

APPENDICES

1. Biography of Edith Wharton

Edith Wharton was born Edith Newbold Jones on January 24, 1862. Edith's parents, George Frederic and Lucretia Jones, were descendants of English and Dutch colonists who had made fortunes in shipping, banking, and real estate. Edith Jones belonged to the small, most fashionable society of New York which lived on inherited wealth and was interrelated. After a six sojourn of traveling and living in Europe with her family, she returned at the age of ten to live on Twenty-Third Street, near Fifth Avenue, in Manhattan. Her society at that time was a society in which the only acceptable aim for a young woman of the upper class was to enter into marriage with a gentleman of the upper class and become mistress of a household. As a daughter of society, her role was to learn the mannerisms and rituals expected of well-bred young women in those days. Later she would rebel against this role but as a child she was schooled at home and had the privilege of use of her father's extensive library. She was privately educated at home and in Europe by governesses and tutors.

In 1885, Wharton married Edward "Teddy" Robbins Wharton, who was twelve years older than she was. He was attractive and kind, a man of leisure from a similar social background and a good sportsman. They lived a life of relative ease with homes in New York, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts. However, he had none of her artistic or intellectual interests and their marriage was very unhappy. Slowly, Wharton grew dissatisfied with the roles of wife and society matron. In 1907, at the age of forty-five, she would begin a passionate love affair--apparently the only one of her life--with the journalist Morton Fullerton. The relationship was brief, but it marked a profound emotional and sexual awakening for Wharton. Teddy, meanwhile, began to suffer from mental illness. He also took a mistress, and embezzled money from his wife to buy his mistress a house. He was institutionalized in 1912, and in 1913, Edith divorced him. She would never remarry.

Between 1900 and 1938, Wharton created many, many novels. The publication of *The House of Mirth* in 1905 marked the true beginning of Wharton's literary career. She continued to publish rapidly, producing, among others, *Ethan Frome* in 1911.

Wharton's most famous novel is *The Age of Innocence* (1920), which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. The story described the frustrated love of a New York lawyer, Newland Archer, for unconventional, artistic Ellen Olenska, the separated wife of a dissolute Polish count. Wharton contrasts the manner of the New World with those of Old Europe. Finally Archer married his calculating fiancée May, representing the 19th-century domestic virtues. Archer's decision promoted his family's wealth underlined the novel's point that individual happiness is secondary to the continuation of the prevailing culture.

When WWI began, Wharton was in the middle of it. She traveled extensively by motorcar, helped untiringly with refugees in Paris during the first World War, and actually only returned once again in her lifetime to the United States to accept the Pulitzer prize for her novel, *The Age of Innocence*.

Through her life she held salon where the gifted intellectuals of her time gathered to discuss and shared ideas. Teddy Roosevelt, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Ernest Hemingway were all guests of hers at one time or another. Another facet of Edith's career was her friendship with Henry James whose influence on her writing is inestimable. Although, traditionally, Henry James is considered "better" by critics, now that the stodgy prejudice against women writers is lessening, most agree that the two are on par.

Wharton's last novel *The Buccaneers* (1938), was left unfinished, but her literary executor had the novel published in 1938. Wharton died in France, St.-Brice-sous-Forêt, on August 11, 1937.

2. The synopsis

Newland Archer cannot be more pleased with his recent engagement to the beautiful debutante May Welland. However, his world is thrown upside down by the sensational arrival of May' s cousin, Countess Ellen Olenska. Recently returned to America after running away from her husband, a philandering Polish count, Countess Olenska shocks the staid New York aristocracy with her revealing clothes, carefree manners, and rumors of adultery. Because the Countess' s family, headed by the powerful Mrs. Manson Mingott, have chosen to reintroduce her into good society, Archer and May feel it necessary to befriend her.

As Archer comes to better know the Countess, he begins to appreciate her unconventional views on New York society. Meanwhile, Archer becomes increasingly disillusioned with his new fiancée, May. He begins to see her as the manufactured product of her class: polite, innocent, and utterly devoid of personal opinion and sense of self.

The Countess Olenska soon announces her intention of divorcing her husband. While Archer supports her desire for freedom, he feels compelled to act on behalf of the Mingott family and persuade Ellen to remain married. At a friend' s cottage near Hudson, Archer realizes that he is in love with Ellen. He abruptly leaves the next day for Florida, where he is reunited with May and her parents, who are there on vacation. There, he presses May to shorten their engagement. May becomes suspicious and asks him if his hurry to get married is prompted by the fear that he is marrying the wrong person. Archer reassures May that he is in love with her. Back in New York, Archer calls on Ellen, and Archer admits that he is in love with her. Just then, a telegram arrives from May, announcing that her parents have pushed forward the wedding date.

After their wedding and honeymoon in Europe, Archer and May settle down to married life in New York. Over time, Archer' s memory of Ellen fades to a wistful image. But on vacation in Newport, he is reunited with her, and Ellen promises not to return to Europe as long as she and Newland do not act upon their love for each other.

Back in New York, Archer learns that Count Olenski wants his wife to return to him and that Ellen has refused. After the stroke of her grandmother, Ellen returns to New York to care for her. She and Archer agree to consummate their affair. But suddenly, Ellen announces her intention to return to Europe. May throws a farewell party for Ellen, and after the guests leave, May announces to Archer that she is pregnant and that she has told Ellen her news two weeks earlier.

Twenty-five years pass. In that time, the Archers have had three children and May has died from pneumonia. Now Archer's son convinces him to travel to France. There, they arrange to visit the Countess Olenska at her Paris apartment. However, at the last minute Archer sends his son alone to visit her, content instead to live with his memories of the past.