the war as she witnessed it or else from second hand information.

Her essay Fighting France, written in 1915, was about her experiences behind the line. Coming Home which appeared in Xingu and Other Stories (1916) was considered by Arthur Hobson Quinn a fine war story. Her long tale, The Marne (1918), contained some authentic and touching glimpses of the French countryside and the French people at war and thus revealed Mrs. Wharton's deep affection for France.

The Marne is an account of the desire of an American boy to fight for France. Troy Belknap was a young American who spent much of his boyhood in France traveling with his parents and learning to love the country and its people. When war was declared, he was fifteen. Back in America, Troy's outspoken devotion to the Allied cause put him at odds with his family and friends. On his eighteenth birthday, he asked to be allowed to return to France to join the American ambulance corps. Several months later his country entered the war. During the second retreat from the Marne, he picked up an abandoned rifle, joined a company of American troops headed for the front, was wounded on a volunteer mission, and later woke up in a hospital to learn that the German advance had been halted.⁸⁹

The history of the First World War revealed that America did not enter the war until 1917, three years after the declaration of the war in Europe, when American ships, in taking the supplies to the Allied countries, were sunk by German submarines and American lives and property were lost. The delayed entrance of America into the war, made

Mrs. Wharton impatient since she felt that if France was destroyed, Western civilization would perish, that the "Teutonic migration" did not only threaten France but the entire world. Thus from The Marne. The chief impression it created was that the author was against her compatriots who were slow to recognize that the defense of France and the preservation of Western civilization were essential. The bitter cry of Troy Belknap was in fact Mrs. Wharton's :

France, his France, attacked,
invaded, outraged; and he, a
poor helpless American boy, who
adored her, and could do nothing
for her — not even cry as a girl
might! It was bitter.⁹⁰

In 1923 long after the end of the war in 1918 Mrs. Wharton wrote another book which, by its World War I setting, shows that she was very much influenced by the effects of the war. Mrs. Wharton's own statement reveals how deeply she realized the importance of the war :

A study of the world at the
rear during a long war seemed
to me worth doing, and I pondered
over it till it took shape in
"A Son at the Front" ⁹¹

Arthur Hobson Quinn found this novel a more elaborate war story, giving a remarkable picture of the war and also of the desire of a young man who felt it was his moral duty to take part in the battle in spite of his father's frantic effort to keep him behind the battle lines.⁹²

From the discussion above one has reason to believe that Mrs. Wharton must have written the war fiction discussed with strong emotion caused by her sense of duty and her love of France which had been nourished by her years of residence there. Yet some of the critics find that her war fiction lacks the threatening power of war. Nevius found the fiction excessive and guilty of presenting the war too narrowly in terms of its impact on the ordinary citizens of France⁹³ and Frederick J. Hoffman seemed to doubt the effectiveness of the secondhand descriptions of battles. Hoffman even disagreed

with Mrs. Wharton in her accusation of America when he discussed America's participation in World War I :

The sympathies of America were largely, though not entirely, with France. But, despite Henry James's indignation and Mrs. Wharton's impatience over America's delayed entrance, France was an ocean's distance away, and coming to her support was not an act that could entirely enlist the sympathy of young Americans. However close to the war they were, it still seemed an affair they were not quite genuinely committed to sharing. They were spectators, gazing curiously at Paris and the French countryside, not entirely sure of what it was all about. What happened, therefore, was never quite so closely linked with "la gloire française" as Mrs. Wharton would have us believe.⁹⁴

Whether Mrs. Wharton's war fiction was successful or not is not so important to us as the fact that World War I forced Mrs. Wharton to write quite a collection of war stories.

CHAPTER III

Mrs. Wharton's Recurrent Themes

In studying Mrs. Wharton's works one notices that the novelist always made full use of one major theme : The Theme of victimization. Her protagonists always fall into two groups. The first are mainly those of an innocent and generous nature for example a Lily Bart, an Ethan Frome or a Ralph Marvell who are ironically trapped by either artificial society, by their own moralistic sense or by a meaner nature, for example, a Zeena Frome or an Undine Spragg. Only by the study of all her works does one notice how significant Mrs. Wharton considered this theme.

In The House of Mirth (1905), Mrs. Wharton's first well-known novel. Lily Bart, the heroine of the story represents a pure and natural spirit who is the victim of an artificial society. She is basically good, but is weak enough to be destroyed by a society which she has put so much faith in. Because of her bringing up, Lily considers luxury necessary, and is somewhat naive about the consequences of her actions.

Is it wrong to desire luxuries? Lily Bart, like Mrs. Wharton, was born into high society where splendor and beauty are requirements. She was also brought up to enjoy beauty and luxuries and to detest dinginess and sordidness in any form. This is in fact Mrs. Wharton's own feeling about beauty and luxuries, without which high society of good taste and manner cannot exist. As a result, to be forced to choose between decency and an inferior standard of living is a terrible choice for her in whom the moral sense and the aesthetic sense are so closely joined especially in a world where beauty, like everything else, has a high price. Lily has the taste and instinct to feel that the environment of wealth even at its most futile, is the only soil where the aesthetic virtues can hope to flourish. Possessed with this instinct and her own beauty, Lily feels she has a right to claim luxury. Her desire for wealth can be seen clearly :

The glow of the stoves warmed Lily's veins like wine. More completely than any other expression of wealth they symbolised the life she longed to lead, the life of fastidious aloofness and refinement in which every detail should have the finish of a jewel, and the whole form a harmonious setting to her jewel — like rareness.¹

To live up to the standard she longs for, Lily, like most of her contemporaries, cannot disregard the power of money. But if one considers her case carefully one realizes that it is a sane point of view and that Lily is practical. Her opinion about money may seem naive but it contains a lot of truth. At the same time it reveals Mrs. Wharton's ironical comment about the people of her own class :

One of the conditions of citizenship is not to think too much about money, and the only way not to think about money is to have a great deal of it.²

Mrs. Wharton shows that Lily is formed by circumstances outside her control and is the innocent victim of heredity and environment :

Inherited tendencies had combined with early training to make her the highly specialized product she was : an organism as helpless out of its narrow range as the sea-anemone torn from the rock. She had been fashioned to adorn and delight; to what other end does nature round the rose-leaf and paint the hummy-bird's breast? And was it her fault that the purely decorative mission is less easily and harmoniously fulfilled among social beings than in the world of nature? That it is apt to be hampered by material necessities or complicated by moral scruples?³

Obviously Mrs. Wharton sympathizes with Lily Bart and expects her readers to share this sympathy. From A Backward Glance, Lyde concluded that there was also a more personal reason why Mrs. Wharton was sympathetic to Lily's desire for

wealth. It was because there was more than a little of Lily Bart in Edith Wharton's own character. If by maturity Mrs. Wharton had discovered a relationship between wealth and morality, she undoubtedly began life with a taste for luxury as instinctive and unreasoning as Lily Bart's.⁴

Lily believes in her point of view; consequently she thinks that if one can get much pleasure out of life, one's life is a success. She like most people in her society does not realize that seeking pleasure does not always constitute the greatest happiness in life. She is therefore quite surprised to learn that Selden's idea of success is completely different from hers :

" Success ?" She (Lily) hesitated "Why to get as much as one can out of life, I suppose. It's a relative quality after all. Isn't that your idea of it?"

" My idea of it? God forbid!" He (Selden) sat up with sudden energy, resting his elbows on his knees and starting out upon the mellow fields. "My idea of success," he said, "is personal freedom."

"Freedom? Freedom from worries?"

"From everything — from money, from poverty, from ease and anxiety, from all the material accidents. To keep a kind of republic of the spirit — that is what I call success."⁵

Lily's concept of success in life reveals definitely that she is innocent about life. This leads her to an act she considers all right : the acceptance of Gus Trenor's offer to invest her money for her. She never suspects his ulterior motive, which ultimately ruins her completely.

Lily may appear to the reader to be a weak character because of her desire for luxury yet in fulfilling her desire she never does a thing which shows a low moral standard. On the contrary she, in trying to possess that luxury, always maintains her dignity and high moral standard. It is for these reasons she does not accept Rosedale's proposal, concede to the wish of the rich George Dorset or seek help from Selden. She has great faith in society and believes that it

will not reject a member who always tries to adhere to its good moral standard, but she fails to notice that the society she thinks highly of is declining and is being replaced by the corrupted one that considers financial status of the most importance. As a result, Lily is betrayed by her belief and becomes a victim of that "polite society"

In Madame de Treymes (1907) where the French convention and moral code are discussed, Mrs. Wharton has made the novelette dramatic by presenting again the theme of victimization. Fanny de Malrive, an American beauty, in marrying a French nobleman, Marquis de Malrive, has fallen completely the victim of old French family tradition. In spite of her personal abhorrence of her husband's conduct and her dread of the French family tie, like Mrs. Wharton, Fanny is attracted by the French artistic sense of beauty, taste and manners. At the same time she is aware of the power of family tradition and realizes her helplessness in overcoming that deep-rooted tradition. This realization compels her to sacrifice her own happiness to keep her son away from French influence which she dreads completely even though in doing this she knows very well that she is ~~adopt~~ adopting a French point of view :

... I must live in France on account of my boy It would have been much more difficult for me to obtain complete control of my son if it had not been understood that I was to live in France. French mothers part late with their sons, and in that one respect I mean to be a French mother.⁶

The part of John Durham, introduced into the story, only helped the reader to see more distinctly the power of the French code. John offered to share her difficulties to help her keep her son, believing that with the two of them all the problems could be overcome. From his offer to Fanny one sees how determined John was to serve the woman he loved :

" — I said nothing of the future, because for the moment, my mind refused to travel beyond its immediate hope of happiness. But

I felt, of course, even then, that the hope involved various difficulties — that we can't, as we might once have done, come together without any thought but for ourselves; and whatever your answer is to be, I want to tell you now that I am ready to accept my share of the difficulties." He paused, and then added explicitly : "If there's the least chance of your listening to me, I am willing to live over here as long as you can keep your boy with you."⁷

" If you'll marry me, I'll agree to live out here as long as you want, and we'll be two instead of one to keep hold of your half of him."⁸

Yet though Fanny never trusted the French in their generosity toward a family outsider and suspected that under their plainness there was always an ulterior motive, she was deceived by the de Malrives who conceded to her wish easily. They convinced her that it was mainly because of their admiration for John Durham that they hastened to grant her wish because they felt that Fanny would be happy if she married John :

" It's the long habit, you know, of not believing them — of looking for the truth always in what they don't say. It took me hours and hours to convince myself that there's no trick under it, that there can't be any," she explained.

" Then you are convinced now?"
escaped from Durham; but the shadow of his question lingered no more than the flit of a wing across her face.

" I am convinced because the facts are there to reassure me. Christiane (Madame de Treymes) tells me that Monsieur de Malrive has consulted his lawyers, and that they have advised him to free me. And I owe it all to you — Christiane said it was your talk with her that had convinced them."⁹

So it was Fanny's trust in the de Malrives that she was trapped in their snare. Neither she nor John would have thought that

to grant her a divorce was only a part of their plan to restore the boy to the family : if Fanny would ever marry again, according to the law, she would have to give her son back to his father. This showed how full of intrigue the de Malrives were, that in spite of their good breeding and taste, they would be prompt to do anything; no matter how mean it might be, for the sake of the family. It was consequently a shock to John when he learnt the true motive of the de Malrives from Madame de Treymes. The dialogue was sharp, straightforward and forceful :

(Madame de
Treymes)

" You asked me then what return I expected for my service to you, as you called it; and I answered, the contemplation of your happiness. Well, do you know what that meant in my old language — the language I was still speaking then? It meant that I knew there was horrible misery in store for you, and that I was waiting to feast my eyes on it : that's all!"

"What misery do you mean?" he exclaimed

"Have you never asked yourself," she enquired, "why our family consented so readily to divorce?"

"Yes, often," he replied, all his unformed fears gathering in a dark throng about him. "But Fanny was so reassured, so convinced that we owed it to your good offices —"

She broke into a laugh. "My good offices! Will you never, you Americans, learn that we do not act individually in such cases? That we are all obedient to a common principle of authority?"

"Then it was not you —"

She made an impatient shrugging motion. "Oh, you are too confiding — it is the other side of your beautiful good faith!"

"The side you have taken advantage of, it appears?"

"I — we — all of us. I especially!" she confessed.

"Why, then, did you consent to the divorce?"

"To get the boy back, "....." It has been our whole thought from the first. Everything was planned with that object. We trembled lest the idea should occur to you."10

The de Malrives or Madame de Treymes plan was doubly cruel when they took advantage of John's honest belief in their good mission to free Fanny to achieve their aim. Disgusted, John learnt of the resolute French view :

(Madame de Treymes) "Don't judge us too harshly — or not, at least — till you have taken the trouble to learn our point of view. You consider the individual — we think of the family."

"Why don't you take care to preserve it, then?"

"Ah, that's what we do; in spite of every aberration of the individual. And so, when we saw it was impossible that my brother and his wife should live together, we simply transferred our allegiance to the child — we constituted him the family."

"A precious kindness you did him! If the result is to give him back to his father."

"That I admit, is to be deplored; but his father is only a fraction of the whole. What we really do is to give him back to his race, his religion, his true place in the order of things."11

But, the American moral standard in John would not let him deceive Fanny and thus their marriage never took place. Although it tormented him, John, because of his principles had to leave Fanny as a victim to work out her own fate among the de Malrives.

Although Ethan Frome is radically different in setting from The House of Mirth and Madame de Treymes, its theme is one that recurs frequently in Mrs. Wharton's significant novels : the theme of victimization and a demonstration of the spiritual value of failure. Her main protagonist, Ethan Frome, fails because he is spiritually superior and materially useless. One cannot help sympathizing with Ethan because he had to sacrifice his ambitions to take care, one after another, of his father, his mother, and his wife. He had longed to become

an engineer, had acquired some technical training, (and was still reading desultorily with enthusiasm when the narrator of the story first encountered him), but he never lived up to expectations. He would certainly have been much better off if he had been an engineer. Even the stranger noticed potential strength and power in Ethan who was then in a hopeless condition :

It was there that several years ago, I saw him for the first time; and the sight pulled me up sharp. Even then he was the most striking figure in Starkfield, though he was but the ruin of a man. It was not so much his great height that marked him, -----" it was the careless powerful look he had, in spite of a lameness checking each step like the jerk of a chain. There was something bleak and unapproachable in his face ...¹²

The tragic story of Ethan Frome shows Mrs. Wharton's preoccupation with the theme which she herself defined as "the hopeless passion of a sensitive man for a stupid uncomprehending woman."¹³ Ethan's marriage to Zeena is a catastrophe from the beginning. Besides the extreme loneliness of farm life, he has to bear most stoically his wife's taciturnity, her feigned "sickliness" which has become her obsession :

At times, looking at Zeena's shut face, he felt chill. At other times her silence seemed deliberately assumed to conceal far-reaching intentions, mysterious conclusions drawn from suspicions and resentments impossible to guess.¹⁴

And

When she spoke it was only to complain, and to complain of things not in his power to remedy.¹⁵

It is therefore quite natural that when Mattie Silver comes into his life, Ethan feels the return of the sweetness of being alive. However, deep understanding of Zeena's disposition makes him feel sorry for this orphaned young woman. The girl's sweetness, Zeena's fault-finding and Ethan's sympathy subsequently help to make Ethan fall in love with Mattie more easily. His love for her grows even more deeply

when he detects in her, never in Zeena, profound understanding of his indescribable artistic temperament :

The girl was more than the bright servicable creature he had thought her. She had an eye to see and an ear to hear : he could show her things and tell her things and taste the bliss of feeling that all he imparted left long reverberations and echoes he could wake at will.¹⁶

Mrs. Wharton also shows how deeply drawn to nature she herself was when she describes with her mastery of the language Ethan's artistic temperament and his delight in imparting it to Mattie :

He had always been more sensitive than the people about him to the appeal of natural beauty. His unfinished studies had given form to this sensibility and even in his unhappiest moments field and sky spoke to him with a deep and powerful persuasion. But hitherto the emotion had remained in him as a silent ache, veiling with sadness the beauty that evoked it. He did not even know whether any one else in the world felt as he did, or whether he was the sole victim of this mournful privilege. Then he learned that one other spirit had trembled with the same touch of wonder : that at his side, living under his roof and eating his bread, was a creature to whom he could say : That's Orion down yonder; the big fellow to the right is Aldebaran, and the bunch of little ones — like bees swarming — they're the Pleiades " The fact that admiration for his learning mingled with Mattie's wonder at what he taught was not the least part of his pleasure. And there were other sensations, less definable but more exquisite, which drew them together with a shock of silent joy : the cold red of sunset behind winter hills, the flight of cloud-flocks over slopes of golden stubble, or the intensely blue shadows of hemlocks on sunlit snow. When she said to him once : "It looks just as if it was painted!" it seemed to Ethan that the art of definition could go no further, and that words had at least been found to utter his secret soul¹⁷

No matter how deeply Ethan may have loved Mattie, his moral standard and his sense of duty make him remain faithful to Zeena. And if Zeena's jealousy had not sent Mattie away, no catastrophe would have happened. Ethan had thought of going away with Mattie but was stopped by nothing but his moral principles and honesty. In fact he was not held back by lack of means because if he had pleaded Zeena's illness which made

a servant a necessity he might have asked Andrew Hale, his kind neighbor, to give him an advance or some lumber. But on his way to see Andrew he met Andrew's wife, was touched by her expression of sympathy, continued toward Andrew's home — and was suddenly pulled up short by the realization that he was planning to appeal to the Hales' sympathy to obtain money from them on false pretenses. This is the turning point of the action :

With the sudden perception of the point to which his madness had carried him, the madness fell and he saw his life before him as it was. He was a poor man, the husband of a sickly woman, whom his desertion would leave alone and destitute; and even if he had had the heart to desert her he could have done so only by deceiving two kindly people who had pitied him.¹⁸

Blake Nevius in his critical study of the novel has a similar opinion :

Although he is nearly hemmed in by circumstances, it is Ethan's own sense of responsibility that blocks the last avenue of escape and condemns him to a life of sterile expiation.¹⁹

Ethan never means to take his own life especially with Mattie but since Mrs. Wharton knows that natural inclination never triumphs over social convention, Ethan's disastrous end is inevitable. Mrs. Wharton seems to believe strongly that a revolt or even an attempt to revolt against social convention costs an individual a high price no matter how excusable his reason may be. It is a definitely unsolvable problem. Thus the death of Lily Bart in The House of Mirth and that of Ralph Marvell in The Custom of the Country are the only solution. In Ethan Frome the solution is even worse because instead of letting Ethan escape from his misery through death, she makes him suffer more by condemning him to live most tragically between Zeena and Mattie, the two women who had shaped his destiny. There is no better description of Ethan's misery than that of Mrs. Hale, the only person who knows Ethan and the cause of his final taciturnity :

"There was one day, about a week after the accident, when they all thought Mattie couldn't live. Well, I say

it's a pity she did. I said it right out to our minister once, and he was shocked at me. Only he wasn't with me that morning when she first came to ... And I say, if she'd ha'died, Ethan might ha' lived; and the way they are now, I don't see's there's much difference between the Fromes up at the farm and the Fromes down in the graveyard;²⁰

Zeena Frome represents cynicism and utter selfishness. It is because of her that Ethan's life is condemned to perpetual misery. The reader cannot help admiring Mrs. Wharton's vivid phrasing in rendering a picture of this severe and egoistic character. Even the physical appearance of Zeena is distinctly drawn :

Against the dark background of the kitchen she stood up tall and angular, one hand drawing a quilted counterpane to her flat breast, while the other held a lamp. The light, on a level with her chin, drew out of the darkness her puckered throat and the projecting wrist of the hand that clutched the quilt, and deepened fantastically the hollows and prominences of her high-boned face under its ring of crimping-pins.²¹

She is a professional invalid who, knowing her husband's generous nature, exploits it to the limit. After she accuses Ethan of causing her taciturnity but she never stops to find reasons for his silence. They live like strangers in clouds of suspicion :

Through the obscurity which hid their faces their thoughts seemed to dart at each other like serpents shooting venom. Ethan was seized with horror of the scene and shame at his own share in it. It was as senseless and savage as a physical fight between two enemies in the darkness.²²

Zeena's meanness is distinct when she can take revenge on Ethan by sending Mattie away on the pretext of avoiding financial extravagance :

At dinner Ethan could not eat. If he lifted his eyes they rested on Zeena's pinched face, and the corners of her straight lips seemed to quiver away into a smile. She ate well, declaring that the mild weather made her feel better and pressed a second helping of beans on Jotham Powell (the person who is taking Mattie to the station), whose wants she generally ignored.²³

There is magnificent writing as the novel rises to its tragic close : Ethan and Mattie together crash into the big elm tree that leaves her a helpless invalid and him a twisted survivor. Then with the ironic touch that Mrs. Wharton knew best when to apply, she makes Zeena rise from her invalidism to take care not only of Ethan, but also of Mattie, whose broken back takes her out of reach of Zeena's physical jealousy. How superb a description Mrs. Wharton has given of Zeena when the narrator of the story first saw her :

One of them, on my appearing, raised her tall bony figure from her seat, not as if to welcome me — for she threw me no more than a brief glance of surprise — but simply to set about preparing the meal which Frome's absence had delayed. A slatternly calico wrapper hung from her shoulders and the wisps of her thin grey hair were drawn away from a high forehead and fastened at the back by a broken comb. She had paled opaque eyes which revealed nothing and reflected nothing, and her narrow lips were of the same sallow color as her face.²⁴

The characterization of Mattie Silver is no less important than Ethan and Zeena. Mrs. Wharton developed her to be a symbol of sunlight whose radiance shines into Ethan's gloomy life. She is the picture of sweetness and innocence :

She stood just as Zeena had stood, a lifted lamp in her hand, against the black background of the kitchen. She held the light at the same level, and it drew out with the same distinctness her slim young throat and the brown wrist no bigger than a child's. Then, striking upward, it threw a lustrous fleck on her lips, edged her eyes with velvet shade and laid a milky whiteness above the black curve of her brows.²⁵

Yet at the last turn of the screw, Mrs. Wharton has left her readers with an unforgettable picture of a querulous neurotic Mattie :

The other woman was much smaller and slighter. She sat huddled in an arm-chair near the stove, and when I came in she turned her head quickly toward me, without the least corresponding movement of her body. Her hair was as grey as her companion's, her face as bloodless and shrivelled, but amber-tinted, with swarthy shadows sharpening the nose and hollowing the temples. Under her shapeless dress her body kept its limp immobility, and her dark eyes had the bright witch-like stare that disease of the spine sometimes gives

"My it's cold here! The fire must be 'most out,
"Frome said, glancing about him apologetically as he followed me in.

The tall woman, who had moved away from us toward the dresser, took no notice; but the other, from her cushioned niche, answered complainingly, in a high thin voice, "It's on'y just been made up this very minute. Zeena fell asleep and slep' ever so long, and I thought I'd be frozen stiff before I could wake her up and get her to 'tend to it"²⁶

Comparing Ralph Marvell in The Custom of the Country (1913) with Ethan in Ethan Frome (1911), one sees that these two male Wharton protagonists are similar in some respects. Except for the difference in birth and social status, they are essentially the same in their moral standard, their sense of duty and their sensitiveness.

Both Ralph and Ethan are optimistic. Ethan believes in Zeena's vitality and efficiency in household activities, as shown to him when she helps nurse his mother and therefore imagines that he will have good prospects. Like Ethan, Ralph is so attracted by Undine's liveliness and her lack of knowledge of aristocratic society that he believes a life with Undine will be a happy one. Ethan is somewhat grateful to Zeena in tending his mother, Ralph feels that Undine awakens his male pride of leadership to lead her through the maze of high society traditions. He even believes in his capacity to mould her taste after his :

The clearness with which he (Ralph) judged the girl (Undine) and himself seemed the surest proof that his feeling was more than a surface thrill. He was not blind to her crudity and her limitations, but they were a part of her grace and her persuasion. *Diverse et ondoyante* — so he had seen her from the first. But was not that merely the sign of a quicker response to the world's manifold appeal? Undine had no such traditional safeguards — Ralph guessed Mrs. Spragg's opinion to be as fluid as her daughter's — and the girl's very sensitiveness to new impression, combined with her obvious lack of any sense of relative values, would make her an easy prey to the powers of folly. He seemed to see her — as he sat there, pressing his fists into his temples — he seemed to see her like a lovely rock-bound Andromeda, with the devouring monster Society careering up to make a mouthful of her; and himself whirling down to cut her bonds, snatch her up, and whirl her back into the blue ...²⁷

As soon as they are married the burden of marriage at once falls on both Ralph and Ethan and both suffer their fate stoically even though it means the sacrifice of the life they long to enjoy: Ralph gives up his more talented work to become a writer and Ethan has to renounce his hope to work and study in a big city. They feel it is their duty to make their wives happy by providing adequate financial support. Thus hard work has become their preoccupation.

But their sacrifice only gives a better advantage to both Undine and Zeena. Undine, like her contemporary housewives who are kept out of the men's business, gets the advantage over Ralph by paying no attention to what he is doing for her, only drifting in the artificial society and spending extravagantly. Zeena, on the pretext of ill health, impoverishes Ethan so that he may not be able to start his new life in town.

If ever Ralph and Ethan had become a little less dignified, they might easily have freed themselves from the spell of their mean and selfish wives. But they could not stoop lower than their standard; therefore they easily fell victims to meaner natures who are cunning enough to take advantage of their goodness.

Ralph is in one way or another trapped by his own sensibility. He realizes in no time Undine's selfishness and cruelty, but he does not claim from her his right or rebel against her because good breeding and fear of scandal forbid him to be ungentlemanly. His aristocratic mother and sister feel terribly sorry for him, but they also think mainly of the family's reputation; therefore they do not urge Ralph to divorce Undine. Because of the Marvells' sense of dignity and refinement, Undine appears to the reader an extremely mean and callous character, by comparison when she abandons Ralph and her son Paul to become the mistress of Van Degen and later ask for a divorce on the grounds of Ralph's neglect. The latter, for the sake of his son, does not even defend himself, and as a result enables Undine to get the custody of their son, and later causes him misery when Undine selfishly claims her right to get the boy. To Ralph this is unbearable and, therefore, he tries every possible way to keep his son. He knows that the law is on Undine's side; consequently he has to

do everything to fulfil Undine's wish and when Undine's motive is made clear — that she wants money rather than the boy, — Ralph has to sacrifice all he has and even to ask Moffatt to invest his little savings in order to raise a sum of money for Undine. Ralph can bear everything even to learn from Moffatt that his money is all gone, but to learn from Moffatt himself of his connection with Undine and how Undine has wickedly deceived him from the beginning is beyond his patience. It is the cruelest treatment Ralph has ever experienced. But it is the truth that he cannot face any longer; thus his death is the only escape from this disgrace :

She had lied to him — lied to him from the first --- there hadn't been a moment when she hadn't lied to him, deliberately, ingeniously and inventively. As he thought of it, there came to him, for the first time in months, that overwhelming sense of her physical nearness which had once so haunted and tortured him. Her freshness, her fragrance, the luminous haze of her youth, filled the room with a mocking glory; and he dropped his head on his hands to shut it out²⁸

As he raised himself he listened again, and this time he distinctly heard the oldservant's steps on the stairs. He passed his left hand over the side of his head, and down the curve of the skull behind the ear: He said to himself : "My wife this will make it all right for her " and a last flash of irony twitched through him. Then he felt again, more deliberately, for the spot he wanted, and put the muzzle of his revolver against it.²⁹

Spititual values and self-sacrifice are discussed again in the Bunner Sisters, a rather long short story which appeared in the collection Xingu and Other Stories in 1916. This time, as in Ethan Frome, Mrs. Wharton successfully presents the lives of the poor and the desperate, that of the two spinster sisters Ann Eliza and Evelina Bunner whose quiet and peaceful lives are invaded by a drug fiend neighbor Herman Rany who completely deprives them of their simple happiness and finally leaves them face to face with death and poverty.

Ann Eliza Bunner and her younger sister, Evelina, have their little millinery shop on a little corner of Stuyvesant Square. The shop is small and inconspicuous, but it is quite

well known to women customers in that district.

Ann buys her sister a clock for a birthday present in spite of their limited economy. At the shop she comes to know Herman Ramy, the German shop-owner, in whom she is interested for he seems to her to be 'the nicest man'. The encounter has changed Ann : after long satisfaction with her existence, she begins to feel the dullness of her work and her shop and even begins to think of the lonely Mr. Ramy.

Secretly Ann tries to find a chance to meet Herman but is not successful. Soon Evelina, in taking the clock to be repaired gets acquainted with Herman. Ann notices with uneasiness that Evelina also feels attracted to Herman and he, using the excuse of seeing the clock comes to their place frequently. Even though disappointed, Ann, being generous, connives for Evelina's bliss.

Herman falls ill. Evelina asks Ann to see him for her since she is quite occupied. The sight of Herman surprises her and she cannot make out what he has. The next day Herman continues his visits. He once takes them to see his friend, Mrs. Hochmüller whose intimate acquaintance with Herman strikes Ann as a little peculiar. At Mrs. Hochmüller's Ann believes that Herman has proposed to her sister but Evelina, on their return home, said nothing. A few days later Ann is shocked when Herman proposes to her instead of Evelina. Surprised and shocked she refuses him. Herman, then, soon proposes to Evelina.

At first Evelina seems very happy while Ann bears everything patiently but one day Evelina comes home unhappy to tell Ann that her marriage has to be the following week since Herman is to leave for St. Louis to get a place in the clock department. Marriage preparations have to be completed quickly. A day before the marriage Ann finds Evelina distressed because Herman cannot take her owing to the inadequate salary he will get. Ann finally gives the other half of their common savings to enable Evelina to accompany Herman.

At first Evelina occasionally writes but soon disappears completely. Worried, Ann tries to get in touch with everybody who knows Herman, and as a result becomes seriously ill from

exhaustion but she still gets no news of Evelina. She tries for the last time at Herman's old company, and with a shock learns that Herman had been discharged a long time before for drug-taking. Ann is desperately worried about Evelina, but having searched in vain she can now only hope for the return of Evelina some day. She is getting into financial trouble, for there is less demand for her work. While her hopes are at lowest ebb, Evelina returns home. Evelina's story is tragic : she had found out about Herman's drug-taking; she was forced to work, got seriously ill when Herman left her with Linda Hochmüller, the daughter of Mrs. Hochmüller who knew well about Herman's drug-taking; Evelina had to do all sorts of work and was often discharged because of her physical weakness, at last she begged for some money to return home. For Evelina's sake, Ann makes it known to her neighbors that Evelina has come home on a visit :

Evelina continues to be very ill and Ann begins to be discouraged about their ill luck. The doctor suggests that she send Evelina to the hospital, but she determines to keep her sister at home in spite of her poverty. Evelina confesses that she has become a Catholic and asks Ann to promise to bring her a priest if she is going to die. At last Evelina dies full of spiritual consolation which Ann never understands. She passes away, leaving Ann to roam alone in that big city looking for a job.

The story is developed in a way to mislead one to think that the two Bunner sisters are the victims of the wretched Herman Remy. But in fact it is Ann Eliza who is the real victim. One can see immediately that here again Mrs. Wharton is presenting the same theme as in Ethan Frome and The Custom of the Country. Ann Eliza's generosity is shown from the beginning of the story when she thinks of buying her sister a birthday present instead of buying herself a new pair of shoes and is sincerely happy to see how pleased her sister is. She does not reveal her interest in the German shop owner whom she finds very nice and later when she detects her sister's feelings toward the same man, she quietly gives up her

dream and seeks happiness in self-sacrifice and finally although Herman prefers her to Evelina, she encourages his attentions to her sister. When they are married, she gives the bride half of their savings to enable her to accompany her husband to St. Louis. She never knows that the reason Herman has asked her to marry is because he thinks she has more money than Evelina and after he is disappointed with her refusal, he still deprives Ann of her money through her sister.

But at this stage, what is worse for Ann than losing money is to be left alone after having lived with Evelina all her life. One can see that Evelina seldom thinks of her sister since she is blindly in love with Ramy. She never stops to consider her sister's welfare, but Ann always thinks of and is worried about Evelina's happiness even though she herself is oppressed by utter loneliness :

Everything in the back room and the shop, on the second day after Evelina's going, seemed to have grown coldly unfamiliar. The whole aspect of the place had changed with the changed conditions of Ann Eliza's life. The first customer who opened the shop-door startled her like a ghost; and all night she lay tossing on her side of the bed, sinking now and then into an uncertain doze from which she would suddenly wake to reach out her hand for Evelina. In the new silence surrounding her the walls and furniture found voice, frightening her at dusk and midnight with strange sighs and stealthy whispers. Ghostly hands shook the window shutters or rattled at the outer latch, and once she grew cold at the sound of a step like Evelina's stealing through the dark shop to die out on the threshold Worst of all were the solitary meals, when she absently continued to set aside the largest slice of pie for Evelina, and to let the tea grow cold while she waited for her sister to help herself to the first cup. . . . 30

The absence of Evelina's letters worries Ann Eliza and she shows her great concern by trying to search for Evelina. But everything she does only makes her more distressed since her small income has decreased and her health is getting worse. The worst of all is to learn that Herman is a drug addict. The information shocks her and she grows even more worried about Evelina. She can only keep a frightened vigil until Evelina returns, ill and deserted by her husband.

Ann Eliza has to take care of her sister again, nursing her devotedly but she herself begins to realize the uselessness of the sacrifice :

For the first time in her life she dimly faced the awful problem of the inutility of self-sacrifice. Hitherto she had never thought of questioning the inherited principles which had guided her life. Self-effacement for the good of others had always seemed to her both natural and necessary; but then she had taken it for granted that it implied the securing of that good. Now she perceived that to refuse the gifts of life does not ensure their transmission to those for whom they have been surrendered; and her familiar heaven was unpeopled. She felt she could no longer trust in the goodness of God, and that if He was not good He was not God, and there was only a black abyss above the roof of Bunner Sisters.³¹

But a Saint-like character like Ann Eliza can never give up her devotion to the one who needs her. She does not follow the doctor's advice to take Evelina to the hospital, but keeps her at home even though it costs a lot of money. In spite of her devotion to her sister, Ann Eliza cannot help feeling that her sister seems to her a stranger. There is something she can never understand which keeps Evelina away from her. But everything is clear to her at last when, knowing that she is going to die, Evelina confesses, to her sister that she has become a Catholic and the thing she keeps hidden from her sister is in fact a religious symbol. Ann Eliza is stunned because neither of them are Catholics and she can never understand the thing that inspires her sister. She only feels that Evelina has become/^acompletely stranger to her :

After that they spoke no more of the matter; but Ann Eliza now understood that the little black bag about her sister's neck; which she had innocently taken for a memento of Ramy, was some kind of sacriligious amulet, and her fingers shrank from its contact when she bathed and dressed Evelina. It seemed to her the diabolical instrument of their estrangement. ³²

Evelina dies months later and her sister, after having spent her last penny on medical bills, is dispossessed of her shop. She is last seen looking for work and being turned away because she is too old.

Like Ethan, Ann Eliza Bunner is tied to an inferior partner and has a strong sense of personal responsibility. How is it that good characters like Ethan and Ann Eliza never get the reward of their good deeds? Mrs. Wharton herself seems to be trying to find the answer to this question but never succeeds in finding it. Instead of leaving her readers perplexed with this moral problem she is successful in making the lives of protagonists like Ethan and Ann Eliza more dramatic and realistic. Any reader of Bunner Sisters can hardly forget Ann Eliza Bunner, the victim of circumstances. By character like her, Mrs. Wharton probably wants to make one realize that, through the bitterness of life, one is likely to win a spiritual victory.

In The Age of Innocence (1920), though Mrs. Wharton's main interest lies in presenting with nostalgia old New York society which no longer existed in the nineteen twenties, she also dramatizes the novel with the roles of the chief protagonists, Ellen Olenska, Newland Archer and May Weeland.

The discussion of The Age of Innocence in the previous chapter reveals that among the three protagonists, it is May Weeland Archer who gets whatever she wants : the man she loves, a peaceful family life and social status. For over twenty years she had that life with Newland and their three children, two boys and one girl. She always lived in her world, never realized its change because of her incapacity and also because Newland and the children concealed such changes from her. She consequently died happily thinking the world a good place to live in :

His (Newland's) eyes, making the round of the room ... came back to the old Eastlake writing table that he had never been willing to banish, and to his first photograph of May, which still kept its place beside his inkstand.

There she was, tall, round-bosomed and willowy, in her starched muslin and flapping Leghorn, as he had seen her under the orange-trees in the Mission garden.

And as he had seen her that day, so she had remained; never quite at the same height, yet never far below it: generous, faithful, unwearied; but so lacking in imagination, so incapable of growth, that the world of her youth had fallen into

pieces and rebuilt itself without her ever being conscious of the change. This hard bright blindness had kept her immediate horizon apparently unaltered. Her incapacity to recognise change made her children conceal their views from her as Archer concealed his; there had been from the first, a joint pretence of sameness, a kind of innocent family hypocrisy, in which father and children had unconsciously collaborated. And she had died thinking the world a good place, full of loving and harmonious households like her own, and resigned to leave it because she was convinced that, whatever happened, Newland would continue to inculcate in Dallas, the same principles and prejudices which had shaped his parents' lives, and that Dallas in turn (when Newland followed her) would transmit the sacred trust to little Bill. And of Mary she was sure as of her own self. So, having snatched little Bill from the grave, and given her life in the effort, she went contentedly to her place in the Archer vault in St. Mark's, where Mrs. Archer already lay safe from the terrifying "trend" which her daughter-in-law had never even become aware of.³³

But May's happiness is acquired by her ill treatment of her betrothed, Newland Archer and her cousin Ellen Olenska. It is May who sees everything through their relationship, even before Newland himself realizes his love for Ellen. As a result step by step May sets to get Newland back without ever making him realize that he is falling into her trap. To Newland she is always the sweet innocent May who knows exactly when and where to lay down her cards.

May stages a campaign to get rid of Ellen since she knows how deeply in love Ellen and Newland are, with each other but May has old New York convention on her side. She knows her betrothed well enough to be sure that with his old traditional breeding he scarcely wants to rebel against convention or to risk scandal and also that Newland will never sacrifice his high moral principles for his own happiness. May's attempt to gain her victory by exploiting Newland's virtue is therefore even more unworthy. With her cousin Ellen Olenska, she uses the same strategy, knowing how kind and sympathetic Ellen is. Thus May's revelation of her pregnancy to both, a lie to Ellen, a fact to Newland, is made when she has already measured their virtuous generosity. She is successful since Ellen immediately leaves the field, and goes back to Europe and she has Newland, her destined victim, forever.

In The Old Maid, the two cousins, Delia Lovell and Charlotte Lovell, both when young, had fallen in love with Clement Spender, a charming person whose career was not a dependable one. For this reason, Delia, even though in love with Clement Spender, got married to James Ralston, a member of New York's best-known family and she had been since then behaving as a true Ralston : trying to maintain the family standards. Her cousin, Charlotte Lovell, was less fortunate because even though she was born a Lovell, she was less wealthy and was left with only her mother, a widow who was so busy with her family that she had no time left to pay attention to Charlotte. A little after Charlotte's shabby début in high society, it was rumored that Charlotte had a disease of the lungs and she was sent to a remote state for a year. When she came back, to everyone's surprise she devoted her life to abandoned children, founding a sort of "day nursery". One of the children was left to her secretly by a "veiled lady" through a reliable Dr. Lanskell. The child was called Tina.

When everybody was beginning to feel that Charlotte might become an old maid, Joseph Ralston, James's brother had asked Charlotte to marry him and she had consented. The greatest obstacle presented itself a little before the marriage when Charlotte was asked to give up her "day-nursery," which she could not. At her wit's end, Charlotte revealed her secret to Delia. The bond that kept her to the nursery was, in fact, her life's secret : Tina was actually her own daughter by Clement Spender who had solaced himself with Charlotte when Delia married James Ralston. Delia was shocked with the revelation, and filled with deep jealousy but, on the pretext that Charlotte might be able to keep her child, she advised Charlotte against marriage. She even arranged to destroy Charlotte's marriage by telling her fiancé that Charlotte had had a recurrence of her old disease. For this same reason, Charlotte had to stop dealing with the nursery, but for sentimental reasons she was going to keep one child, and the child who was chosen was, of course, Tina.

Some years later, Delia became a widow, and had Chrlotte and her "adopted child" come to live with her. In Tina, Delia saw herself playing the role she had missed all her life, she, therefore, dominated Tina's life. A great rivalry developed between the two elderly women to possess the love of Tina, who, spoiled by Delia, loved Delia as her mother.

When Tina became a full-grown young lady, she secretly fell in love with Lanning Halsey, a son of a rather famous and well-to-do family. Lanning loved Tina but hesitated to marry her because Tina was merely an "adopted child". Charlotte could not bear the situation and decided to take Tina away before it was too late when Delia, who also could not bear to have Tina taken away from her, played her last winning card : she adopted Tina, an act which enabled Tina to marry Lanning. Tina, therefore, never learnt of her real birth because of the sacrifice of her "old maid" mother.

In Edith Wharton's three books, Ethan Frome, The Age of Innocence and The Old Maid there is one thing in common : the dominating characters of each book are women of the same type of character. Zeenobia Pierce in Ethan Frome, May Weeland in The Age of Innocence and Delia Ralston in The Old Maid are the concrete expression of the period and the place, characters that appear weak but are fiery inside. They portray strong jealousy and determination. The victims of their jealousy are of similar type too: Mattie Silver in Ethan Frome, Ellen Olenska in The Age of Innocence and Charlotte Lovell in The Old Maid. All are characters who have done a seemingly little wrong : Mattie Silver in falling in love with Ethan Frome, Ellen Olenska with Newland Archer and Charlotte Lovell in having an illegitimate child with Clement Spender but all of them pay heavily for their wrongdoing. Each one is tormented in a different way : Mattie, in being a cripple under the care of Zeena; Ellen, in having a lifelong separation from Newland Archer; and Charlotte, in being considered "The Old Maid" throughout her life and an old maid aunt even by her own daughter.

Charlotte Lovell is one of the most unfortunate of Mrs. Wharton's protagonists. She is second to Delia from the be-

ginning of the story. She is poor, less attractive and not witty. It is bad luck that she and her pretty rich cousin, Delia, should have fallen in love with the same man and that man by whom she had a child did not even know about the birth of the child and she did not wish it to be known since she herself knew that he made love to her because he was lonely and unhappy, owing to his love for another woman who was marrying somebody else. Charlotte is therefore a pitiful character who did not enjoy even the love of her own lover :

Charlotte Lovell stood up in her turn. "I knew it — I knew it! You think worse of my baby now, instead of better Oh, why did you make me tell you? I knew you'd never understand. I'd always cared for him, ever since I came out; that was why I wouldn't marry anyone else. But I knew there was no hope for me he never looked at anybody but you (Delia). And then, when he came back four years ago, and there was no you for him any more, he began to notice me, to be kind, to talk to me about his life and painting" She drew a deep breath, and her voice cleared. "That's over — all over. It's as if I couldn't either hate him or love him. There's only the child now — my child. He doesn't even know of it — why should he? It's none of his business; it's nobody's business but mine. But surely you must see that I can't give up my baby." 34

Had Charlotte not revealed her secret to Delia but abandoned the idea of marriage and gone away with her child, at least she would have got her own child for herself. She did not at first realize that a woman's love could be as strong as her jealousy. On the pretext of acting for the child's sake, Delia at once set about to get revenge. Mrs. Wharton's skill in making one aware of the "real Delia" is remarkable. Her cynicism is clear when she makes Delia strike surely and relentlessly to destroy Charlotte's marriage and later to dominate Charlotte and her child.

Delia's meanness is made even more noticeable when she destroys Charlotte's hope of marriage, on the pretext of preserving the family's morals :

Charlotte's marrying Joe Ralston — her own Jim's cousin — without revealing her past to him, seemed to Delia as dishonorable as it would have seemed to any Ralston. And to tell him the truth would at once

put an end to the marriage; of that even Chatty was aware.

No; there was no escape from the dilemma. As clearly as it was Delia's duty to save Clem Spender's child, so clearly, also, she seemed destined to sacrifice his mistress. As the thought pressed on her she remembered Charlotte's wistful cry : "I want to be married, like all of you," and her heart tightened. But yet it must not be.³⁵

In fact Delia did not have to bother to plan the destruction of Charlotte's marriage because Charlotte herself was most willing to sacrifice her chance of happiness for the sake of her child. Her determination is clearly heroic:

"Shall I live with her somewhere, do you mean? Just she and I together?"

"Just you and she."

"In a little house?"

"In a little house."

"You're sure, Delia?"

"Sure, my dearest."

Charlotte once more raised herself on her elbow and sent a hand groping under the pillow. She drew out a narrow ribbon on which hung a diamond ring.

"I had taken it off already," she said simply, and handed it to Delia.³⁶

The rivalry of the two elderly women to win the child's love is clear in the second part of the story. It's Delia again who wins. Charlotte is aware of her defeat and bears her misery patiently until she can bear it no longer when she realizes that her child may have the same experience she has already had : ~~-----~~ a young man who loves Tina hesitates to marry her because she is only an adopted daughter. Charlotte, therefore, wants to take Tina away from all the unrealities, and to let her know the truth about her birth even though it means Charlotte's greatest disgrace. She is not successful, however, in getting her child back for Delia has "very generously" solved the problem by adopting Tina as her own daughter. It is the offer that guarantees her child's happiness; therefore Charlotte has to submit completely and accepts her fate given to her by the "Goddess Delia". But before she yields completely she has been successful in making Delia realize that her sin is : "a terrible thing, a sacrilegious thing to interfere with

another's destiny, to lay the tenderest touch upon any human being's right to love and suffer after his own fashion":37

"Just tonight (the night before Tina's wedding),
"Charlotte concluded," I'm her mother."

"Charlotte! You're not going to tell her so — not now?" broke involuntarily from Delia.

Charlotte gave a faint laugh. "If I did, should you hate it as much as all that?"

"Hate it? What a word, between us!"

"Between us? But it's the word that's been between us since the beginning — the very beginning! Since the day when you discovered that Clement Spender hadn't quite broken his heart because he wasn't good for you; since you found your revenge and your triumph in keeping me at your mercy, and in taking his child from me!"

"... You've always thought of him in thinking of Tina — of him and nobody else. A woman never stops thinking of the man she loves. She thinks of him years afterward, in all sorts of unconscious ways, in thinking of all sorts of things

" ... I (Delia) don't want to hurt you (Charlotte) — I never did."

"You tell me that — and you've left nothing undone to divide me from my daughter! Do you suppose it's been easy, all these years, to hear her call you 'mother'? Oh, I know, I know — it was agreed that she must never guess but if you hadn't perpetual¹ come between us she'd have had no one but me, she'd have felt about me as a child feels about its mother, she'd have had to love me better than anyone else. With all your forbearances and your generousities you've ended by robbing me of my child. And I've put up with it all for her sake — because I knew I had to. But tonight — I can't bear that she should call you 'mother.' "38

The story ends with Delia's realization of Charlotte's misery :

"Darling! Just one thing more."

"Yes?" Tina murmured through her dream.

"I want you to promise me —"

"Everything, everything, you darling mother!"

"Well, then, that when you go away tomorrow — at the very last moment, you understand —"

"Yes?"

"After you've said goodbye to me, and to everybody else — just as Lanning helps you into the carriage —"

"Yes?"

"That you'll give your last kiss to Aunt Charlotte. Don't forget — the very last."39

In "The Last Asset" Paul Garnette, an American newspaper correspondent in London, found pleasure in coming to Paris to lodge in a dingy hotel of the Latin Quarter whence he could go to a cheap but excellent restaurant. His pleasure increased after he had made the acquaintance of one elderly American whose name he did not know but whose conversations were full of a philosophy he enjoyed.

Paul felt annoyed at being asked to meet Mrs. Sam Newell, an American socialite from London. He found her aggressive, demanding, but quite interesting. She had a twenty-three year old daughter, Miss Hermione Newell or Hermy who was simple, but understanding and sympathetic. Paul learnt that Mrs. Sam Newell had not had a divorce, but was merely separated from her husband. She wanted to meet Paul to announce the marriage of Hermy to Comte Louis du Trayas, son of a French Marquis. Mrs. Newell expected this marriage to restore her reputation in high society. Paul found her scandalously involved with Baron Schenkelderff who was then giving her financial support.

Mrs. Newell wanted Paul to see Mr. Newell who was living in Paris and ask him to appear at the wedding because the French, especially those belonging to old families would not think of letting their son marry the child of divorced parents. Therefore she only wanted her husband to appear at the wedding since everything else would be prepared through the kindness of her friends like the Hubbards and Baron Schenkelderff. After Paul discovered how much in love Hermy was, rather than abandon her to the mercy of her mother and Schenkelderff, Paul promised Mrs. Newell to try to find her husband.

From the embassy, Paul found out the district where Mr. Newell was supposed to be living. It was the district near his favorite restaurant where he again met his old acquaintance. When Paul asked him the way to Panonceux, his friend asked Paul if he was looking for Samuel C. Newell. To his astonishment Paul learnt that his friend was Hermy's father. In spite of Paul's entreaty to appear at the wedding for the sake of pure, innocent Hermy, Mr. Newell still wouldn't promise but asked Paul to see him again the next day.

Mrs. Newell, on hearing the result from Paul, wanted to see her husband herself but Baron Schenkelderff was afraid that it would spoil everything. She, herself, thought it would be a failure and was definitely sure that it was her husband's revenge. Paul himself was preparing to give up when Hermy saw him in person and asked him to leave her father alone for the sake of her father's peace of mind. She only asked Paul to deliver this definite wish from her to her father. Mr. Newell received this with the greatest wonder and suddenly changed his mind : he decided to come to his daughter's wedding but added ironically that his wife always got what she wanted.

Everything went fine as Mrs. Newell had planned. She looked brilliant and important at the wedding but Hermy in spite of her happy brightness looked a little melancholic. Paul observed the scene with a feeling of disgust, for :

... one and all they were there to serve Mrs. Newell's ends and accomplish her purpose : Schenkelderff and the Hubbards to pay for the show, the bride and bridegroom to seal and symbolize her social rehabilitation, Garnette himself as the humble instrument adjusting the different parts of the complicated machinery, and her husband, finally, as the last stake in her game, the last asset on which she could draw to rebuild her fallen fortune.

In this short story Mrs. Wharton has given a vivid picture of an aggressive woman who thought of others only in terms of her own advantage. Mrs. Newell was a maniac for power and prestige, domineering, selfish and unscrupulous. She was successful in victimizing everyone and in exploiting them to achieve her selfish social aim. Her most pitiful victim, her last asset, was, of course, her husband whom she had long since completely rejected.

"The Other Two" is another of Mrs. Wharton's remarkable short stories showing the ironical situation of a person who, through ambition and callousness, succeeds in getting whatever he wishes. It is interesting that in this short story the central character, a woman, gets what she desires not through meanness, like Zeena in Ethan Frome, or selfishness like Undine Spragg in The Custom of the Country, or helplessness

like Evelina Bunner in Bunner Sisters; but through her pliancy. Mrs. Wharton, in writing this short story, has shown her deftness in developing with pungency a character so real and so cunning that one is not likely to forget the heroine of this short story easily. "The Other Two" is also considered one of her best short stories.

In spite of his friends's remark and to the surprise of society, Waythorn married a woman who had already been divorced twice. He even returned prematurely from his honeymoon so Alice or Mrs. Waythorn could take care of ailing Lily Haskett the daughter of her first marriage whom Waythorn had allowed to live with them. Back from the honeymoon Waythorn contemplated his life with great contentment. When his wife announced that Mr. Haskett, her first husband, claimed his right to see his daughter, who was ill with typhoid fever, Waythorn was disturbed but he gave permission. Although he could avoid meeting Haskett, he was forced by business dealings into close contact with Gus Varick, his wife's second husband. During the business discussion Waythorn was surprised to discover that Varick was a good person, that both he and Varick "had the same social habits, spoke the same language, understood the same allusions." Waythorn was even more embarrassed when Varick, on his leaving, seemed grateful to him for his good business advice.

As the days passed, Waythorn grew so used to the idea of Haskett's weekly visit that one day, forgetting it was Haskett's visiting day he returned home and unexpectedly met Haskett. The encounter shook Waythorn because Haskett did not appear to be a brute. The meeting caused Waythorn to analyze his wife and her motives. He was curious to know how Alice had managed to remake herself into the woman he had married.

The reflection made Hawthorn realize with a shock that he knew nothing at all about his wife's first marriage. He further learnt that his wife had told a lie in saying that she had never met Haskett when Haskett came for a visit. Later even after the recovery of the child, Haskett asked to be permitted to continue his visits. Waythorn had to yield to Haskett's sincerity of purpose after he had learnt that Haskett had sold all his property in Utica and accepted a

modest clerkship in order to live near his daughter in New York.

The necessary conferences between Waythorn and Varick were continued in spite of Waythorn's unwillingness. Circumstances forced him to acknowledge Varick whenever they met but he never expected that his wife would renew her friendship with Varick; therefore, one night at a ball he was surprised to see his wife sitting beside Varick, and talking too sympathetically to him. Waythorn discovered, to his disgust, how pliable she was. Yet he had to yield to his wife's explanation that it would be less awkward to speak to Varick when they met. Waythorn wearily agreed that it was better for her to speak to Varick but he could not help having a poor opinion of his wife. He cynically came to a conclusion that his wife through her ambition and marriages had succeeded in becoming the tactful person he very much admired, and since he valued his comfort, he should not be disillusioned but at the same time should feel fortunate to own a third of a wife who had acquired, through previous marriages, the art of making a man happy.

Thus it happened that when the three husbands met unexpectedly in Waythorn's library — Haskett had come to see Alice about Lily, Varick to see Waythorn on urgent business — Alice successfully swept aside their embarrassment by inviting them, with a charming gesture of hospitality, to have tea. Her invitation had a magnetic influence over all of them. They each accepted a cup of tea, but Waythorn accepted his with a laugh.

From the discussion in this chapter it is obvious that victimization is Mrs. Wharton's important theme. Let us consider whether Mrs. Wharton is pessimistic in rendering this theme in so many of her works. Having gone over her life story and the stories discussed in this chapter one sees that there is no reason to say that she is a pessimist. On the contrary one has a feeling that she has a deep understanding of human misery that may occur to anyone at any time. She is clearly sympathetic with all the victims, but she seems to make one realize that at times this misery cannot be

avoided. The only thing one can do is to face one's own misery with courage and dignity. These qualities all her protagonists, who are taken captive by meaner characters or environmental circumstances, possess and never yield to any low moral inclination.

Two other important themes that often recur in Mrs. Wharton's works are divorce and illegitimacy. If one remembers Mrs. Wharton's own separation and divorce from Edward Wharton which is one crucial event in her life, it is not surprising that she was preoccupied with divorce in writing her novels and short stories. But what is surprising is that she does not discuss the causes of separation and divorce so much as the attitude of society toward divorce. As for illegitimacy, some people are inclined to believe in the legend, as yet unverified, that Mrs. Wharton's own birth may have been illegitimate. And for this reason she has made it a theme in some of her stories. These two themes are sometimes interlocked in the same story. Whatever her true motives are, there is one definite sign of Mrs. Wharton's attitude: marriage is a serious matter that may involve a great number of conflicts, personal or social. Marriage, divorce and illegitimacy are intricately related.

The sign of divorce first appears in "Souls Belated", a short story in The Greater Inclination (1899), Mrs. Wharton's first volume of stories and the best apprentice work. This collection is considered versatile but its versatility is a bit too calculated, its cleverness too transparent. All of the stories except the unexpectedly realistic "A Journey" reflect a self-conscious attitude. The collection consequently produces no definite impression of Edith Wharton's talent. In these preliminary stories of what Percy Lubbock calls her "odd cases, queer motives, and awkward episodes" only "Souls Belated" has an important relation in theme to her later and more characteristic fiction.⁴¹

"Souls Belated" is the story of Lydia Tillotson, who has left her wealthy, uninteresting husband to join her lover Gannette, a writer who moves about from place to place. While the fugitives are in Italy Lydia receives notice of her

husband's consent to a divorce. Gannette wants to marry her at once but Lydia does not consent to marriage because having been condemned for years to the monotony of respectability, she does not want to defer to the conventions of a society they have both learned to despise:

We neither of us believe in the abstract "sacredness" of marriage; we both know that no ceremony is needed to consecrate our love for each other.

Gannette counters with the argument that Lydia surveys life too theoretically and that life is made up of compromises. As for conventions he thinks that as long as they rule the world it is only by taking advantage of their protection that one can be happy.

Gannette's objections are proved true by what follows. After months of hiding during which the lovers move from one obscure hotel to another to evade the curiosity of their compatriots, Lydia learns that they cannot remain forever in hiding. For one thing, Gannette needs the stimulus of society in order to continue his writing. As Mr. and Mrs. Gannette, they register at a fashionable resort and are immediately accepted into the exclusive, mainly English society ruled by Lady Susan Condit. Somewhat later, a Mr. and Mrs. Linton appear among the guests. Mrs. Linton is a flamboyant and dominating type but her husband appears "a blond stripling, trailing after her, head downward, like a reluctant child dragged by his nurse." Lydia, taking her cue from Lady Susan, manages to avoid the newcomers until one day Mrs. Linton corners her, confides that her husband is really Lord Trevenna, that she is the notorious Mrs. Cope, and that after a publicized courtship they have fled to Italy to await her divorce. It has been clear to her from the beginning, she adds, that she and Lydia are "in the same box." The encounter makes Lydia see herself in Mrs. Cope's situation. Recounting the scene to Gannette she admits the folly of her earlier viewpoint. She trembles to think how Lady Susan's group should react knowing her real situation. Gannette, seizing the opportunity, again urges marriage, and Lydia finally capitulates after having failed in her attempt to flee from

Gannetto.

Lydia's world is similar^{to} Mrs. Wharton's : old New York society where conventions are valued as expedients and compromise is the only path to freedom. The presentation of Lydia Tillotson lets one see that Mrs. Wharton herself is somewhat disgusted about respectability in society and would very much like to be free from it. This story was published fourteen years after Mrs. Wharton's marriage to Mr. Edward Wharton, which as we know was unsuccessful. Like Lydia, she might have been condemned for years to the monotony of respectability that she was completely tired of. She, therefore, in writing about Lydia, makes Lydia commit a sin from society's point of view : Lydia runs away with her lover. This same notion appears not only in the case of Lydia but in many other cases of her rebellious women protagonists. Undine Spragg, of The Custom of the Country thinking her marriage to Ralph Marvell a failure, flees to Pater Van Degen. Julia Westfall, the heroine of "The Reckoning," in Edith Wharton's third collection of stories, The Descent of Man (1904), leaves her husband, because, having tired of him, she decides that the marriage tie should bind neither partner permanently. Kate Cleplane, in The Mother's Recompense (1925), deserts her stuffy husband for a lover.⁴² But however suffocated Mrs. Wharton may be by the marriage tie, she realizes the influence of social conventions. Lydia is consequently made at last to defer to the conventions of the society which she once deplored :

Respectability ! It was the one thing in life that I was sure I didn't care about, and it's grown so precious to me that I've stolen it because I couldn't get it in any other way.

In "The Other Two", a short story, in the collection entitled The Descent of Man (1904), Mrs. Wharton has presented to the readers, the pliant Alice Waythorn who had had two divorces before she became Mrs. Waythorn. This story is ironical. It mocks the society that is against a divorce or a divorcée but once that person succeeds in conforming to good manners or pliancy, society immediately forgets what it once very much opposed. Alice could then surmount all diffi-

culties with ease knowing exactly what to do and when to do it :

When she had appeared in New York, nine or ten earlier, as the pretty Mrs. Haskett whom Gus Varick had unearthed somewhere — was it in Pittsburgh or Utica? — society, while promptly accepting her, had reserved the right to cast a doubt on its own indiscrimination. Enquiry, however, established her undoubted connection with a socially reigning family, and explained her recent divorce as the natural result of a runaway match at seventeen; and as nothing was known of Mr. Haskett it was easy to believe the worst of him.⁴³

Her marriage to Gus Varick is therefore welcomed in high society and the Varicks are the most popular couple in town until their separation a few years later. This time, though society did not blame Gus Varick, it admitted that he was not meant for matrimony but as for Alice Varick :

.... in the semi-widowhood of this second separation Mrs. Varick took on an air of sanctity, and was allowed to confide her wrongs to some of the most scrupulous ears in town.⁴⁴

However when Waythorn announced his determination to marry Alice, there was a momentary reaction among both her friends and his friends. But what Alice did to overcome the reaction only increased Waythorn's admiration for her :

He (Waythorn) knew that society has not yet adapted itself to the consequences of divorce, and that till the adaptation takes place every woman who uses the freedom the law accords her must be her own social justification. Waythorn had an amused confidence in his wife's ability to justify herself. His expectations were fulfilled, and before the wedding took place Alice Varick's group had rallied openly to her support. She took it all imperturbably : she had a way of surmounting obstacles without seeming to be aware of them⁴⁵

In "Madame de Treymes" (1907), divorce is treated very seriously. It is not only used as a means to free Fanny from the de Malrives, but it is also used as the de Malrives' instrument to preserve their clan solidarity : to restore Fanny's son to the de Malrive family and insure his remaining French forever. Divorce, which should be a lawful means of

rendering justice, only serves the purpose of those who know how to exploit it. Viewing it in this light, Mrs. Wharton reveals her contempt toward the looseness of a divorce law which gives good chances for opportunists :

(John) "Why, then, did you consent to the divorce?"
 (Madame de Treymes) "To get the boy back," she answered instantly; and while he sat stunned by the unexpectedness of the retort she went on : "Is it possible you never suspected? It has been our whole thought from the first. Everything was planned with that object."46

It is noticeable that in her short stories as well as in The Custom of the Country (1913) when divorce was the theme, Mr. Wharton wrote primarily about the serious disapproval of the society of the eighteen seventies and against this disapproval there had to be a soul that rebelled. In later stories she even showed how society gradually yielded to this social taboo and hence took less interest in it.

Mrs. Wharton is often called the "grande dame" of the old society because she was herself born into it and, in her works, she showed her deep understanding of this society and its strict conventions. Therefore, through some of these stories, when she made clear her point of view that divorce should be permissible, she revealed herself as a determined and liberal spirit. Her own divorce certainly seems strong evidence to support this point of view that divorce should not be objectionable if one's marriage is not successful.

Her heroine, Undine, certainly, shocks the Marvells when she discussed the divorce of the people in her set :

(Undine) "I guess Mabel'll get a divorce pretty soon,"....
 Mr. Dagonet's handsome eye-brows drew together.
 "A divorce?" H'm ---- that's bad. Has he been misbehaving himself?"
 Undine looked innocently surprised. "Oh, I guess not. They like each other well enough. But he's been a disappointment to her. He isn't in the right set, and I think Mabel realizes she'll never really get anywhere till she gets rid of him."
 These words, uttered in the high fluting tone that she rose to when sure of her subject

"But, my dear young lady — what would your friend's own situation be if, as you put it, she's 'got rid' of her husband on so trivial a pretext?"
 Undine, surprised at his dullness, tried to



explain. "Oh, that wouldn't be the reason given, of course. Any lawyer could fix it up for them. Don't they generally call it desertion?"⁴⁷

Throughout the story, Undine's divorces are mentioned as if they were ordinary incidents. The author made no critical comments on Undine's behavior. It seems to the reader that Undine more or less has a right to claim a new life once she finds the old one unsatisfactory. In fact it is through these experiences that she obtains the wealth and social distinction she has longed for. Mrs. Wharton not only does not blame Undine on this score but on the contrary satirizes the aristocrats who unnaturally ignore this matter and thus easily fall victims of those who use the divorce law to their own advantage. Her pitiful protagonist, Ralph Marvell, therefore, has to suffer until his death because of his fear of scandal and is, at the end, destroyed completely, not being able to bear the treachery of his wife who is supported by the law.

The Age of Innocence was written in 1920 some years after her divorce from Edward Wharton. This may probably be the reason why Mrs. Wharton paid keener attention, than she did in The Custom of the Country, to divorce which was an important factor in this novel.

In the New York of the eighteen seventies, divorce was formidable. Whether the couple was successful in their marriage was of no importance. Once they were married, they were bound to accept their fate since divorce was shunned by society. Newland, as an ambassador of the New York clan, explained wonderfully to Ellen how much a divorce might cost an individual :

"New York society is a very small world compared with the one you've lived in. And it's ruled, in spite of appearances, by a few people with — well, rather old-fashioned ideas."

She said nothing and he continued: "Our ideas about marriage and divorce are particularly old-fashioned. Our legislation favors divorce—our social customs don't."

"Never?"

"Well — not if the woman, however injured, however irreproachable, has appearances in the least

degree against her, has exposed herself by any unconventional action to — to offensive insinuations —"48
 "... is it worth while to risk what may be infinitely disagreeable and painful? Think of the newspapers — their vileness! It's all stupid and narrow and unjust — but one can't make over society."

 "The individual, in such cases, is nearly always sacrificed to what is supposed to be the collective interest : people cling to any conventions that keep the family together — protects the children, if there are any,"49

This sounds like a declaration but if it is, it is an angry and ironical one. Mrs. Wharton herself got a divorce even though she knew how her class would judge her but, being independent she did not care. Consequently, Newland, her spokesman for the New York of the eighteen seventies, rallied openly to Ellen's support :

Woman ought to be free — as free as we are! 50

With "The Children" Mrs. Wharton has used the theme of divorce in an unusual way. In The Custom of the Country, divorce is used as a means to enable Undine get an advantage of Ralph; in "Madame de Treymes" it is used to free Fanny de Malrive from the misery of life with her French husband; in "The Other Two" it is used to show Mrs. Wharton's mockery of society in its delightful acceptance of Alice Waythorn, a woman who had been divorced twice and married three times, but in The Children, divorce is used to reveal the wretchedness of the children whose suffering is caused by a divorce or a separation of their parents.

The Children is a tragic story of the continual segregation of the offspring of one rich family, the Wheaters, this segregation causes the misery of the Wheeler children. Headed by Judith Wheeler, the fifteen-year eldest daughter of Mrs. Cliffe Wheeler, the little Wheaters vowed not to be separated and to be thrown here and there like luggage any more. They were on board a ship heading for a destination designated by their parents when they met Martin Boyne, an old college friend of their parents. Martin was a bachelor engineer in his middle forties, who had spent most of his

adult life on engineering projects in remote countries. When he met the Wheeler children he was in Algiers, en route to Italy where he was to meet an old flame, Rose Sellars. Having laid away a competence, he had begun to long for some deeper personal attachment and a more settled way of life, and to this end he had reached a tentative understanding, by correspondence, with Mrs. Sellars, whom he had not seen for five years. In Algiers a troop of six small children, being cared for by a young-looking mother attracted his attention greatly. He learnt upon inquiry that the "mother" was Judith Wheeler, eldest daughter of Mrs. Cliffe Wheeler, formerly Joyce Mervin whom Martin had courted briefly during his college days but who, when Martin left for parts unknown, had married the vigorous Cliffe Wheeler.

The extraordinary, miscellaneous tribe of young Wheelers was the product of their parents' several marriages. Judith Terry, her only brother who was physically weak but academically mature and Blanca, an attractive but detached, selfish and hypocritical twin of Terry were the three older children, the offspring of the Wheelers' first marriage. Since then the parents had been divorced, married briefly to other partners, and then remarried. Later additions to the tribe were : a girl, Zinnie, a materialistic and ungovernable daughter of Cliffe Wheeler and Zinnia Lacrosse, a movie star; "Bun", or Astore Buondelmonte and Beechy or Beatrice Buondelmonte, the children of a philandering but not rich Italian nobleman, to whom Joyce Wheeler had been married, when she remarried Cliffe she had adopted these two Italian children; and lastly, Chipstone Wheeler, an eighteen-months-old boy, who was the first child of the Wheelers' remarriage.

Because she had the responsibility of mothering the younger children, Judith Wheeler, even at fifteen, looked and acted older than her years. Her childhood had been shortened as a result of her parents' deeds. For this reason Judith greatly attracted Martin and half against his will he became a sort of godfather to these children. When the party proceeded to Venice to meet the elder Wheelers, Martin was persuaded to urge on the parents the necessity of a tutor

for Terry. Following the success of this assignment, and by now thoroughly charmed with the children, Martin became more and more devoted to their interests. While Rose Sellars awaited their rendezvous, he lingered in Venice. Judith Wheeler looked to him as intermediary and godfather, and, after years of loneliness, Martin was flattered and was attracted to the girl, whose combination of maturity and childishness he found irresistible. What grew out of it was Martin's inevitable misunderstanding with his fiancée; his growing involvement with the plight of the children, which fostered a series of crises; the breaking off of his engagement, and, finally his failure to make Judith understand his love for her. Feeling suddenly old, disillusioned and incapable of helping the children when Martin learned that Judith had transferred her allegiance to a new savior, Mr. Dobree, he decided to sail for New York and got another engineering job. Before he withdrew completely from the affairs of the Wheelers, he sadly learnt that Mr. Dobree was Rose's elderly lawyer who cunningly showed affection for both Rose and Judith but at last married Joyce Wheeler who was completely under his influence and control. Dobree was also successful in persuading Joyce to return "the Steps" to their own parents, keeping only her own. Years later Martin returned to Europe, caught a glimpse of Judith through the window of a hotel ball-room, but sailed again without meeting her.

In spite of her own divorce and proclamation that divorce should be permissible if the couple is not successful in their marriage, Mrs. Wharton however does not approve of divorce that is used to serve the pleasure of the parents and to leave their children in misery. In fact she is disgusted by members of high society who sacrifice their own children to maintain their artificial social status. Mrs. Wharton is angry with the parents whose neglect of their parental duty ruins the lives of their children. It is the parents who should be fiercely blamed. In The Custom of the Country Paul Marvell's loneliness and bewilderment have already been shown by Mrs. Wharton to provide the final commentary of Undine. Also in The Glimpses of the Moon, the characterization

of the eleven-year-old Clarissa Vanderlyn is evidence of Mrs. Wharton's fierce comment on the neglectful parents: the girl, the only child of the parents, was always left in charge of a nurse in their Venetian mansion while the parents pursued their marital conquests. In The Children the story is intensified by Mrs. Wharton's sharp comments and the irony of the post war high society members whose easy-going behavior results in the blighting of their children's lives:

All about them, at the tables exactly like theirs, sat other men exactly like Lord Wrench and Wheeler, the Duke of Mendip and Gerald Ormerod, other women like Joyce and Zinnia and Mrs. Lullmer Here it was, in all its mechanical terror — endless and meaningless as the repetitions of a nightmare. Everyone of the women in the vast crowded restaurant seemed to be of the same age, to be dressed by the same dress-makers, loved by the same lovers, adorned by the same jewellers and massaged and manipulated by the same Beauty doctors. The only difference was that the few whose greater age was no longer disguisable had shorter skirts, and exposed a wider expanse of shoulder-blade. A double jazz-band drowned their conversation, but from the movement of their lips and the accompanying gestures, Boyne surmised that they were all saying exactly the same thing as Joyce and Zinnia and Mrs. Lullmer. It would have been unfashionable to be different.

No other expression is more tragic than the innocent but tormenting remark of young Terry Wheeler:

"But then we had to go away — one of our troubles," Terry interrupted himself, "is that we're so everlastingly going away. But I suppose it's always so with children — isn't it? — with all the different parents they're divided up among and all the parents living in different places, and fighting so about when the children are to go to which, and the lawyers always changing things just as you think they're arranged ... Of course a chap must expect to be moving about when he is young."

Mrs. Wharton's impatience with the society's absurd judgment of divorce is very vividly made in "Autre Temps" written in 1916, a short story which Blake Nevius considers her best short story.⁵¹ This interesting story deals brilliantly and somewhat wistfully with the return to New York of Mrs. Lidcote who eighteen years before had divorced her husband and for this reason had been ostracized by polite society.

She consequently had been spending most of her time, since her divorce, in Florence, Italy. She didn't want to come back but was summoned on account of her daughter, Leila's divorce; She was worried lest history should repeat itself and Leila would have to suffer severely like her. She was even more distressed when she learnt that Leila had already married another man in spite of a recent divorce. During the journey Mrs. Lidcote was annoyed by the indifference of one of her acquaintances, the ambassador Mrs. Boulger and also vexed by a conversation of two young New York girls who discussed divorce freely. On the boat she discussed her unsolvable problem with her old friend, Franklin Ide, who warned her that things were different in New York, for New York's attitude had changed. Her daughter did not come to meet her at the harbor but sent instead a cousin, Susy Suffern, from whom Mrs. Lidcote learnt about the younger generation's attitude toward divorce.

Mrs. Lidcote found that what Franklin Ide had told her was true: society had so much changed that a matter of divorce and remarriage was no longer scandalous. Miss Suffern had shown no worry about the case of Leila and Leila, herself, seemed to be perfectly happy. Mrs. Lidcote, though relieved, felt a little lost and lonely, for she would no longer be needed as a spiritual refuge for her daughter. One important incident was that before her encounter with her daughter, Franklin Ide had renewed his hope of marrying her.

Mrs. Lidcote was heartily welcomed by her daughter. However, Mrs. Lidcote noticed Leila's uneasiness. Susy Suffern was summoned to be the companion of Mrs. Lidcote for dinner upstairs and from her Mrs. Lidcote learned that there was going to be a party in honor of Mrs. Boulger since Wilbourne Barkley, Leila's husband, was hoping to be sent to Rome as second secretary. When Mrs. Lidcote realized that her daughter had arranged everything carefully so that she would not meet Mrs. Boulger and spoil Barkley's expectations she did not come down to the party to find out her real status but stayed in her room to avoid embarrassing her daughter.

Mrs. Lidcote made a quick decision to return at once to Florence in spite of her daughter's suggestion that they go

together. She even refused the company of her daughter and Susy Suffern anywhere. Having decided not to see Franklin Ide before her departure she did not make it known to him but on her last night in the same hotel in New York, he happened to learn where she was and came to see her. She tried to make it clear to him that even though her case and Leila's were identical, society did not cut Leila as it still cut her; therefore the best solution was for her to quit New York, her former home, forever. Ide accused her of being a pessimist and a coward for not daring to face her former acquaintances so she suddenly decided to try him out. She asked Ide to take her at once to see one of her former acquaintances. This proved to her at once that she was right since Ide himself did not dare to face the test. So she adhered to her former decision to go away at once.

Mrs. Wharton in writing this short story had certainly made a full study of the society's change in attitude. She makes it plain that as time goes by society is less critical and less severe towards the new generation. A commitment that forty years before was severely condemned by society is a trivial matter in the nineteen twenties. Yet society is prejudiced enough never to forgive the old sinner but to accept the young one who has committed exactly the same sin. On this point Mrs. Wharton's irony is clear when she discusses Mrs. Lidcote's case and shows how absurd society's treatment of Mrs. Lidcote is. Mrs. Wharton's passionate feeling is echoed in Mrs. Lidcote's reflections :

(Mrs. Lidcote " We were both mistaken. You say it's prepos-
to terous that the women who didn't object to accept-
Franklin ing Leila's hospitality should have objected to
Ide) meeting me under her roof. And so it is; but I
begin to understand why. It's simply that society
is much too busy to revise its own judgments.
Probably no one in the house with me stopped to
consider that my case and Leila's were identical.
They only remembered that I'd done something which,
at the time I did it, was condemned by society. My
case has been passed on and classified : I'm the
woman who has been cut for nearly twenty years.
The older people have half forgotten why, and the
younger ones have never really known : it's simply
become a tradition to cut me. And traditions that
have lost their meaning are the hardest of all to
destroy."52

However Franklin insists on marrying her even though he realizes the truth of her reflections. He offers to share her solitude, but Mrs. Lidcote points out that it would not help to improve the situation; moreover it would only ruin both of them:

"It would be more of a prison. You forget that I know all about that. We're all imprisoned, of course — all of us middling people, who don't carry our freedom in our brains. But we've accommodated ourselves to our different cells, and if suddenly moved into new ones we're likely to find a stone wall where we thought there was thin air, and to knock ourselves senseless against it. I saw a man do that once."⁵³

The theme of illegitimacy is made clear in "The Old Maid" and "Roman Fever". In "The Old Maid" illegitimacy causes Charlotte Lovell's misery and makes her 'the old maid' victim of her cousin, Delia, forever. In "Roman Fever" illegitimacy is used in just the opposite way: as a means of retaliation.

"Roman Fever" is a dramatically written short story, the success of which reveals one facet of a woman's emotion and temperament. It is a seemingly calm conversation of "two American ladies of ripe but well-cared-for middle age" who had been friends and rivals — since their girlhood. Mrs. Slade, widow of a famous corporation lawyer, Mr. Delphin Slade, had a rather high opinion of herself so that she could not help looking down a little on her friend, Mrs. Ansley. However she felt envious of Mrs. Ansley's apparent tranquility, calmness and of her striking daughter, Barbara.

The story begins with the two middle-aged women left sitting together contemplating the Palatine and the forum of Rome from the balcony of a hotel. They were apparently having a friendly conversation for the sake of being sociable but their thoughts are completely different from their conversation since Mrs. Slade was thinking enviously of her friend's peacefulness and Mrs. Ansley was feeling sorry for her uneasy friend.

The conversation suddenly returned to how they acted when once as young ladies they were spending their holidays

together there in Rome. Mrs. Slade sneeringly recalled malaria, 'the roman fever', which generally affected lovers who met at night at the Colosseum and she remembered that Mrs. Ansley had had it once because she went there one night. When asked by Mrs. Ansley how she came to know of it, Mrs. Slade hotly responded she was the one who had sent the letter to make the date and she had used the signature of her betrothed, Delphin Slade. Mrs. Slade's envy decreased when she saw how miserable her words had made poor Mrs. Ansley because Mrs. Ansley had treasured that letter — the only love letter she had ever received from Delphin. Mrs. Slade even told how upset she was especially when she heard that Mrs. Ansley was so ill after being kept waiting in the Colosseum but Mrs. Ansley retorted that she did not have to wait : she had answered the letter and Delphin had been waiting her. Upset by hearing this, Mrs. Slade added that anyhow she had had Delphin for twenty five years and Mrs. Ansley had had nothing but that one letter which he hadn't even written. Mrs. Ansley answered quietly that she had Barbara instead.

Though the story is short, it is admirably written revealing the tortured soul of a woman who was always jealous and never trusted her beloved or her friend. If she had not been jealous of her friend and not tried to prod her she would have been happier for she would never have discovered that she had actually been beaten completely from the very beginning. The end of the story contains an unexpected twist in the unpredictable disclosure which added the acrid quality to the story.

Besides the stories dealing with victimization, divorce and illegitimacy, Mrs. Wharton surprisingly produced a group of works dealing with the supernatural. They are stories like "The Moving Finger", "The Lady's Maid's Bell", "A Bottle of Perrier" and "Pomegranate Sood". She makes it clear in her own discussion in The Writing of Fiction that her stories of the supernatural have no other aim than the creation of terror.⁵⁴ Writing on a supernatural theme is also a good exercise because writing this kind of story Mrs. Wharton has a chance to test her skill to see whether she can make the

supernatural seem natural. On the whole these stories are written remarkably showing how cleverly the writer, by accumulating details, builds up a successful story that definitely shakes the reader, and at the same time leaves in the reader's mind an impression of probability.

"The Moving Finger" which appeared in Crucial Instances (1901), Mrs. Wharton's second collection of short stories, tells about the strange practice of a man who had a portrait painter paint a picture of his dead wife to make her grow old with him. Ralph Grancy married twice. His first marriage, in the eyes of his friends, was unhappy. His friends even blamed the first Mrs. Grancy for so dominating Ralph that he failed to use fully the ability that his friends believed he had. His second marriage was therefore watched critically and everybody was relieved and believed that the admirable Mrs. Grancy would be able to bring out the best in Ralph. He loved her so much that he had the artist Claydon paint her portrait. Claydon devoted his whole ability to making the portrait so real that people were suspicious that Claydon himself was in love with Mrs. Grancy. Everybody, however, was shocked to hear of Mrs. Grancy's death only three short years later. Ralph immediately asked for a position abroad so that he was away from home for a period of years. At last he returned home and had Claydon repaint the portrait of his wife to make her look about as old as he was. In this way, Ralph could get on with his work and was constantly promoted since he had a feeling that his wife was with him all the time. As Ralph grew older, Claydon was asked to repaint the portrait several more times and at the last request, Claydon made the portrait wear a look of warning of death. Ralph showed signs of ill health but soon recovered so that everyone thought that Mrs. Grancy's warning look prophesied wrongly. Claydon alone had a firm belief in Ralph's approaching death. Ralph had a sudden attack and died bequeathing his wife's portrait to Claydon who repainted her as she was when he first met and loved her. Claydon then felt that she was no longer Ralph's but his forever.

"The Moving Finger" makes one recall a feeling that at times astonishes one, looking at the picture of a dead person : one feels that the person is still alive! For this reason Mrs. Wharton does not make the story incredible as a complete supernatural story. The details that she includes makes the story mysterious but not exaggerated because the kind of feeling that Ralph Grancy and Claydon have, very often occurs to people who have loved someone deeply and the feeling is more intense when that one has passed away. This is the 'Pygmalion' theme, which, though less original than Bernard Shaw's, is treated in a different way. The story shows Mrs. Wharton's skilful handling of material which is one of her characteristics: sticking to the main theme never letting minor details weaken the climax of the story.

"The Lady's Maid's Bell", in The Descent of Man and Other Stories (1904), another collection of five short stories, is also a supernatural story which technically is even more awaying. Mrs. Wharton wisely chose a woman as narrator, a woman whose limitations provide the possibility of natural explanation.⁵⁵

It is a story told by a Miss Hartley who secured a post as maid to Mrs. Brympton, a nervous but good-hearted lady whose home was in the country where most of the time she lived alone because Mr. Brympton was always away and their two children were dead.

At her new home Miss Hartley observed that the only visitor was Mr. Ramford, a neighbor who lived a mile or two beyond the Brymptons. He frequently visited Mrs. Brympton and from the other servants in the house, Miss Hartley learnt that he was a gentleman and a good companion. But Mr. Brympton, the master of the house, Miss Hartley observed that none in the house liked him; this did not surprise her because she had been warned before by Mrs. Brympton's aunt, who recommended her, to keep out of his way when he came back home.

Being educated above her real station, Miss Hartley felt that in spite of the greatest kindness of Mrs. Brympton shown to all around her, there was something unusual in the house of her new mistress; for example she was to be called by

a house-maid instead of being called by the bell. Also the day she came she had seen a mysterious woman in front of the room which was supposed to be locked and which she learnt later was the former maid's room. The room she was in was really the sewing room. She had thought the mysterious woman to be a nurse, but was informed that there was no nurse.

It was nearly a week before Miss Hartley saw Mr. Brympton and she understood why he was unpopular in the house. He came and went, ~~never~~ staying more than a day, always cursing and grumbling at everything. It was plain that his marriage was an unhappy one since Mrs. Brympton had just the opposite temperament. Miss Hartley, like the other servants, found Mr. Ramford a pleasant companionable gentleman who was kind and sympathetic.

Everything went fine yet Hartley felt uneasy. Later she learnt, with mysterious reasons, that within the last six months — since the death of Emma Saxon who had lived with Mrs. Brympton for about twenty years — Mrs. Brympton had had four maids.

Mr. Brympton came home one day and Hartley heard him accuse his wife angrily of making the place like the family vault, referred sneeringly to Mr. Ramford as the only person fit for her to talk to. In the middle of that night Hartley was awakened by the maid's bell and felt that someone from the locked room had come out and passed her room. When she knocked at her mistress's room, she was startled to be received by Mr. Brympton, whose apartment was on the far end of the house, and was even shocked to be asked angrily by Mr. Brympton how many maids there were to knock at the door. Mrs. Brympton, in her seemingly weak state, also mistook her for Emma.

The next morning Mrs. Brympton sent her to the chemist's to have a prescription filled and to take a note to Mr. Ramford. She also gave strict orders that Miss Hartley should be back before Mr. Brympton got up. It was a strange order that puzzled the maid and that afternoon she happened to find a picture of the woman whom she had seen on the first day of her arrival and to her horror learning that it was Emma.

Contrary to his usual practice, Mr. Brympton stayed on for nearly a week. Hartley heard him say sneeringly that since he was in the house, Ramford never showed up but when they met, the two men seemed to be on good terms. After that Mr. Brympton departed and was absent for a month. Everybody understood that he was cruising in the West Indies. Mr. Ramford continued to call but less often and Miss Hartley noticed that there was a change in him.

Mrs. Brympton became more dependent on Hartley and Hartley, in spite of the thought about the locked room, felt brighter and happier when, late one afternoon, she saw the apparition of Emma who led her to Mr. Ramford's door. Before Hartley could understand what Emma wanted, Mr. Ramford came out of the house and before she could give him a reason for being there, she fainted. When Hartley came to her senses, she simply told Hartford that she had had a dizzy spell while taking a walk.

It was a fearful night for Hartley. She dared not spend a solitary evening in her own room but stayed downstairs until she was overcome by sleepiness. In her bedroom she thought she heard the opening and closing of the garden door but she saw nobody in the garden. She was soon awakened by the bell and in the hall she saw Emma's apparition again. Her mistress answered the door and denied that she had rung the bell. Miss Hartley noticed that her mistress had not undressed for the night and Miss Hartley sensed something terrible was going to happen. She immediately said that she thought she heard Mr. Brympton's footstep down below. Mrs. Brympton, upon hearing this, fell into a dead faint. Suddenly Mr. Brympton flung the door open and in spite of the shocking scene hurried to enter his wife's dressing-room. Miss Hartley did not know what she thought or feared but she tried to detain him; he, however, shook her off furiously when both heard a slight noise inside. Mr. Brympton tore the door open at once but there on the threshold stood Emma. At the sight of Emma, he threw his hands over his face. Mrs. Brympton opened her eyes, stared at him and fell back dead.

In "The Lady's Maid's Bell" Mrs. Wharton succeeds remarkably in leaving in her reader a feeling of mystery and uneasiness.. Though the story was seemingly incredible one cannot help admiring Mrs. Wharton for her talent in creating suspense and horror. The power of the story also arises from the way the devotion of the former lady's maid, Emma Saxon, reaches across the barriers of death to summon her successor to help the mistress she had loved.

"A Bottle of Perrier" and "Pomegranate Seed" are two other supernatural stories among Mrs. Wharton's later short stories that show no marked falling off in power. In "A Bottle of Perrier" the supernatural is again subtly treated. No wraith appears except in the minds of the two men. ^{The} art of the story is best appreciated when one realizes/_{how} important the absence of the bottle of perrier is in the story.

Medford a young American archaeologist took a long journey to see Almodham, his queer English friend who had chosen to live in the desert at Athens. His friend's choice of living in an isolated place like this had amazed him for a long time but once he saw the place he understood that to anyone tired of the Western fret and fever, this was a perfect place, for behind the walls of this desert fortress peace lingers. He was informed that Almodham had gone away to visit old ruins before he arrived but had given full instructions to his servant to take excellent care of Medford until his return.

Medford was content in this place and was very well entertained. The only thing that annoyed him was that at first Gosling, Almodham's English butler, promised him a bottle of perrier but soon reported that the water was all gone. Medford asked for plain water and Gosling boiled the well water for him. However Meford was struck by the queer atmosphere of the place and the eccentric manner of Gosling who seemed to keep him away from the Arab servants. Medford was kept waiting for many days. This delay made him begin to suspect that something strange might have happened to Almodham. He therefore resolved to go after Almodham with Selim, an Arab servant, but he was warned not to do so by Gosling

who said that it might cause his death. Medford discovered that Gosling longed to go to Wembly near London, where the famous exhibition was held in 1924 and Gosling had long been promised the trip by his master. When Medford said that he might be able to take him there, Gosling felt very grateful to him. Everything went on mysteriously and Medford began to realize that he was being kept waiting intentionally by the queer Almodham himself. He even felt that Almodham, finding pleasure in watching him, was hiding somewhere in the house and would come out only at night for a walk. He was so firm in his guess that he resolved to stay out until late near the well, the water of which had a terrible smell. Gosling tried to make him go inside so Medford immediately asked whether Gosling was afraid that he might see Almodham taking a walk. The retort electrified Gosling whose nerve failed. He revealed that Almodham due to Medford's arrival broke his promise to let him go on a holiday in England after years of service in this lonely place, he was so angry that he had lost control of himself and hit Almodham who fell into the well. The well water therefore stank and because the bottles of perrier had not arrived Gosling had had to serve Medford water from that polluted well.

The last supernatural story available is "Pomegranate Seed" in which Mrs. Wharton succeeded again in revealing again her ability in accumulating little details to build up to a climax of horror and suspense. Besides the story also shows the strong spiritual struggle of the two women for the man they both love. This story would not be as interesting as it is if this struggle had been presented in a natural form, but with the supernatural plot one feels more strongly the intensity of this struggle.

Charlotte Gorse married Kenneth Ashby, a widower whose first wife had died suddenly. Her friends had warned her of the possibility of fighting his "old entanglement" since Kenneth Ashby was well-known for his love for Elise, his first wife who had completely dominated him. But Charlotte believed that her good nature, sophistication and great love for Ashby would help her to overcome all difficulties.

Charlotte was successful in making her husband perfectly happy with her during their two months' honeymoon. But the day after their return from their honeymoon, a mysterious letter in a grey envelope was waiting for her husband. At first she paid no attention to it but it aroused her curiosity when she chanced to be looking at him and noticed at once how quickly the letter changed him to an uneasy miserable state of mind. She was the more terrified to observe the same sort of letters come at regular intervals, but she was never told about them and the worst part of it was that Kenneth always acted strangely whenever he got one : sometimes he was silent for the rest of the evening; and if he spoke, it was usually to hint some criticism of her household arrangements. For this reason Charlotte found herself yielding to a nervous apprehension since to be shut out in the dark with her conjectures was unbearable. She had thought of opening the eighth letter but finally resolved to see for herself what would happen between him and the letter when he thought himself unobserved. She saw at first his look of surprise, and later hesitation in opening it. Then he read and reread it and at last kissed it when Charlotte interrupted. Try as she would to make him reveal the secret about the letter and its contents, Charlotte had to give up, but she was quite sure that the letter was from a woman.

Charlotte thought of taking Kenneth on a long holiday as soon as possible to have a complete change from the horrible atmosphere that haunted him and her but to her dismay for inexplicable reasons he absolutely refused to go away. In her anger, she put her suspicion into words but was startled to see him cry. At the same time she observed in his eyes a look of yearning to escape from something. But although the struggle continued in her mind, his extraordinary reaction made her weaken in her attempt to get an answer from him. She was going to leave him alone when suddenly he caught her firmly promising to go wherever she wanted.

Kenneth's promise made Charlotte think that the victory was hers. But the following morning she found that Kenneth had left for his office before she woke up leaving a message

that he was going to see about their passages and asked her to be ready to sail the next day. This sudden decision made Charlotte even more sure about her victory. The only strange thing was he did not tell anything about their destination. She rang him up but learnt that he had gone out of town after dropping in at the office.

The information made Charlotte think that he must have gone to that woman to get her permission to leave. But after all, she felt she had a right to claim the victory since Kenneth was doing what she wanted. She waited for his return until late in the afternoon. Finally since she had learnt from the office that Kenneth had not yet returned there, she decided to telephone her mother-in-law. Kenneth was not at his mother's, but old Mrs. Ashby asked her for dinner.

It was after nine that Charlotte left old Mrs. Ashby's house. The old lady insisted on accompanying her home. At home another letter was waiting and with anguish she showed it to old Mrs. Ashby asking if she knew that handwriting. She saw her mother-in-law's startled look at the sight but she denied that she knew the handwriting and even forbade Charlotte to open it. Anger drove her to reveal the strangeness of the letters and their effect on Kenneth. Learning that the letters had come since their return from the honeymoon, old Mrs. Ashby decided that the letter should be opened. But they only caught a glimpse of very weak handwriting that they could not make out except for words that looked like "mine" and "come".

Old Mrs. Ashby grew so pale that Charlotte was certain that she knew whose handwriting it was. But when she insisted, she saw old Mrs. Ashby look fixedly at the blank wall where a picture of Elsie Ashby had formerly hung. This answered Charlotte's question. Shocked, Charlotte must have been, but she angrily announced that everything was possible : if it was possible for old Mrs. Ashby to see the face of Elsie on the blank wall, it was possible for Kenneth to see Elsie's handwriting which was illegible to others. She was sure that Elsie was everywhere in the house. The only thing old Mrs.

Ashby suggested was to notify the police. She thought that it would be better to do anything no matter what rather than nothing.

If the reader stops to think about the strange name of the story, they may feel that this short story is somewhat symbolic. In the Encyclopaedia Britannica, it is explained something like this :

King Solomon possessed an orchard of pomegranates, and when the children of Israel, wandering in the wilderness, sighed for the abandoned comforts of Egypt, the cooling pomegranates were remembered longingly. Centuries later, the prophet Mohammed remarked sententiously ' Eat the pomegranate, for it purges the system of envy and hatred.' It will thus be seen that this fruit is of exceptional interest because of its historic background.

From this quotation, one may see that pomegranates have special significance to the Israelites. They believe in what the prophet said. Mrs. Wharton may be using it symbolically: pomegranates stand for the letters sent to Kenneth Ashby and the one who consumes these pomegranates is his second wife, Charlotte Ashby. After the mystery is clear to her, she comes to the conclusion that she will never overcome the dominating power the dead woman has over her husband. But one consolation is that that woman no longer exists therefore there is no use to brood over her intervention. Charlotte then feels free from envy and hatred; the letters like the pomegranates of the Israelites have purged her soul. The supernatural factor displayed in this short story is again not too incredible. If one thinks carefully one will observe that the seemingly incredible incidents could take place in real life. This story on a supernatural theme is a good example to illustrate it. Charlotte is quite reasonable in saying that it is possible for a person to see something which is invisible to others if he is so attracted to that thing since imagination may lead him to see it.

From the beginning of her writing career Mrs. Wharton wrote with a mastery of words and technique. Her style manipulate and technique are remarkable. Her supernatural stories are evidence of this. And once one thinks of her style and

technique one is inclined to think of a story, which is not a supernatural one, or one of her typical stories but her most popular work, Ethan Frome.

Ethan Frome, considered a minor American classic, is a triumph of style and construction.⁵⁶ Mrs. Wharton herself felt that it was the first subject she had ever approached with full confidence in its value :

"It was not until I wrote 'Ethan Frome,' " she recalled in her memoirs, "that I suddenly felt the artisan's full control of his implements."⁵⁷

The details of this novelette are few but impressive; they arise easily and directly, and always with the sharpest pertinence, all of which help to develop intense emotion. Every reader will recall some of them for example : Mattie's tribute to the winter sunset :

"It looks just as if it was painted!"⁵⁸

Ethan's reluctance to have Mattie see him follow Zeena into their bedroom :

The doors of the two bedrooms faced each other across the narrow upper landing, and to-night it was peculiarly repugnant to him that Mattie should see him follow Zeena.⁵⁹

The watchful, sinister presence of Zeena's cat disturbs the intimacy of the lovers' evening together by appropriating its mistress' place at the table, breaking the pickle dish, and later seating itself in Zeena's rocking chair :

They (Ethan and Mattie) drew their seats up to the table, and the cat, unbidden, jumped between them into Zeena's empty chair.⁶⁰

The cat, unnoticed, had crept up on muffled paws from Zeena's seat to the table, and was stealthily elongating its body in the direction of the milk-jug which stood between Ethan and Mattie. The two leaned forward at the same moment and their hands met on the handle of the jug. Mattie's hand was underneath, and Ethan kept his clasp on it a moment longer than was necessary. The cat, profiting by this unusual demonstration, tried to effect an unnoticed retreat, and in doing so backed into the pickle-dish, which fell to the floor with a crash.⁶¹

Ethan made a pretext of getting up to replenish the stove, and when he returned to his seat he pushed it sideways that he might get a view of her profile and of the lamplight falling on her hands. The cat, who had been a puzzled observer of these unusual movements, jumped up into Zeeha's chair, rolled itself into a ball, and lay watching them with narrowed eyes. 62

To Mrs. Wharton, writing of fiction is an art of invention. She is therefore very careful in her selection of the material. She has made this clear in her literary criticism, The Writing of Fiction (1925). For this reason she writes mostly about what she really knows or has experienced and she is capable of handling a complicated social scene with ease, as a result she became an important novelist of manners. Her thorough knowledge of painting and architecture as well as poetry, fiction and drama adds to her the powers of creation. Unlike certain novelists who in their first fiction attracted attention by the discovery of new material, Mrs. Wharton developed gradually and rose to her fame many years after her first story appeared in "Scribner's Magazine."

One sure sign of Mrs. Wharton's success is her belief in moral value. Her fiction is not didactic, nevertheless she knows that a good subject must contain in itself something that sheds a light on our moral experience," otherwise it remains" a mere irrelevant happening, a meaningless scrap of fact torn out of its context."⁶³ She realizes that the inner conflict and contrast of the moral man or woman are the very life of art which is more worth representing than that of the immoral. Her skill in making her characters dominate the situation is another reason why Mrs. Wharton rises above her contemporary writers. Her characters are always active and realistic and it is worth noticing that great moments in her fiction are dominated by her heroines who are much better drawn than men. How well she knows the American woman, young and old, rich and poor, aristocratic and common, urban and rural! She has given us a great variety of female characters, from the luxury-loving Lily Bart, the tragic figures of Ellen Olenska and Charlotte Lovell to those other women, like Lydia Ralston and May

Weeland who, from their strongholds of matrimony and respectability, dominate others, yet have always felt that the very women they control or combat have a rapture they have never known! There are the remarkable dowagers, Mrs. Mingott and Mrs. Peniston; the ruthless forces of evil Bertha Dorset and Zeena Frome.

Mrs. Wharton's versatility is shown not only in her characters but also in the background. In her fiction New York is a town with traditions. She watched the social barrier of the old commercial and financial New York being stormed by new forms of wealth. To New England where she had had long residence she turned largely for tragedy. For the Middle Western civilization she had no real sympathy and used it simply for contrast with the east. Her European scene is authentic showing how well she knew those places. Her supernatural stories usually have remote settings and their appearances are not mere wraiths but the results of the working of emotional forces. Usually she leaves a way out through a natural explanation which gives the story more force and value. No matter what themes she renders in her stories Mrs. Wharton is capable of painting them with genius style and technique all of which make her outstanding among the modern writers of the twentieth century.