

Snobs Study Guide

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Plot Summary

Snobs is a novel about Edith Lavery, a young English woman from a middle-class background who meets and marries an upper-class Earl, Charles Broughton. Although she imagines that her new wealth and position will make her happy, Edith soon finds she is not fully accepted by Charles' upper-class friends and family, particularly Charles' imperious mother, Lady Uckfield. She leaves behind her active social life in London to live with Charles and his parents at their country estate, where she becomes bored and unhappy. When an attractive actor named Simon comes to the estate as part of the cast of a film, she begins having an affair with him, eventually leaving Charles and moving to London with Simon, who has left his wife, as well. Although happy for a short time, Edith finds she does not fit in with his group of friends, who seem only interested in her because of the scandal she has caused. After six months with Simon, she finds she is pregnant. Forced to take stock of her life and learning that Charles still loves her, Edith returns to him despite the efforts of his mother to keep her away. She returns to live in the country, has the child, and later another. She is never fully accepted by Charles' mother, and she still does not have the glamorous carefree life she imagines the upper class enjoys, but she finds she is content.

Snobs is narrated by an unnamed character who is from an upper-class background and has become an actor. Inhabiting both of these exclusive worlds, he trains a keen eye on the behavior of the "snobs," unveiling the motivations behind their apparent snobbishness, and suggesting that their apparent belief in their own superiority is really a result of not knowing any other way to behave. The narrator knows the unspoken meaning behind the various forms of politeness shown by the upper class and reveals them to the reader. As someone who is successfully established in both the upper- and upper-middle classes the narrator provides the other characters with a conduit between the two, facilitating introductions and acting as go-between. He first meets Edith through mutual friends David and Isabel, an upper-middle-class couple who live near the Broughton estate. While visiting the estate as part of a public tour, they run into Charles Broughton, whom the narrator knows slightly. He introduces Edith to Charles, and when the two of them meet again at a social event Charles invites Edith to dinner, beginning their courtship. As Edith becomes more involved with Charles, David and Isabel, who would like to belong to Charles' social set, try to invite themselves to events at the estate. They are eventually included when Charles' parents throw a large dinner party to announce the engagement of Charles and Edith. The narrator is also unwittingly responsible for Edith's affair when he arranges for Simon to attend a dinner at the Broughton estate where he charms Edith.

The novel takes place in the 1990s, when social mobility has become more common in Great Britain. Some people from the middle class who have become very wealthy aspire to be thought of as belonging to the exclusive upper class. Although they are able to adopt a similar lifestyle, attend many of the same social events and marry into the exclusive upper class, they are still looked on as outsiders who do not truly belong.



Chapter 1

Summary

Chapter 1

The first chapter introduces Edith Lavery, the main character, as well as the voice of the unnamed narrator, from whose point of view most of the story is told. Edith and the narrator first meet through mutual friends, David and Isabel Easton. Isabel and the narrator are childhood friends. Isabel and David are an affluent couple who live in Sussex, in a nice home near Broughton Hall, the large estate where Lord and Lady Uckfield live with their son, Charles Broughton.

The narrator meets Edith when they are both invited to stay with the Eastons in Sussex. She is pretty and charming, and the narrator likes her immediately. During their visit, Edith suggests they take a tour of Broughton Hall, which is partly open to the public. She does not realize this is a sore subject with David, who as a wealthy member of the upper-middle class aspires to move in the same social circles as the upper class Broughton family. Although he and Isabel have lived nearby for some time, they have never been invited socially to the estate and in fact have never even visited it. To go to the house as paying tourists would be an admission to David that he had failed to enter the Broughton's social circle on his own terms. David makes an excuse not to join the others, who go to tour the house.

The narrator reveals that he is an actor who has had some small success. He is also from an upper-class background and has in fact met Charles Broughton, the heir to the estate, on a few occasions. As he, Edith, and Isabel are taking the tour of the house, the narrator sees Charles through a window. Charles, recognizing him, waves. They run into Charles again as they are leaving the house, and Charles greets the narrator. The narrator briefly introduces Edith and Isabel, and they leave. In the car, Isabel is cold toward the narrator for never having mentioned that he knows Charles Broughton. The narrator pretends that he thought he had mentioned it before, but he knows he has not.

Analysis

Three of the central characters are introduced in the first chapter. Edith Lavery, who will be established as the main character, is described as a woman with disarming beauty and charm. When she meets Charles, the Earl Broughton, at the end of the chapter, their eventual marriage is foreshadowed.

Charles Broughton, although glimpsed only briefly in the first chapter, is also introduced. He does not really know the narrator closely, but recognizes him as a member of his own social circle and so automatically shows him the proper level of politeness. He is cordial to Edith and Isabel, but apparently deaf to Isabel's hints about living nearby.



The narrator is also established in the first chapter. His upper-class background is implied incidentally through his social acquaintance with Charles. His position between the upper-class world of the Broughtons and the upper-middle class world of David and Isabel is established here. He is comfortable in both, but is also well aware that social "climbers" like David and Isabel might try to take advantage of his position to ingratiate themselves with the upper class.

This social mobility between the classes is one of the main themes of the novel, and it is first described here in the characters of David and Isabel, a wealthy couple who imagine they have earned the right to be considered "upper class" but do not fully understand the barriers that are in place.

Discussion Question 1

What do we learn about the narrator in the first chapter? What is his background?

Discussion Question 2

What are your first impressions of Edith Lavery? What do the other characters think of her?

Discussion Question 3

What is the relationship between the narrator and Isabel? and David?

Vocabulary

Albeit, longevity, pastel, potentates, eking, acme, spurious, pragmatic, rusticated, finial.



Chapter 2

Summary

Chapter 2

Edith Lavery grew up on the fringes of society. Her father a descendent of Jewish immigrants, her mother a descendent of a distant, low-ranking royal (her grandmother was a great-niece of a baronet) "the very lowest hereditary rank" (p.12) Mrs. Lavery imagines herself part of "society" and wants to introduce her daughter into that world.

The Lavery's are well off, but not part of the upper-class society that Mrs. Lavery intends to have their daughter, Edith, become a part of. Edith is agreeable and enjoys the parties and dresses that go along with being a society debutante. Although upper class girls attend, there is still segregation between them and the girls from upper-middles class, like Edith. Edith goes to a good school, and is friendly with the upper-class girls she knows from there, but after the debut she goes on much as before, getting a job as a receptionist.

The narrator runs into her at lunchtime in London after their first meeting in Sussex. Just as the narrator never mentioned to Isabel that he had met Charles Broughton, Edith has not told her mother about meeting him for fear she would go overboard trying to get her to marry him. She admits to the narrator that her best prospect might be to meet and marry a wealthy man, but she is reluctant to recognize how cold this sounds. The narrator is sympathetic. He thinks a person should admit to themselves exactly what they want and avoid the let-down later on in life.

The narrator is called away for a few months on an acting job. After he returns to England he is invited by Isabel to join her, David and some friends at Ascot, a horse race that is a regular social event. Ascot, the narrator explains, is an event that allows upper-middle class people like David and Isabel to rub elbows with the upper-class people like Charles Broughton, and imagine for a few days that they all belong to the "vanished leisure class." (p.17) The event is not as exclusive or as luxurious as the tradition makes it out to be, however, the narrator explains.

Edith has come along, and she walks around the Royal Enclosure with the narrator. Charles Broughton sees the narrator and says hello. He remembers Edith from their brief meeting at the house and she takes his arm. Seeing David and Isabel approaching, eager to meet Broughton, he tries to steer them off. Isabel approaches and Charles, always polite, acknowledges her, but David hangs back.

The narrator, Charles and Edith move along, with Charles obviously charmed by her. When he suggests they all go have tea at the exclusive tent of Charles' club, the narrator excuses himself, sensing that Edith would like to go alone with Charles.



The narrator finds David and Isabel at one of the bars. At the news that Edith has gone to tea with Charles, David sulks. Isabel seems less irritated. They all meet back at David's car afterwards. He is grumpy with Edith, so she whispers to the narrator that Charles has asked her out for dinner the following week.

Analysis

More is learned about Edith's background and her motivations in Chapter 2. Although she herself has no overt desire to join the upper class, her mother does. Edith is brought up mirroring the social conventions of the upper class, having a formal coming out party and going to an expensive private school. Although she becomes acquainted with some girls from upper-class society, at the end of the parties and after graduation they go their own way. Edith is reluctant to tell her mother about her chance meeting with Charles Broughton for fear that she will begin to push Edith to take advantage of it.

This is the first of the challenges Edith faces as she finds herself between the two worlds of the upper class and the upper-middle class. She has a similar challenge when she is asked to dinner by Charles and feels she must hide the fact from David and Isabel.

The separation between the classes is illustrated in the scene at Ascot. Once an event for royalty and the upper classes, it is now a chance for people like David and Isabel to mingle with the upper class and imagine themselves as part of the same social circle. Even within the "royal enclosure," however, there are distinctions. Charles is able to dine at the tent of his exclusive club, from which David and Isabel would be excluded unless invited by a member. The narrator, attempting to maneuver between his upper-class acquaintance Charles and his upper-middle class friends, the Eastons, tries to avoid a situation where Charles might feel obligated to invite them to his tent.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Edith reluctant to tell her mother about Charles Broughton?

Discussion Question 2

How does the event at Ascot parallel the larger relationship between the upper-middle and upper classes?

Discussion Question 3

Why do David and Isabel react as they do to Edith's second meeting with Charles? Why does she keep their date a secret?



Vocabulary

Unlamented, echelons, demarcation, dyslexia, disparity, pretensions, perennial, brevity, archetype, enraptured.



Chapter 3

Summary

Chapter 3

Edith Lavery is preparing for her dinner with Charles Broughton. Although not promiscuous, she has had some romantic encounters, including one year-long relationship with a well-off stockbroker that ended when he left for another woman. She had attended their wedding. Later she was involved with a man named George, who she had been attracted to physically but was "too frightful." (p. 23) At the age of 27 she is beginning to become worried that her prospects are dwindling.

Edith is not, strictly speaking, a snob, or someone only out to marry a rich man. She freely admits she would prefer to be "on the inside looking out rather than the other way round" (p. 25) but she is not ambitious about marrying someone of high rank. In a passage that foreshadows her eventual marriage to Broughton, the author writes "She was not looking for a successful costermonger but she was not really looking for an earl either. Which probably explains why she got one."(p. 25)

Edith lives with her parents, to whom she introduces Charles when he arrives to pick her up. She has not told them about his title, and only introduces him as "Charles." Her mother, however, immediately asks his last name. She recognizes who he is, but does not let on, as she believes is proper. To her relief, Charles does not let on that he had first met Edith when she was a paying guest touring his house.

Charles takes Edith to dinner at a nightclub, where they are joined by Jane and Henry Cumnor. Jane is a pretty and talkative woman and her husband a large, somewhat surly man who is a member of the House of Lords. Jane eagerly asks Charles about people they both know and his plans for traveling, conversation which is meant to exclude Edith, whom she quickly realizes is not a member of the upper class. Charles, aware of Jane's rudeness, makes efforts to include Edith in the conversation. Edith learns that Charles has a sister, named Caroline, who has recently married a man named Eric. She infers from Henry's curt description that Eric is also not from the upper class.

Charles takes Edith home and kisses her. He goes from there to one of the apartments his family owns in London. He does not like to be in London, preferring to take care of the country estates his family has. As he sits alone, thinking over the evening, he imagines what his imperious mother, Lady Uckfield, would think of Edith. He of course knows that she would prefer that he marry someone in his own class, and he would be happy to do that if he could find someone he felt he was marrying for love. He knows Edith is not "ludicrously unsuitable" as a possible wife, but "nevertheless not what his mother was hoping for." (p. 37) Despite this, a few days later, he calls Edith again and asks her out.



Analysis

The narrator's point of view is temporarily absent in Chapter Three, which focuses on Edith's background and her first date with Charles. She hides his full identity from her parents until the last possible moment, when he is introduced to them while picking her up for their dinner date. That this budding romance will eventually end in marriage is clearly signaled by the author at this point.

Edith gets a taste of what life among the upper class will be like when she and Charles are joined by the Cumnors. They immediately engage in what the author describes as the usual type of idle talk among the upper classes, running through the names of mutual acquaintances as if to reaffirm their own position within their exclusive social class. This ritual also serves to exclude people like Edith, who do not know the same people. This scene with Jane Cumnor will be reversed after Edith marries Charles and gains a title.

The shadow of Lady Uckfield, Charles' mother, is cast near the end of the chapter as Charles sits and contemplates whether he should continue seeing Edith. He knows that his mother will object, and the question seems to be whether pursuing her will be worth incurring his mother's anger. He appears to show some character when he invites Edith out again.

Discussion Question 1

What is Edith's relationship history and why does it matter to the story?

Discussion Question 2

How does Edith's mother react to her date with Charles Broughton?

Discussion Question 3

How does the author foreshadow the major conflicts of the story?

Vocabulary

Inkling, ruminations, materialistic, costermonger, nubile, worsted, ghastly, shambled, miscegenation, interloper.



Chapter 4

Summary

Chapter 4

After dating Charles for a short while, Edith begins to attract attention in the popular press, including photographs, profiles and appearances on television talk shows. Soon she has become somewhat famous, but begins to "believe her own publicity," (p. 38) mistakenly thinking she is drawing all the attention because she has an interesting life, rather than just being famous for being famous.

The narrator runs into Edith at a restaurant having lunch. She somewhat desperately asks if he will come to Sussex the following weekend for a dinner party at Broughton Hall. He suspects the dinner is to announce their engagement, but she does not confirm his suspicion.

The narrator goes to the dinner, attending with David and Isabel, who are excited to finally have been invited to Broughton Hall socially but are trying to conceal their excitement. At the dinner, he meets Charles' mother, Lady Uckfield, for the first time. She seems at first to be an unimposing woman, but he soon discovers she is adept at speaking in the sort of coded way that upper-class people have of indicating they know the social status of those to whom they are speaking. The narrator, whose own family is from the upper class, is just as adept at deciphering this coded talk. When Lady Uckfield says to David and Isabel, "How lovely it is to welcome some friends of our darling Edith," he immediately understands that Lady Uckfield does not like Edith. (p. 42) Charles' father, the Marquess of Uckfield, is an amiable but unintelligent man.

At dinner, the narrator is seated next to Caroline, Charles' sister. He learns that her husband is in advertising and that unlike Charles she detests the country, preferring London. They discuss Edith, and Caroline compares her to an animal that has caught its prey. After dinner, Charles' father stands and announces their engagement. The party drinks to Edith and Charles. Caroline mutters to the narrator that she hopes Edith knows what she is about to get into.

Analysis

With Charles' commitment to continue seeing Edith comes a kind of celebrity for her. She soaks in the attention. Perhaps, as the narrator suggests, she even begins to believe that she is truly worthy of the media's interest on her own merits. She remains savvy, however, and tries to use the publicity to her advantage.

A chance meeting between Edith and the narrator results in his invitation to a grand dinner party at Broughton Hall. The scene at the dinner party introduces Lady Uckfield, whose influence has already been felt in the story. She is an outwardly gracious and



kind woman, but the narrator sees through her demeanor to recognize a powerful woman who is intent on upholding the traditions of her class and rank.

David and Isabel finally receive the social invitation they have long coveted but they find they are paired off with other outsiders like Eric, the husband of Charles' sister, Caroline. They see Edith's connection to Charles as an entry to the upper class.

Caroline's marriage to an upper-middle class man provides a parallel to Charles' marriage to Edith. Caroline is more worldly than Charles and views Edith as someone like her own husband, Eric, who preys on the upper class for their own gain. The narrator suggests that this is not Edith's sole intention, although he notes she has started to affect some of the mannerisms of her new social circle.

Discussion Question 1

Is Edith completely taken in by her new life as a minor celebrity?

Discussion Question 2

How do David and Isabel anticipate the dinner at Broughton Hall? What is their reaction afterward?

Discussion Question 3

What is Lady Uckfield's reaction to Edith?

Vocabulary

Quell, advantageous, disheartening, redolent.



Chapter 5

Summary

Chapter 5

In Chapter 5, the narrator comes to know Charles a bit better when he is invited to attend the bachelor party thrown by several of his friends. To the dismay of David, the narrator is also invited to be an usher at the wedding. The narrator downplays the invitations to Isabel, suggesting he was only invited to be an usher as a formality for having introduced the couple.

For the bachelor party, Charles and twelve of his friends fly to Paris for an evening on the town. In Charles' friends, the narrator recognizes some regular upper-class types, including the somewhat dense Henry Cumnor and the amiable Tommy Wainwright,. Wainwright sometimes flies in the face of upper-class tradition. Eric, Caroline's husband, also attends, and the narrator discovers what a disagreeable person he is. He is rude to wait staff and makes several disparaging remarks about Edith and her supposedly ulterior motives in marrying Charles. The evening culminates in a visit to a nightclub with female impersonators where one performer has been paid to sing a number that makes fun of Edith, portraying her as a gold digger only interested in Charles' money. Eric is behind the stunt, which Charles does not find amusing.

Charles leaves the nightclub angry and the narrator follows him. Charles is upset, but also angry that his supposed friends have behaved so stupidly. The narrator catches a glimpse of a depth to Charles he had not noticed before and begins to respect his basic decency.

Analysis

The narrator continues to walk the line between the classes in Chapter 6 as he is invited to participate in Charles and Edith's wedding and attend Charles' bachelor party, an event which takes up most of the chapter. At this party, Charles' upper class friends demonstrate that they can behave as crudely as anyone else when they go out for a bawdy night in Paris. The episode with the nightclub dancer impersonating Edith gets out of hand in a way that seems to portray the men as snobs who look down on Edith, and by extension on Charles. The narrator suspects, correctly as it will be revealed later, that it is actually Eric Chase who inserted the especially insulting portion into the performance, which was intended by the others to be only a bit of light teasing. Eric, of course, is not considered a real member of the upper class, only having married into it. His nastiness directed at Edith, who has also married into the upper class, is perhaps meant to solidify his own feeling of belonging.



Discussion Question 1

What motivates Eric Chase's negative opinion of Edith?

Discussion Question 2

How does Charles react to the teasing of his friends?

Discussion Question 3

How does the narrator's opinion of Charles change, and why?

Vocabulary

Placatory, smitten, sumptuous, perspicacity, belligerent.



Chapter 6

Summary

Chapter 6 opens on the day of Charles' and Edith's wedding. Edith awakes in her room aware that her life is about to change and feeling like she is in a daze. Her mother, Stella Lavery, is very excited that her daughter is about to become a countess. Kenneth Lavery, Edith's father, has spent a good deal of money on the affair.

The wedding is attended by several members of the upper class on Charles' side, including some members of the royal family. On Edith's side, her mother has invited a distant relative who holds a minor title to represent her family's connection to past nobility. The narrator has a brief discussion with Lady Uckfield after the wedding in which she seems to be intentionally trying to make him feel welcome. He is wary, but he understands that she is signaling to him that she has no objection to him remaining in touch with Edith. She is delighted to learn that the narrator enjoys shooting sports, as this will make it easier for him to fit in with Charles' circle. The narrator also speaks alone with Edith, who tells him about their honeymoon plans to go to Rome and Mallorca.

Analysis

This chapter describes the actual wedding day of Edith and Charles, an event that places their two backgrounds in stark contrast. On the Broughton side of the wedding are wealthy elite guests including royalty. On Edith's side are her few friends and some distant relatives invited by her mother. There is a satirical flavor to Mrs. Lavery's invitation to her distant cousins who happen to hold a minor title of nobility. In her mind it is done out of propriety, as that is what would be expected in the upper class. In reality, it is to let the Broughton family know that her background is not entirely "common." The one lone titled guest on Edith's side creates an amusing balance to the sea of nobility on Charles' side.

The narrator's friendship with Lady Uckfield continues to develop, although he is well aware that she is maintaining control. He is able to interpret her coded way of speaking to understand she has deemed him a suitable friend to Charles and a welcome house guest. The implication is that even though the narrator himself has an upper-class background his connection to Edith might otherwise have excluded him the way that David and Isabel are excluded as members of the upper-middle class.

Discussion Question 1

How does Edith's relationship with the narrator change during and after the wedding?



Discussion Question 2

How do the narrator and Lady Uckfield grow closer together? On what is their friendship based?

Discussion Question 3

How do Edith's parents react to the wedding?

Vocabulary

Firmament, milliner, wistful, crinoline, deputed.



Chapter 7

Summary

Chapter 7

Charles and Edith spend the night of the wedding in a hotel in London before flying to Rome. Although they had been dating for some time, they have not had sex before this point. Edith finds the experience now to be awkward and unsatisfying, but she hopes that things will improve as they become more relaxed with the thought of being married. She is slightly concerned that they do not seem to have much to talk about, but she tells herself that as they live together and share more experiences they will have more to share with one another. She is also heartened when the hotel staff refers to her as "my lady," telling herself "things could be worse." (p. 73)

Edith is charmed with her visit to Rome. She notices that Charles speaks more enthusiastically about the family estate at Broughton and another at Feltham, telling her his plans for improving them. He enjoys the country, and it is clear he wants her to share his enthusiasm. She makes an effort to engage Charles in conversation. From their outward appearance, the two seem to be a devoted, newlywed couple.

Analysis

Edith's gradual disenchantment with Charles begins almost immediately after the wedding when she discovers they may not be sexually compatible. Her concerns are offset somewhat by the exciting prospect of having a whole new world open up to her where she is called "my lady" and is treated with deference. She addresses her own concerns by telling herself that things will improve, but the narration suggests that conditions will only get slightly better.

The narration diverts from the point of view of the narrator character in this and the following chapter as the character of Edith embarks on her own with Charles. These chapters are told mostly from Edith's point of view and establish her feelings and motivations upon entering the circle of the upper class. These feelings will change over the course of the book, a development that is hinted at here.

Discussion Question 1

How does the author foreshadow the fate of Edith and Charles while they are on their honeymoon?



Discussion Question 2

What is Edith's response to her initial disappointment on their wedding night?

Discussion Question 3

How does Edith console herself after her disappointment?

Vocabulary

Ruminations, momentous, nomenclature, crashingly, unfeigned.



Chapter 8

Summary

Chapter 8

After their visit in Rome, Edith and Charles land on the island of Mallorca and are driven for two hours across the scrubby center of the island to the resort area where Eric and Caroline have rented a villa for the summer. Charles is dismayed to find that there are several other people staying at the villa, including Jane and Henry Cumnor and some business friends of Eric, Bob and Annette Watson. Edith tries to cheer Charles up about the crowd but is secretly glad there will be others there as she is intimidated by Caroline, does not like Eric, and has run out of things to talk to Charles about.

Edith notices that her relationship with Jane Cumnor has changed slightly since their first meeting. Jane is now more deferential to her. Bob and Annette Watson are outsiders. When they are not present, the others speak about them sarcastically. Edith takes exception at this, however, as she finds Annette to be funny and entertaining. She speaks her mind and makes a slight dig at the others about how all they talk about is other people they know.

The house party visits the opulent villa of a family named Frank, a family distantly connected to the Broughtons. Annette is awed by the large house and makes several comments about it. The upper-class guests do not remark on the grandeur of the home, as part of their regular behavior is never to be surprised at any display of wealth. In bed that evening, Edith repeats her observation that he and the others treat Annette unfairly. She is feeling confident expressing her opinion, but Charles responds sourly.

Analysis

This chapter illustrates Edith's first real social interaction as Lady Broughton. She is in a mixed group, with the upper-class friends and relatives of Charles, Eric Chase, Caroline's upper-middle class husband, and some "common" business acquaintances of his, Bob and Annette Watson. Edith has been accepted into the group to the point that the others do not hesitate to make sarcastic remarks about Bob and Annette in her presence. She further stakes out her position within the group by standing up for Annette, whom she likes. The others do not challenge her, but drop the subject. Later, when visiting the grand villa of the Frank family, Edith meets a quiet, boring young woman named Tina. Later, when she speaks to Charles about how she did not like Tina he scolds her and says she must be kind. She points out the double standard that he and the others are willing to overlook the behavior of someone from their own class but are quick to criticize someone who is an outsider. He has a somewhat petulant reaction to her expressing her opinion like this.



The tone of the chapter is optimistic, despite the negative remarks made by members of the house party. Edith, already having doubts about whether she will fit in with Charles and his family, is finding she enjoys the deference others are showing her and feels she has earned the right to speak her mind. Charles' reception of her opinions, however, indicate that her outspokenness may not be appreciated.

Discussion Question 1

How is Edith excluded from Charles' social circle while on their honeymoon? How is she included?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the double standard that Edith points out to Charles regarding the different treatment of Tina and Annette. Is Edith justified in her criticism?

Discussion Question 3

How does Edith feel she fits in with Charles' friends?

Vocabulary

Smilingly, unfazed, azure, litany.



Chapter 9

Summary

Chapter 9

Part Two of the novel begins with Chapter 9. Some time has passed, and the narrator has not seen much of Edith. She and Charles are occasionally in London, but she spends most of her time at Broughton Hall, where they live in the same large house as Charles' parents. The narrator is somewhat surprised to receive an invitation from Charles to come to Broughton for a shooting party. He accepts, having a few days free between acting jobs.

At Broughton, he finds Edith has settled into her role as "Countess Broughton." She is in a committee meeting along with Lady Uckfield when he arrives, and has taken on various charity causes. Edith is delighted to see the narrator. He is surprised to have been invited, thinking it was Edith's idea, but she informs him it was Lady Uckfield who suggested it, possibly to entertain Edith and remind her how good her life is now. Edith has become bored, and Lady Uckfield has recognized this. Charles seems to acknowledge her boredom, as well, but he feels she will adjust to life in the country and enjoy herself. Although the original plan had been for Charles and Edith to renovate Brook Farm, a farmhouse on the property, and live there, she has decided against it in favor of staying in the large house with Charles' parents. The narrator recognizes that Edith's decision is meant to avoid too much time on her own with only Charles. Although she does not get along completely with Lady Uckfield, she prefers the activity of the large household to keep her distracted, at least.

As the narrator is leaving, Charles takes him aside and asks his advice. A film crew has asked to use the estate in a production. He wants the narrator's advice on whether they should allow it. The narrator gives him a contact at an agency that negotiates contracts for this kind of thing. A grateful Charles says that he will make the narrator part of the deal.

Analysis

Although feeling guardedly optimistic at the end of Part One, Edith has discovered that despite her efforts to throw herself into the life of a country lady she is still unsatisfied. She confides in the narrator, but her dissatisfaction is no secret from Charles and Lady Uckfield. When the narrator learns that it was Lady Uckfield's idea to invite him to the shooting party he realizes she expects his presence will help Edith cope with the boredom. Lady Uckfield's efforts are placing the narrator character between Charles and Edith in a way. As someone who knew Edith before she was married, albeit only briefly, he represents a link to her former, more exciting life. He is also a member of the upper class, however, despite having become an actor, and Lady Uckfield seems to be



relying on him to somehow convey to Edith that she is expected to take on her responsibilities and keep up the proper appearances. Whether Lady Uckfield is truly concerned over Edith's feelings or simply worried that she will not behave properly is not clear. As the narrator suggests, it is not considered appropriate among the upper class to openly acknowledge one's emotions.

The short exchange about the film crew at the end of the chapter sets up the middle portion of the novel when the narrator and some of the actors associated with the production come to stay on the Broughton estate, facilitating Edith's affair.

Discussion Question 1

Why does the author introduce a gap in time between the previous chapter and this one? Does it serve the story?

Discussion Question 2

How does Brook Farm symbolize the relationship of Charles and Edith?

Discussion Question 3

How does Edith have to adapt her behavior to get along at Broughton Hall?

Vocabulary

Contingent, stipulate, suppressed, disheartening.



Chapter 10

Summary

Chapter 10

The film crew reaches an agreement with the Broughton family. Indeed, the narrator is hired to perform. The filming will take eight weeks, with about six weeks filming around the estate. The narrator phones Edith to tell her the news and she invites him to stay with them at Broughton Hall. He politely refuses, having already gotten the job through his connection to the family he does not want to alienate the other actors any more by staying in the luxurious house. In the end, he is put in a very small hotel room with two other actors, Simon Russell and Bella Stevens.

The conditions are very cramped and after a while the narrator asks the Broughtons if there might be an empty cottage on the estate they could rent. Lady Uckfield replies that since Edith and Charles will not be moving into Brook Farm the three actors might use it. She invites all three of them to dinner at the house so she can meet them.

Simon Russell is a very handsome actor playing the leading role in the film. At dinner at Broughton Hall he acts as if he is quite at home among the upper class, but the narrator explains that his acting convinces nobody. At dinner, Simon tries to charm Lady Uckfield but comes off looking a little foolish. Charles' father, on the other hand, is delighted by Bella, who tells him several amusing and slightly risqué stories. Edith, the narrator notices, is reserved. Her usually warm smile has been replaced with a colder one. After dinner she talks to the narrator about Simon, saying she could never take him seriously because he was so vain. By saying this, however, she accidentally seems to be admitting that she was paying close attention to him.

Analysis

Chapter 10 introduces Simon Russell, the man with whom Edith will have an affair. Her interest in Simon is hinted at in the closing sentences of the chapter when she speaks about him to the narrator. This affair will generate the main conflict in the story, around which many of the important themes are centered.

The narrator is seen interacting in both of his social circles at the same time in this chapter. He is equally at home in the somewhat squalid company of hard-working actors as in the fancy dining room at Broughton Hall. He suggests some parallels between the two groups. Like members of the upper class, actors come together for short periods of time, then go their separate ways for a time, often to run across one another on another job and easily take up wherever they left off. Although they are a more demonstrative and intimate group than the upper classes, they have a similar exclusive membership to their group. This will be developed further as Edith tries to fit in with Simon's social circle after leaving Charles.



Discussion Question 1

Compare Lady Uckfield and Lord Uckfield's reactions to their actor guests. Are they both snobs?

Discussion Question 2

How does the narrator assess Edith's emotional state at dinner. Is he concerned for her?

Discussion Question 3

How is Edith's eventual affair with Simon foreshadowed?

Vocabulary

Decorously, seldom, miffed, presumably.



Chapter 11

Summary

Chapter 11 opens with a scene between Charles and Edith. Edith has broken with her usual morning routine and decided to take a bath before breakfast. This change in habit has alarmed Charles mildly, and Edith is short with him when he asks her the reason for it. As Charles gets dressed and ready to go to Brook Farm to oversee getting it ready to rent, Edith thinks over her dissatisfaction. She has intentionally tried to stay away from London, even though Charles feels it might help her better cope with living in the country. Although she does not fully realize it, her reluctance to go to London more often is based on a fear that she might find it too enjoyable and not be able to bear returning to her life as a country lady.

Charles invites Edith to come to Brook Farm with him, but she declines at first. He understands she is dissatisfied, but he cannot fully grasp why. He has offered to spend more time in London and hoped that moving to Brook Farm would allow Edith to cultivate a social life in Sussex, away from his parents. Neither of these things have happened, and he is at a loss what to do about it.

After thinking over her situation while finishing her bath, Edith decides she will join Charles in looking over Brook Farm after all. From their film location, the narrator, Bella and Simon see Charles and Edith walking toward the farmhouse. Simon, who is not scheduled to be in any shots that day, says he will walk over to the farmhouse as well. His attraction to Edith is obvious to the other two actors. Although Simon is married, he has a reputation for bragging about his frequent romantic endeavors.

Simon returns from the farmhouse to tell the others they can move in right away and that they have been invited to dinner again at Broughton Hall. That evening, Edith has changed her mood. Instead of being sulky and cold as she was the previous night, she is lively and charming. In the drawing room before dinner, she defends Simon when Lady Uckfield makes a slightly sarcastic remark about his acting career. Simon is obviously charmed by Edith, who is slightly flirty with him for the rest of the evening. As the three actors return to Brook Farm that night, Bella notes that Simon is uncharacteristically quiet.

Analysis

The romance between Edith and Simon begins in Chapter 11 as Edith appears to have made some kind of decision about what to do about her dissatisfaction. Simon seems to be a willing party to her flirtation and the chapter ends with an ominous foreshadowing of the affair that is to follow.

The first part of the chapter is told from an omniscient point of view, depicting the thoughts of Edith and Charles. This gives the author a chance to more fully describe



these characters without having to rely on the point of view of the narrator character. Providing some richer background for these characters also makes the episode of the affair more interesting to the reader by demonstrating that Edith's character is not acting completely out of selfishness and that she feels she has tried to make the best of her situation. It also shows Charles in a clearer light. Although he feels helpless about Edith's dissatisfaction, he truly does seem to want to help her be happy.

Edith's flirtation with Simon is not unnoticed by Lady Uckfield, who shows no outward concern but, as will be seen, is well aware of the situation.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Edith's change in routine alarm Charles and the rest of the household? Why does she change the routine?

Discussion Question 2

Is Charles at fault for Edith's dissatisfaction? Does she blame him?

Discussion Question 3

How does Lady Uckfield assess the state of Charles' and Edith's marriage?

Vocabulary

Quizzically, risque, rubbish, superficial.



Chapter 12

Summary

Chapter 12

The flirtation between Simon and Edith reaches a high point in Chapter 12 as they are all together at dinner again. Adela FitzGerald, the girlfriend and future wife of the narrator, who has not been mentioned before now, first appears here when she comes to Sussex from London to visit the narrator for a few days during the filming. She is invited, along with the narrator and Simon, to go out with the Broughton family as the guests of Bob and Annette Watson, who are staying at the house as guests of Caroline and Eric Chase.

Adela is from the same background as the narrator and she quickly finds acceptance from Lady Uckfield, who knows one of her aunts and is the same age as her mother. A kind of rivalry develops between Adela and Edith. Edith does not want to lose her confidant, the narrator, and Adela shares the opinion of many of her class that Edith has "caught" Charles. Edith also becomes jealous that Adela so quickly gets along with Charles and Lady Uckfield because they know so many of the same people.

The dinner outing hosted by Bob and Annette is something of a disaster. In their effort to impress the Broughton family they have booked a dinner reservation at a country house hotel. Despite being a generous gesture, the narrator explains, it is not seen as such by the Broughtons because among the upper classes being too generous is a sign that one does not truly belong to their circle.

Simon is funny and charming at dinner, and even Lady Uckfield appears to be having a good time. Charles is at a disadvantage because he is not swift enough to follow the funny stories of Simon and Annette, and seems only interested in talking about his plans for improving the estate. When he is rebuked by Edith for being too boring, he excuses himself and asks if he might leave early. Instead of joining him as she might have been expected to do, Edith stays. Simon offers to make sure she gets home safely.

After the dinner as the group has coffee in an adjoining room, Lady Uckfield congratulates the narrator on finding such a suitable woman. She asks his future plans and if they include having children. She advises him not to wait too long after marriage to have children, adding that she hopes Charles and Edith do not wait. At this, the narrator understands that she means she thinks they have already waited too long. If Edith had a child to take care of they would not be faced with the potential "nightmare" of Edith's affair.



Analysis

Another clash of the classes takes place in Chapter 12 as the upper-middle class Bob and Annette Watson try to host a dinner outing for the Broughton family. Bob does not realize that what would normally be a generous gesture will make him the object of mockery. In truth, Charles and his family are too polite to be openly antagonistic, Eric Chase and Simon act in the most snobbish manner, criticizing the wait staff and rejecting Bob's expensive champagne.

The chapter ends ominously after Charles has left the restaurant to go home on his own and Edith has not accompanied him. Simon's offer to make sure she gets home safely disturbs Charles and signals to Lady Uckfield and the narrator that things are about to get very complicated.

Discussion Question 1

What role does Adela play in the drama concerning Charles, Edith, and Simon?

Discussion Question 2

Is Adela justified in her opinion of Edith? Does the narrator agree with her?

Discussion Question 3

Who are the most snobbish at Bob and Annette's dinner party? Why is this?

Vocabulary

Embodiment, conversely, underpinned, charismatic.



Chapter 13

Summary

Chapter 13

As the party leaves the hotel restaurant, the narrator notes that the back seat of Simon's car is full of items, meaning that nobody else will fit except him and Edith. The narrator suspects that Lady Uckfield had intended to ride back with the two to prevent anything from happening. Simon delays and fiddles with his keys until Adela drives off with the narrator and Lord and Lady Uckfield.

They return to Broughton Hall and find Charles sitting alone in the drawing room with a drink. He makes an excuse to ask the narrator to come into his study where he asks him what he thinks is going on between Edith and Simon. The narrator is reluctant to answer with his full opinion, afraid to hurt Charles. He is surprised when Charles admits that he knows Edith does not love him, and he begins to cry. The narrator tries to comfort him by saying they don't really know that anything is going on.

They return to the drawing room and the others go off to bed leaving the narrator with Lady Uckfield. She tells him that Eric returned and told her he had seen Edith and Simon passionately kissing in Simon's car. The narrator immediately realizes that Eric, who detests Edith, was probably spying on them. To the narrator's surprise, Lady Uckfield does not appear to be angry, but she does not want the story to get out. She will not tell Charles, she says, but expects that someone, perhaps even Edith, will tell him. She asks the narrator to tell Simon to leave Edith alone. He hesitates, doubtful he can do anything. Although Lady Uckfield appears to be understanding and even forgiving of Edith as long as the affair goes no further. The narrator recognizes that she actually hates Edith for having made her son unhappy.

Analysis

Edith's affair with Simon finally begins after much flirtation, causing a minor emergency in the Broughton family. Nobody is surprised, and the main concern of Lady Uckfield is to see that no scandal ensues and that her son is spared any hurt or embarrassment. She is very direct in her assessment of the situation and uses her relationship with the narrator to ask him to intervene. The narrator's difficult position is highlighted in this chapter. Although he is among the Broughton family as a friend of Edith, he has also become something of a friend to Charles, whom he likes and feels is a decent man. Lady Uckfield has also taken him into her confidence and asked him to get involved with the affair between Edith and Simon.

An interesting parallel between Edith and Lady Uckfield is drawn by the narrator in this chapter. Like Edith, Lady Uckfield is married to a man of only moderate intelligence who does not really provide her with the amusement or personal satisfaction she desires.



Lady Uckfield has recognized this from the start and instead of looking for fulfillment through her husband she was able to find it through other activities. By expecting Charles to provide her with fulfillment in everything, Edith has made him the object of her resentment when he fails to do so. Had she not expected this, she would have no need for having an affair, it is suggested.

Discussion Question 1

Everyone seems to know what is about to happen between Simon and Edith. Why doesn't someone stop them?

Discussion Question 2

How does the author favorably compare Edith and Lady Uckfield? What is their crucial difference?

Discussion Question 3

Is Lady Uckfield happily married?

Vocabulary

Necessitate, horrid, impart, imperceptible,



Chapter 14

Summary

Chapter 14

Adela and the narrator return to the Brook Farm house, and he explains everything to her. At the house they find Simon sitting up, waiting, apparently wanting the talk about the incident. The narrator sits with him and learns that Eric had confronted Edith and Simon when they returned to the house. The narrator tries to reason with Simon and asks him not to continue the affair. He reminds him he is also married, but Simon seems to have little concern that his wife will find out. As they are talking, Edith rushes in, surprising Simon and the narrator. She tells them that Eric has told Charles what happened. In answer to his request that he leave Edith alone, Simon takes her in his arms and kisses her.

The setting skips forward several months to the wedding of the narrator and Adela. They invite the Uckfields and Charles and Edith. All of them accept. The narrator, who has been out of touch with Edith while working and planning his wedding, takes the acceptance of his invitation as a sign that things have blown over with Simon. When Edith calls him and asks if he has invited Simon to the wedding, he assures her he has not. So, there will be no awkwardness. To his surprise, she asks if he will invite Simon. She continues on to ask if she and Simon might use his apartment while he is away on his honeymoon. He flatly refuses, saying he could not encourage them. She coldly ends the phone call.

Lord and Lady Uckfield and Charles attend the wedding, but Edith does not. Charles only shrugs when the narrator asks him where she is. After returning from his honeymoon, the narrator finds an invitation to meet Charles for lunch at his club in London. At lunch, Charles tells him that Edith has left him and plans to get an apartment in London to share with Simon. He asks the narrator if he will "reason" with her and explain what her life will be like living with an only moderately successful actor. The narrator replies that she is certainly already aware of the life of luxury she would be giving up, so he is not sure what good pointing this out will do. He is further impressed by Charles' simple decency when he asks Charles if he is willing to take her back and he answers that of course he would because she is his wife. The narrator agrees he will speak to Edith.

Analysis

The crisis at the center of the book advances as Edith appears prepared to actually leave Charles and move in with Simon. The narrator becomes even more deeply involved when both Edith and Charles begin asking him for favors, Edith to help her carry on her affair and Charles to help end it. He has an essential conflict over which



person to help. He feels loyal to Edith as a friend, but he also feels she has made a bad choice. He tries to steer a middle course by letting his feelings be known and not encouraging her, but also by not condemning her.

Discussion Question 1

Another time gap occurs during this chapter during which the narrator is out of touch with Edith and Simon. How does this serve the story?

Discussion Question 2

How is the narrator drawn into the conflict? How does he try to stay out of it?

Discussion Question 3

What do Charles and Lady Uckfield hope the narrator can do to help them? Why do they come to him?

Vocabulary

Antidote, cabals, renounced, alluring.



Chapter 15

Summary

Chapter 15

The narrator meets with Edith for lunch at the beginning of Chapter 15. She seems eager to speak with him and is relaxed and comfortable when they meet. She has foreseen that Charles has put him up to talking to her and tries to forestall his lecturing by explaining she knows full well what she is doing. She appears to be putting stock in the hope that Simon will strike it big one day soon, returning her to a life of wealth. The narrator, who knows this is unlikely, expects she is compensating for her leaving Charles by believing that Simon is a better prospect than he really is.

After about a week, the story of Edith and Simon's affair hits the gossip columns and becomes the subject of wide discussion. Simon rather enjoys being in the papers, but Edith has already had her fill. While the coverage is still frequent, she and Simon attend a party of show business people that the narrator and Adela are also attending. Simon is flattered that the hostess, a distinguished actress, has invited him. He does not realize that the only reason he has been asked is because of the scandal.

At the party, Edith is paraded around by one of the actors there, introduced as "Lady Broughton" and "The Countess of Broughton" in a slightly mocking tone. Adela watches in amusement as Edith tries to make small talk with the people she does not know and with whom she has shared no experiences. She does not care for Edith, thinking she has acted stupidly in leaving Charles.

After the party, Edith begins to have her own doubts about her future with Simon. They quarrel in the car on the way home and drive in silence.

Analysis

Edith's foray into Simon's social world goes badly when the two of them are put on display and mocked at a party. There is a parallel to the more refined house parties of the upper classes, where outsiders are similarly mocked and not welcomed into the exclusive group. Edith has moved from the world of Broughton, where she is outwardly accepted as long as she follows the traditions and behaviors of her husband's class but is never truly a full member, into the world of show business, where she is similarly excluded. Her ultimate choice of which world she wishes to live in is complicated further.

Discussion Question 1

How does Edith justify leaving Charles? Is she happy?



Discussion Question 2

Compare Edith's experience at the party of actors with her first social encounters with Charles' friends and family.

Discussion Question 3

Where does Edith belong?

Vocabulary

Rhetorical, akin, adulation, murmured.



Chapter 16

Summary

Chapter 16

At the beginning of Chapter 16, the narrator runs into Mrs. Lavery at a shop. They speak briefly about Edith and Simon, and she asks if he has spoken with Charles. He tells her he has seen Charles and that he is "cast down" about everything. She tells the narrator that she is expecting Simon and Edith for dinner that evening.

The scene shifts to the Lavery household where Stella and Kenneth Lavery are preparing to host Simon and Edith for dinner. Mrs. Lavery has told her husband about her meeting with the narrator and the news that Charles is upset about Edith leaving. She wonders if they should try to get in touch with Charles, but her husband feels this is a bad idea. Mrs. Lavery is upset that she has lost her connection to the upper class world of Charles and his family.

Mrs. Lavery is cool to Simon when he arrives, telling him straightforwardly that she feels her daughter has made a mistake in leaving her husband. She is exceedingly polite during the evening in a way that is almost rude. As they sit in the Lavery living room after dinner, Edith looks around at the furnishing and decoration that is mostly an imitation of the real world she has left behind. She tells herself in resignation that this is the world she will live in from now on.

Simon and Edith leave the Laverys, and Simon suggests they go out to a private nightclub called Anabel's. Edith is reluctant as she herself is not a member of the club although Charles is. Simon is sure she can get them in. At the door, however, the attendant politely refuses to let her in as she is not a full member. Edith is ready to leave it at that and go, but just then Jane and Henry Cumnor arrive. Edith introduces Simon, who expects the Cumnors will invite them in. Jane vaguely offers to ask Henry, but in a way that indicates she would rather not. Edith declines. Simon is upset, and when Charles' friend Tommy Wainwright and his wife show up at the door Simon blurts out that Edith had tried to get them in but could not. Tommy offers to invite them through and the four of them have a drink at the bar.

Afterward, at home with Simon, Edith again thinks over her decision to leave Charles for Simon. She has had her doubts, but she seems to confirm her choice of Simon by engaging in a night of passionate lovemaking. In the morning, however, her doubts return.

Analysis

Edith is driven into further isolation from the two worlds she has known when she has to face the disapproval of her parents and the social embarrassment in front of her former



acquaintances from Charles' social circle. Without Charles, she seems to have no connection to her former life at all. Apparently accepting this once and for good, she seemingly confirms her choice. The doubts return, however, and the middle section of the book ends on a note that suggests Edith regrets her decision.

Discussion Question 1

How does Edith's behavior affect her parents? What is behind Mrs. Lavery's disappointment?

Discussion Question 2

How does Mrs. Lavery's behavior parallel Lady Uckfield's when she meets Simon? Is she a snob?

Discussion Question 3

How does the meeting with her parents and Simon affect Edith? Is it a turning point for her?

Vocabulary

Inasmuch, enormity, clambering, tangentially.



Chapter 17

Summary

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 opens after several months have passed. The narrator has not been in touch with Edith, but there has been no further news of divorce or other scandal in the newspapers. His wife, Adela, is expecting a child and he has been busy. He sends word of the upcoming birth to Charles, who invites him to get in touch when he can.

Most of the people who were friends with Charles and his family before Edith left have abandoned her, with the exception of Annette Watson, whose husband has become very wealthy. The tables have turned between the Watsons and the Chases, in fact. Eric has hit hard times and the gossip is that it is Caroline's money that keeps them afloat. Bob Watson, who had once tried to use his connection to Eric to gain access to the upper classes in the country has now earned some social currency of his own in London. Annette invites Edith to attend a fashion show with her. At lunch beforehand they speak about Charles. Annette gossips that Charles may be seeing a woman named Clarissa Marlowe, which appears to disturb Edith. She asks if Edith is proceeding with a divorce and Edith says she will probably wait.

Adela has been invited to the same fashion show by a cousin of hers, and she notices Edith seated in the crowd. By chance, Lady Uckfield is also at the show, sitting with a royal princess in the front row. Afterward, Adela speaks with Lady Uckfield and deftly avoids her meeting up with Edith, who she sees approaching afterwards. Adela speaks briefly with Edith. She returns home and describes the close call to the narrator.

Isabel and David Easton invite Adela and the narrator to their home in Sussex for the weekend. Although Adela does not really care for the Eastons, she accepts with the idea that they might get in touch with Charles while they are there. When they arrive, the narrator soon realizes that David also has a motive for the invitation. He wants to regain his connection to the Broughton family that has been lost since Edith has left.

The narrator phones the Broughton house and is told Charles is away. Lady Uckfield gets on the phone and invites him Adela to dinner, pointedly not including the Eastons in the invitation. The narrator declines, but accepts an invitation for tea the following day. David is quietly furious at not being included, and insists that the narrator take with him an invitation for the Uckfields to have a drink at their home Sunday morning.

Analysis

The situation has settled over the course of several months as Chapter Seventeen opens. Edith has stayed with Simon, despite her occasional doubts. Most of the people she knew from her time with Charles have opted to stick with Charles, which the



narrator does not find surprising. People from Edith's previous life before Charles, like her parents and the Eastons, are disappointed at losing their connection to the prestigious Broughton family and want to reconnect. The Broughton family has continued on apparently with little disturbance, although there is a hint that Charles may be ready to move on to see other women.

The narrator and his wife are positioned in the center of these groups of people, as this chapter illustrates, and have to navigate among them. The scene at the fashion show where Adela silently warns Lady Uckfield of the approaching Edith is an example of the complicated situation they are in. They are put in a similar situation when visiting the Eastons, who want to take advantage of their connection to the Broughtons. Adela and the narrator have their own ulterior motive for reconnecting with Charles.

Discussion Question 1

Edith's connection to her former life seems to have ended when she disconnected from Charles. is this fair?

Discussion Question 2

Edith seems to have doubts about staying with Simon, but she sticks with him. Why?

Discussion Question 3

How do the narrator and Adela maneuver among the various groups of people they know and to whom they feel loyalty?

Vocabulary

Dreariness, pretensions, condemnation, starkest.



Chapter 18

Summary

Chapter 18

The narrator and Adela arrive for tea at Broughton Hall the following day as Chapter Eighteen opens. There is a group of half a dozen house guests staying there, as well. Lady Uckfield is very attentive to the narrator and his wife, which is unusual for a weekend house party where the guests usually make little show of overt politeness, normally just leaving one another alone until mealtimes. The narrator understands he is about to be asked a favor and is not surprised when Lady Uckfield invites him to see her newly-decorated study.

Once alone with him, she does ask the narrator for a favor. She wants him to speak to Edith and ask her to proceed with a divorce rather than wait any longer. She somewhat crudely tells the narrator that there will of course be an adequate financial settlement for her. He bristles at this, as he knows Edith would not make money an issue. He agrees to speak to Edith.

As they are leaving, the narrator passes on David's invitation for the Uckfields to come over for a drink the next morning. He knows Lady Uckfield will refuse politely, and she does, but he is surprised when she invites them back to the house the next day and includes the Eastons in the invitation. The narrator realizes she is being overly kind to him because of the favor she has asked.

The Eastons, Adela and the narrator return the next day. Charles has come back from London and speaks alone with the narrator. He confides that his mother is trying to match him up with Clarissa Marlowe, who is one of the house guests there that weekend, and wants the divorce to be over with. He asks the narrator for a favor himself. He wants him to speak to Edith and tell her he will do anything she wants if she will come back to him.

Analysis

Chapter 18 shows how Charles' family has coped with Edith's leaving. While Charles, depressed, hopes for her return, his mother has already laid plans to marry him to someone she feels is more suitable, Clarissa Marlowe. Edith has become an obstacle to her plan. Charles is aware of her plans, but still holds out hope.

The narrator is put in another very difficult situation when he is given two conflicting messages to carry to Edith. Lady Uckfield wants to ask her to proceed quickly with a divorce while Charles wants Edith to know he wishes her to come back. His solution to the dilemma will be seen in the next chapter.



The theme of conflicting classes is revisited as David and Isabel once again find themselves social guests of the Uckfields. The experience leaves David dissatisfied after he is stuck talking to an uninteresting woman for much of the morning. The realization of a dream often leads to resentment, the narrator observes, and David's experience might be seen as a small example of what Edith has experienced.

Discussion Question 1

How does the narrator handle his dilemma in this chapter? To whom is he most loyal?

Discussion Question 2

How does David and Isabel's second social encounter at Broughton compare to the first? Why do they still want to be included?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the social behavior of the upper class as described by the author. How do they differ from the upper-middle class?

Vocabulary

Timeless, underlay, enthralled, meticulously.



Chapter 19

Summary

Chapter 19

In Chapter 19, the narrator carries his message to Edith. They meet at lunch, and he casually mentions he has been to stay with David and Isabel and had a drink at Broughton Hall. Edith asks about the family but does not mention Charles. The narrator has decided he will deliver Lady Uckfield's message but not Charles'. He tells her that Lady Uckfield would like a quick divorce, but he does not tell her about Clarissa Marlowe. When Edith finally asks if he had spoken to Charles, he admits he has. He tells her that Charles says he will do whatever she wishes. This is only a partial truth, as he does not tell Edith that Charles wants her back. Edith's response is that she will, of course, cooperate; but, she wants some time to think about it.

After lunch, Edith walks around the city alone, thinking over her situation. She has told herself that she has chosen personal fulfillment over material comfort by choosing Simon over Charles, but she has started to doubt that Simon and the life he promises her really can bring her personal fulfillment. She tries to remember what it was that made her want to leave her life at Broughton.

Edith returns to their apartment and tells Simon about Lady Uckfield's request. Simon is apprehensive about being involved in a scandalous divorce case where he might be named as the cause of her adultery, but she explains that if she simply tells Charles not to proceed, he won't. Simon does not understand her confidence that Charles will simply do what she says and she realizes that Simon does not realize how decent a person Charles really is. She is suddenly very annoyed with Simon and leaves the room. She feels physically uneasy after their encounter, and the chapter ends with the suggestion that her discomfort may be partly because she has become pregnant.

Analysis

The narrator makes an interesting decision in Chapter 19 to seemingly encourage Edith to leave Charles for good. Given two conflicting messages from Lady Uckfield and Charles, he chooses to deliver only Lady Uckfield's, concealing from Edith the fact that Charles wants her to come back. His motivation seems to be based on his feeling that Edith will not be able to cope with the limitations of being Charles' wife and that she will only end up hurting Charles and making things worse for herself.

The narrator does not lie to Edith flat out, and he leaves open the possibility that Charles might take her back by not directly contradicting Charles' message. Edith, feeling afloat, wanders the city thinking over her position. This episode gives the author an opportunity to more fully examine Edith's motivations from her own point of view. When she returns to her apartment after her long walk and sees Simon, she is suddenly



irritated with him. Her impatience signals that she is seriously considering trying to return to Charles.

Discussion Question 1

How does the narrator try to influence Edith's decision? What motivates him?

Discussion Question 2

How is Edith's change of heart indicated by the author?

Discussion Question 3

What are Edith's values? What does she really want in life?

Vocabulary

Apprehension, tweed, pragmatic, meritocracy.



Chapter 20

Summary

Chapter 20

Chapter 20 opens with an early-morning visit from Edith to the apartment of the narrator and Adela. She is disturbed that she cannot get in touch with Charles and wants the narrator's help. She has tried calling him at Broughton but was told he was not there. She has also called his house at Feltham and his apartment in London and has been told he is at Broughton. She does not believe that Charles is trying to avoid her, but that Lady Uckfield is trying to keep her from seeing him.

The narrator reluctantly agrees to help. He calls Broughton and asks for Charles, but Lady Uckfield comes to the phone. He admits to her he is calling on Edith's behalf and tells her he thinks Edith will not give an answer about the divorce until she has seen Charles. Lady Uckfield asks the narrator to meet her for tea later that afternoon in London. He agrees, then calls Edith to tell her what has happened.

At tea, Lady Uckfield opens up to the narrator, telling him directly she does not want Charles to see Edith because she thinks he is confused and that seeing her will only make things worse. She admits she does not like Edith, but she says this would not matter if Edith were able to make Charles happy. She does not think Edith could ever make Charles happy because her life with him is not the glamorous life she imagined from reading magazines and novels. She denies being a snob, which the narrator finds amusing, but he also admits to himself that she truly believes she is not a snob. She does not think that Edith likes Charles, and she suggests that it is only after eight months of living with a relatively poor actor that Edith has begun to miss the material comfort Charles can provide.

The narrator happens to agree with everything Lady Uckfield has said. He understands her logic that it would be better to put up with the temporary scandal of the divorce now rather than seeing Edith come back only to leave Charles again when she becomes bored once more. Despite agreeing with her, he does not agree to help her keep Charles and Edith apart. As he leaves the table, Lady Uckfield asks him at least not to encourage Edith. He says he will see what he can do.

Afterward the narrator relates his meeting to Edith, confirming that Lady Uckfield does not want them to meet. He suggests that she cannot keep the two of them apart forever and that Edith be patient. Edith replies that she does not have time to wait. The narrator chooses to ignore the potential importance of this remark.



Analysis

It is confirmed in Chapter 20 that the narrator is more sympathetic with the plight of Lady Uckfield than with Edith, although when it comes to taking action he finds a way to stay out of it. He acts mainly as a messenger and tries to avoid supporting Lady Uckfield even when he agrees with her.

The episode at the Ritz Hotel where Lady Uckfield lets down her normally guarded demeanor adds some humanity to the development of her character. She does truly seem to wish for the happiness of her son over everything else. It is only an accident of their class that this means he should find a woman from his own class who understands the role she is to play in the marriage and to find fulfillment from some place other than her husband. This seems to rule out the possibility that Charles might find happiness purely out of love.

Edith's pregnancy is not yet confirmed, but has been strongly hinted at when she mentions the urgency of seeing Charles. Both the narrator and Adela suspect Edith might be pregnant, but they do not yet admit it.

Discussion Question 1

Lady Uckfield denies she is a snob. Is she one?

Discussion Question 2

The narrator is reluctant to be involved. Why?

Discussion Question 3

How does Lady Uckfield's personal revelation to the narrator change their relationship?

Vocabulary

Statesmanlike, tenants, ventured, espoused.



Chapter 21

Summary

Chapter 21

In Chapter 21, Edith sets about trying to get in touch with Charles, which proves more difficult than one might imagine. She is no longer invited to the exclusive social events he might attend, so she asks Tommy Wainwright to help her. He mentions he has invited Charles for drinks and dinner and that she could come as well and see him there.

The narrator and Adela are also present at the Wainwright's party and are surprised when Edith arrives. She stays until the party is nearly over but Charles does not arrive and she leaves. After she leaves, the narrator overhears Tommy arguing with his wife, Arabella, angry to learn that she had phoned Lady Uckfield to tell her Tommy's plan to get Charles and Edith together. This is why he did not attend.

The next morning is a Saturday and Edith suffers from morning sickness. She tells Simon she expects she has eaten some bad food. Mrs. Lavery calls while Edith is throwing up and asks in a circumspect way if she might be pregnant. Edith denies it, but her mother's question focuses her mind on the issue. She gets dressed and lies to Simon that she is going to lunch with her mother. Instead, she drives to Broughton Hall, intending to see Charles in person.

Edith arrives at Broughton Hall, forgetting that on Saturdays the house is open to the public. She walks in the public entrance and lets herself through the rope line. The tour guide greets her, but also calls the family's private phone number.

Charles is alone in his study when one of the weekend house guests comes in and asks if he will drive her to the village for an important errand. He agrees and leaves the house with her. Meanwhile, Edith makes her way through the house toward Charles' study and is headed off by Lady Uckfield, who tries to pull her away from the public part of the house where there are people taking the tour. Edith does not move, enjoying the awkward scene of her mother-in-law attempting to be polite to her in front of the people who are watching.

Edith makes her way to Charles' study and finds he is not home. Lady Uckfield manages to get her alone and has a conversation with Edith. She describes to Edith how she had noticed before she left Charles how irritated she was with him and how bored she was living at Broughton. She asks what could have changed to make Edith so eager to see Charles all of a sudden. She admits that she cannot keep Edith away from him forever, but then she says that perhaps she only needs to keep them apart for a few months. Then, they can see how everyone feels. Edith understands by this remark that Lady Uckfield knows she has become pregnant by Simon. Edith replies with a direct and vulgar insult of Lady Uckfield, calling her heartless and thick-skinned. Lady



Uckfield calmly agrees that Edith is perhaps correct, and she suggests that this is why she has been able to take advantage of her opportunities where Edith has not.

Analysis

Chapter 21 all but confirms Edith's pregnancy. Also, it introduces the fact that Lady Uckfield has correctly guessed Edith's secret. The showdown between Edith and Lady Uckfield is the dramatic centerpiece to the chapter and provides a parallel to the story told earlier in the novel about the time that Lady Uckfield herself had a similar dramatic encounter with her own mother-in-law.

There is another parallel in Edith's re-entry into Broughton Hall through the same public door she had used as a paying guest the first time she met Charles. This time she is treated with outward deference. Ironically, she has a harder time getting into the house than a paying visitor might.

Discussion Question 1

How does Edith's return to Broughton through the public entrance symbolize her status with the Broughton family?

Discussion Question 2

Does Edith's pregnancy complicate her decision or make it easier for her?

Discussion Question 3

Does Edith gain any respect from Lady Uckfield from their confrontation?

Vocabulary

Multitude, extricated, gilded, ludicrous, congratulatory.



Chapter 22

Summary

Chapter 22

Chapter 22 opens with a brief explanation that Edith has decided she will carry through the pregnancy rather than have an abortion. The narrator does not question her decision, only mentions how she might have had an easier time had she decided not to keep the baby. He speaks with Edith, who tells him about her failed plan to meet Charles at Broughton. She says she has decided to try to find him at his other house, Feltham, which she knows he visits regularly. When the narrator asks her how she will manage this he is surprised to learn that Caroline, Charles' sister, has offered to help Edith meet with Charles.

The narrator speculates on Caroline's motivations for defying her mother. She may be wanting to draw attention away from her own rocky marriage to Eric, or she may be doing it simply to defy Lady Uckfield. There is also the chance that she truly wants to see Charles happy.

After a few days, Edith receives a call from Caroline telling her Charles is at Felton and offering to drive her there if she likes. Edith makes up a story to give Simon about going shopping and to lunch with Caroline and walks to meet her. As she walks, she once again mulls over her intentions. She has guessed from Lady Uckfield's great efforts to keep them apart that Charles would probably take her back if she asked him to. She realizes in comparing Charles to Simon that Charles is a much better person. She worries what people will think about her deciding to return but realizes that most people will assume she simply had come to her senses.

As they drive to Feltham, Caroline confides to Edith that she is going to leave Eric. She tells Edith he had only married her to get access to her family and the upper class. Caroline adds that she thinks this is much the same as what Edith had done. She tells Edith she is helping her because Charles is so unhappy. She takes Edith into the house at Feltham where they find Charles, who is surprised to see them. Caroline excuses herself, saying she'll be back in a few hours.

The conversation between Edith and Charles is awkward at first. He is uncertain why she has come to speak to him, suspecting it is to make some kind of demand about the divorce. When she starts to cry, however, Charles realizes she has come to ask him to take her back and that he need only make the first move and the matter would be settled. He asks her simply, "Are you happy?" She waits a moment before answering, understanding that his question has given her permission to return. She simply replies, "No." (p. 256)



Analysis

Chapter 22 is the final full chapter. It brings most of the threads of the novel together. Edith finally gets through to see Charles in person after deciding she wants to return to him. That her champion in the family would be Caroline is something of a surprise to her and to the reader, as Caroline has been portrayed as one of her most cynical critics.

The final scene at Feltham is interesting in that so much is left unsaid. Charles, who has been portrayed as a somewhat dense person is described as having a fairly keen sense of what Edith's intentions are even before she has said anything explicitly. He has a realistic assessment of why she left him in the first place and knows what he might expect by taking her back. In the end, it is suggested that his love for Edith and his selfless decency are his primary motivations.

Discussion Question 1

What is Caroline's motivation for helping Edith meet with Charles?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Edith not tell Simon her plan? Is she sure of herself?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Charles take Edith back? Are they in love?

Vocabulary

Disconsolately, unflattering, fastidious, brickbats.



Epilogue

Summary

The epilogue summarizes the ensuing years after Edith returns to Charles. Seven months after her return she has a baby, which the Uckfields are relieved is a girl, as the girl will not inherit the Uckfield title. Fourteen months after that, Edith gives birth to a boy. The daughter, named Anne, quickly becomes a favorite of Charles and even, in later years, of Lady Uckfield.

Edith's children keep her busy and free from boredom. The narrator and Adela, who have a son a little older than Anne, are frequent guests at Broughton. The narrator notes that Lady Uckfield is not quite as close to him as before, probably because of their discussion where she let down her guarded demeanor.

Caroline and Eric divorce, and Eric marries a rich woman from the upper-middle class who shares his ambitions. Simon's wife takes him back, and he moves to California to try to advance his acting career.

Edith does not discuss her affair with the narrator or ask about Simon except on one occasion a few years after she had returned to Charles. He tells her about Simon going to California and that he has not yet been successful in getting a job. She wonders if the narrator will ever ask her if she is happy having returned to Charles. He does ask her, and she answers that she is "happy enough." (p. 264) He admits that this is probably more than can be said about most people he knows.

Analysis

The Epilogue pins a bittersweet ending onto the novel, describing how Edith finds a kind of happiness after returning to Charles and starting a family. She gains a kind of acceptance from Lady Uckfield, who resigns herself to Edith's return and later becomes a doting grandmother.

Edith finds she is "happy enough" with her life, which the author suggests is perhaps all anyone should hope for. In her assessment, Edith seems to have realized that the fairy-tale world of the upper class which she had imagined is not a realistic expectation. Life among the upper classes is as troubled and complicated as anywhere else.

Discussion Question 1

Does the story end happily for everyone? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 2

How does Lady Uckfield change after Edith's return and the birth of her children?

Discussion Question 3

Is there a moral to the story? Is being "happy enough" the most we can expect in life?

Vocabulary

Testimonial, concede, subsequent, hospice.



Characters

Edith Lavery

Edith Lavery is the main character in the novel. She is in her late 20s when the novel begins, single, and works as a receptionist in London, England. She is the daughter of Kenneth and Stella Lavery, and still lives with them in their London apartment. She is very attractive and has a charming personality.

Edith's parents are comfortably affluent and belong to the upper-middle class. Edith's mother, who is distantly related to an ancestor with a minor title of nobility, has affected the manners and customs of the upper class and aspires for Edith to some day marry into an upper class family. As a result, Edith is sent to the same private schools attended by upper-class girls and is given a debutante party in the same fashion as her upper-class classmates. Despite affecting all the traditions and manners of the upper class, however, Edith is not fully accepted into their exclusive social circle. Although Edith has inherited her mother's dreams of one day living in upper-class luxury, she tells herself she is not so materialistic as to marry only for money.

While taking a tour of a grand country estate in Sussex, Edith briefly meets Charles Broughton, the heir to the estate. When they meet again at a social event, Charles asks her to dinner. After dating for a time, they are married and Edith becomes Countess Broughton. She moves in with her husband at Broughton Hall, his family's estate, where he lives with his parents.

Edith is happy with her new life for a time, but eventually becomes bored with Charles and with her life in the country. When an attractive actor names Simon Russell comes to the estate as part of a television series project she starts an affair with him. When her affair is revealed she chooses to leave Charles and moves back to London, taking an apartment with Simon and creating a tabloid scandal.

After several months living with Simon, Edith begins to question her decision to leave Charles. Realizing she has become pregnant with Simon's child, she urgently tries to get back in touch with Charles but is held off by his domineering mother, Lady Uckfield. She finally succeeds in meeting Charles again, who takes her back. She has the child, and later another one by Charles. As the novel closes, she has decided that she is content.

The Narrator

The Narrator is an unnamed man in his 30s who provides the point of view for much of the novel. He is a professional actor who comes from an upper-class family, so he is familiar with the manners and traditions of both social circles. He meets Edith Lavery through mutual friends and is the person who introduces her to Charles Broughton, her future husband, when they are both visiting Broughton Hall as tourists. The narrator is



acquainted with Charles because they belong to the same upper-class social circle and is recognized by Charles during the tour, providing the opportunity for Edith to become involved in Charles' life.

Although he has an upper-class background, the narrator does not only move within that social circle. He has friends who are in the upper-middle class like David and Isabel Easton, and as an actor he socializes with people in show business. This unique position allows him to move freely between social settings and to become the confidant of both Edith and Charles, as well as of the normally reserved Lady Uckfield. His mobility between the classes also becomes a conflict for him as he is increasingly asked to intervene in the marriage difficulties of Edith and Charles.

The narrator becomes engaged, marries and has a child over the course of the novel. His wife, Adela FitzGerald, is herself a member of the upper class and fits in easily with Charles' family. She tends to side against Edith in the conflict her husband is involved with, providing another source of tension to his life.

The narrator is a driving character in the novel even though he tries to remove himself from the central conflict. He feels loyal to his friends and acts on their behalf when asked, such as when he tries to help David Easton ingratiate himself with the Uckfields. On the other hand, he grows to admire Lady Uckfield and Charles Broughton and also agrees to help them by passing along messages to Edith. He tries to walk a line between his two sets of friends, and appears to side with Charles' family and his wife when he agrees that the marriage between Edith and Charles is unsuitable. When Lady Uckfield asks him to take an active part in ending the marriage, however, he refuses to become involved.

Lady Uckfield

Lady Uckfield is the mother of Charles Broughton. She is married to the Marquess of Uckfield and has the title of marchioness. She is referred to as Lady Uckfield, usually, and informally is called "Googie." She and her husband live at Broughton Hall, a large estate in the Sussex region of England that Lord Uckfield has inherited through his family. As the lady of the large house, Lady Uckfield is responsible for hosting the regular weekend house parties and overseeing the household. She also volunteers for charitable organizations in the surrounding area.

Lady Uckfield is an intelligent woman who is expert at manipulating people, particularly her husband and son, Charles. She affects a conspiratorial tone of voice when speaking to her guests as though they are sharing a secret, but her manners are always calculated to project her superiority as a member of the nobility. She has been raised in an upper-class family and although she does not consider herself a "snob" she has been ingrained with the exclusive outlook of the upper class that does not allow anyone outside its tight circle to truly belong.



As an outsider, Edith is not liked by Lady Uckfield, who feels she has only married Charles to gain what she thinks will be a fairy-tale life as a countess. Although she appears to be snobbish in her dislike for Edith, it is revealed that Lady Uckfield is mainly motivated by her desire to see her son happy.

Charles Broughton

Charles Broughton is the son of Lord and Lady Uckfield and has the title Earl Broughton. He is the heir to the large estate owned by his family and will one day become Marquess of Uckfield. He is a simple man of ordinary intelligence who enjoys his life in the countryside. He enjoys shooting sports and making plans to improve the hunting grounds on the family's estates.

Charles meets Edith Lavery by accident when she is taking a tour of the Broughton estate house. He is attracted to her and when he meets her a second time at a social event he asks her to dinner. Although she is not from his own class, and although he knows his mother would ultimately not approve of her, he decides to pursue his romance with Edith, eventually asking her to marry him.

Charles has every intention of making Edith happy, but he underestimates her interest in the country-centered life he enjoys. He realizes Edith is slipping away from him but is at a loss about what he can do.

Charles is heartbroken when Edith leaves him, but he continues to love her. When she wants to return to him, there is little risk that he will not take her back.

Although portrayed as someone who is not overly intelligent, Charles is shown to be capable of deep feeling and is thought of by the narrator as a very decent person.

Simon Russell

Simon Russell is a very attractive actor who meets Edith Broughton and has an eight-month affair with her. He is married and has children, but he is also romantically promiscuous and often brags to his fellow actors about his affairs. He meets Edith when he comes to the Broughton estate as part of a television crew filming an historical series there. Edith is charmed by Simon at first, and she tells herself he is destined to become a famous and wealthy actor. However, she eventually realizes he is shallow and may not be able to provide her with a comfortable future. Simon is the biological father of Anne, who is raised by Charles and Edith with no contact from Simon.

Stella Lavery

Stella Lavery is Edith's mother. Distantly descended from a member of the upper class with a minor title of nobility, she imagines herself to be socially above others in the upper-middle class where she and her husband belong. She dreams of her daughter



one day being accepted into the upper classes and is delighted when Edith meets and marries an earl. Although Mrs. Lavery imagines that Edith's marriage means that she and her husband have also been elevated into the upper classes, she does not fully realize that without the social background she will never be fully accepted.

Caroline Chase

Caroline Chase is the daughter of Lord and Lady Uckfield, sister to Charles. She is married to Eric Chase, a businessman with social aspirations. She has a sarcastic wit and looks down on Edith, sharing her mother's view that she has only married Charles for his money and position. Despite her apparent dislike of Edith, it is Caroline who defies her mother's wishes and brings the two together after Edith has left Charles for Simon.

Eric Chase

Eric Chase is the husband of Caroline, Charles' sister. A businessman of some means, he has married Caroline thinking her position will give him the status of a member of the upper class. He is a snob, but his snobbishness takes the form of rudeness to almost everyone. He sees Edith as a rival of sorts and grows to dislike her intensely. It is Eric who goes out of his way to expose the budding affair between Edith and Simon, thinking wrongly that it will ingratiate him to the family. Instead, they see Eric as part of the problem, knowing that his lack of manners and respect puts the family at a higher risk of exposure and scandal. Caroline and Eric finally divorce after Caroline leaves him. He later marries a woman who shares his social ambitions.

David and Isabel Eaton

Isabel Easton is a childhood friend of the narrator who has married David Easton, a comfortably wealthy businessman. They live in Sussex, a short distance from the Broughton estate and are friends of Edith. David is a member of the upper-middle class but feels his wealth and influence entitle him to move up into the upper class. He wants to enter the social circle of his neighbors, the Uckfields, and jumps at any opportunity. Isabel is not as ambitious to belong to the upper classes, but she does support David's efforts. Neither of them appear to be aware that no matter what they do they can never really be considered by the upper classes as one of their own circle because they lack the common exclusive background the upper classes share.

As friends of Edith, they see an opportunity to finally belong to the Uckfield's circle when she marries Charles. When Edith leaves Charles and they lose that connection, they try to reconnect through the narrator, who has stayed on good terms with the family.



Jane and Henry Cumnor

The Cumnors are neighbors of Charles Broughton at his country house called Feltham Place. Henry Cumnor is an overweight, dour man with little patience for Edith or anyone outside his small social circle. He is also a member of the nobility and is called Lord Cumnor. His wife, Jane, is a chatty woman who snubs Edith on their first meeting, before she has married Charles, but then changes her behavior once Edith becomes Countess Broughton. Jane once again snubs Edith when their paths meet in London while Edith is living with Simon

Adela FitzGerald

Adela FitzGerald is the girlfriend, then wife of the unnamed narrator. She has had an upper class upbringing and fits in well with the Broughton family when she is brought to the estate by the narrator. She has a skeptical view of Edith's motives and tends to side with the Uckfield family during the ensuing scandal.

Bob and Annette Watson

Bob and Annette Watson are business acquaintances of Eric Chase who attend a few social events with Charles' family. Edith first meets them during her honeymoon with Charles and becomes friends with Annette, who is talkative and entertaining. The Watsons, like Eric Chase, are eager to be thought of as part of the Uckfield's social circle and make an ill-fated attempt to impress them with a dinner out at a country house hotel. The dinner is an expensive disaster. It is where Edith and Simon begin their affair.

Lord Uckfield

Lord Uckfield, the Marquess of Uckfield, is the husband of Lady Uckfield and the father of Charles. He is described as an unintelligent man and has little to say about the events that unfold in the novel. He simply does what is expected of him by his wife without question.

Tommy Wainwright

Tommy Wainwright is a friend of Charles who is friendly with Edith and tries to help her reconnect with Charles after leaving him. His efforts are thwarted by his wife, who wants to keep Edith and Charles apart.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Upper Class

The upper class is an exclusive class of people in British society. They are usually, but not always, wealthy people with very old families that can be traced back many centuries. Some members of the upper class are also members of the nobility, carrying hereditary titles like Marquess and Earl, which are handed down through the male heirs of the family. It is an exclusive social group that shares a common background. Anyone who has not been raised in the social circle is never truly fully accepted as part of the upper class, however it is possible for someone from the upper class to move into other circles. In the novel, Charles and his parents are in the upper class, as is the narrator and his wife.

The Upper Middle Class

The upper-middle class is a section of British society where people are sometimes quite wealthy, but are still considered just below the upper class in social rank. Some members of the upper-middle class aspire to be thought of as social equals to the upper class, and among themselves and classes below them they may even appear to be so. Because they lack the centuries of tradition and connections to nobility, however, the upper classes do not consider them as equals. In the novel, David and Isabel Easton are members of the upper-middle class who aspire to join the social circle of the upper class, as is Mrs. Lavery and Eric Chase.

Ascot

Ascot is an annual horse racing event traditionally attended by the nobility and the upper class who are separated from the public in a "royal enclosure." In more recent years, Ascot has opened to members of the upper-middle class, but access to the royal enclosure is still exclusive. To characters in the upper-middle class such as David Easton, Ascot represents an opportunity to mingle with the upper class people he aspires to join in their social circle. To those members of the upper classes who attend, it has ceased to be the purely exclusive event for their own kind, however they have managed to maintain separate sections within the enclosure where they can exclude whomever they wish.

Brook Farm

Brook Farm is a farm that is part of the Broughton estate. When Charles and Edith are married, their initial idea is to fix up the farmhouse on Brook Farm where they will live together. Edith enjoys making plans for the remodeling and decoration of the farmhouse, but the idea is eventually abandoned as Edith realizes she is becoming



increasingly bored with Charles and his country life. Her abandonment of Brook Farm is symbolic of her eventual abandonment of Charles.

Annabel's

Annabel's is a private nightclub that comes to represent Edith's exclusion from the upper class after she leaves Charles for Simon. It is the place of her first real date with Charles, and the place where she first meets some of his friends, Jane and Henry Cumnor. Later, when she is living with Simon in London, he insists she try to get them into the club, but they are turned away because she herself is not a member, only Charles. Jane and Henry Cumnor see her turned away but do not help her gain entrance. Tommy Wainwright is sympathetic to her embarrassment and escorts her and Simon inside. Later Tommy will also try to bring Edith and Charles back together.

Broughton Hall Tour

Broughton Hall, the home of Charles Broughton and his parents, is partially open to the public on weekends. While the public are able to walk freely through the open parts of the house, they do not truly belong there. They are only tourists looking at the life of the upper class from the outside.

It is on one of these public tours that Edith first meets Charles Broughton, and later, when she has been shut out by Lady Uckfield, Edith takes advantage of the open house day to get inside Broughton Hall and confront her. The open house tour symbolizes the limited access the rest of society has to the upper class, and underscores Edith's outsider status.

London Flats

Charles and his family own several apartments in London, which they use only occasionally. These expensive apartments that sit empty most of the time symbolize the excessive wealth of the family.

Lavery Household

When Edith brings Simon to meet her parents, she is struck by the nature of the furnishings her mother has chosen to imitate what she imagines are upper-class surroundings. Having lived in an upper-class family, Edith recognizes their hollow quality. To Edith, her parents' household symbolizes the empty desire to belong to the upper class.

Television Production

Simon meets Edith when he comes to Broughton Hall as part of a television production of a historical romance. The fictional television production, which is described as an exaggerated version of reality aimed at an American audience, symbolizes the skewed public perception of the upper classes.

Edith's Wedding

The wedding of Charles and Edith is attended by members of the royal family on Charles' side and by a distant titled relative of Edith's mother on her side. It is a display of the two families' different social status.

Settings

Sussex

Sussex is the county where the Broughton estate is located. It is a quiet area that is contrasted with the livelier environment of London. It becomes the location of Edith's self-imposed exile from London once she marries Charles.

Broughton Hall

Broughton Hall is the large estate house where Lord and Lady Uckfield and Charles Broughton live. It is situated in Sussex, in the countryside of England. It is surrounded by countryside and farmland that also belongs to the family and has been passed down for many generations. To the family, Broughton Hall represents the long history of its presence in the English nobility. To many of the upper-middle class residents who live near the house, it is a symbol of the luxurious life to which they aspire.

London

The largest city in England, London is an urban setting that is contrasted with the quiet country lifestyle of Sussex. The characters from London are flashier and seemingly more sophisticated than their counterparts in the country. Edith is from London and finds it a difficult transition living in the country after her marriage.

Feltham Place

Feltham Place is a smaller estate owned by Charles' family which is sometimes rented out to shooting parties. Charles has made many improvements to the surrounding land to encourage wildlife for hunting. Along with Broughton, it is the center of his activities. Broughton and Feltham represent Charles' main interest in leading a quiet life in the countryside, a lifestyle that Edith finds difficult to enjoy.

White's

White's is the private club to which Charles Broughton belongs, and where he invites the narrator to have lunch to talk about Edith. It is a very exclusive establishment that helps perpetuate the line between the upper class and everyone else. Even the narrator, who is himself a member of the upper class, must wait in the lobby until Charles arrives and escorts him in. Within the enclosure at Ascot, White's has a tent that excludes anyone who is not a member or the guest of a member. Charles escorts Edith into the White's tent at Ascot, in a symbolic gesture that parallels his escorting her into an upper-class life of a countess. Brook Farm is a farm that is part of the Broughton

estate. When Charles and Edith are married, their initial idea is to fix up the farmhouse on Brook Farm where they will live together. Edith enjoys making plans for the remodeling and decorating of the farmhouse, but the idea is eventually abandoned as Edith realizes she is becoming increasingly bored with Charles and his country life. Her abandonment of Brook Farm is a parallel to her eventual abandonment of Charles.



Themes and Motifs

Class

Beginning with the title of the book, one of the main themes in "Snobs" is the subject of class in British society, specifically the upper-middle and upper classes. In the upper-middle class are characters such as David and Isabel Easton, Edith Lavery and her parents, and Eric Chase, the husband of Caroline Broughton. These are affluent people who have mainly earned their wealth in business. In the upper class are characters like Lady Uckfield, Charles Broughton and his sister, Caroline, and Jane and Henry Cumnor and their friends. These are people who trace their families back many centuries and in cases like the Broughton family have owned large estates that have become valuable.

For the most part the upper classes do not have to work, being able to live off their enormous wealth. They often observe very old traditions and may hold titles of nobility, such as Charles and his parents do. As the author portrays them, they are an insulated group who are slow to accept anyone from outside their circle. For some characters in the upper middle class, such as Mrs. Lavery and David Easton, the upper class is something they aspire to join.

That these characters feel they might be able to move up into the upper class is a sign of the changing times, the narrator explains. The novel takes place in the 1990s when many young people are finding success in the business world. Eric Chase is an example of these "Yuppies" as they were called. Eric feels his own success and his marriage to Caroline Broughton have given him membership in the upper class. He is not fully accepted, however, largely because he lacks the social manners that the upper class characters pride themselves on.

The novel includes several scenes where people from each class mix socially. The event at Ascot, for example, is described as the kind of event that has been more or less taken over by the upper middle class who wish to act like their upper-class counterparts. The upper classes attend largely out of tradition, but even within the event there are sharp distinctions between those who belong to each class.

Edith's central conflict revolves on which group of people she wishes to belong to. Although she is not portrayed as being as hungry as her mother for her own social advancement, she does enjoy much of the lifestyle of a country lady. When she spends several months separated from Charles and living the hand-to-mouth existence of the



mistress of an actor, she returns briefly to the middle-class lifestyle she might have had if she had never met Charles. In the end, she chooses to return to the upper class, but although she is outwardly accepted back it is implied she never truly belongs to either class.

Matriarchy

The social setting in *Snobs* is depicted as being dominated by women, particularly the mothers of the two main characters Charles and Edith.

Mrs. Lavery, Edith's mother, is the driving force behind her upbringing, choosing to associate Edith with the upper classes and follow their exclusive traditions as much as possible. All of this is intended to prepare Edith to one day enter into the upper class herself. Although Edith does not consciously share her mother's aspiration to gain social position, she has been shaped to expect a certain amount of comfort in her life and when the prospect of marrying an earl arises, she is delighted.

Lady Uckfield operates in a world where the matriarch has considerable more power. Although the upper class world of the nobility to which she belongs is based on the hereditary male lineage, the male characters in this novel are portrayed mostly as weak and dull-witted compared to their wives. Lord Uckfield is depicted as unintelligent, while Charles Broughton is described as being only of average intelligence. Lady Uckfield assumes the role of making important decisions for them and when her authority is challenged by Charles when he chooses Edith as a wife rather than someone from a family in his own class, Lady Uckfield is upset.

After Edith leaves Charles, Lady Uckfield feels vindicated in her opinion that she knows best for Charles and she works to keep him from Edith and to introduce him to someone she feels is more suitable. Her assessment is that her son needs a woman who will not look to her husband for fulfillment, but will assume a role similar to her own of accepting his shortcomings and taking control of the relationship. This has been Edith's failure, she feels. Upper-class men like Charles need a wife who will act more like a mother, Lady Uckfield believes. Having children right away might have given Edith the chance to develop this maternal instinct toward Charles, Lady Uckfield seems to believe, and allowed their marriage to continue trouble-free.

Lady Uckfield seems to be vindicated in the end as Edith, pregnant, returns to Charles and starts a family. The first child, who is actually the biological daughter of Edith's lover, Simon, is a girl. This is a relief to Lady Uckfield as it means the Uckfield title will not eventually be held by an illegitimate son. In the epilogue, however, the narrator explains that this girl becomes the favorite grandchild of Lady Uckfield, perhaps because she can carry on the matriarchal traditions of the family.



Snobs

The title of the novel suggests that the characters within are shallow, upper-class people who look down on everyone they consider socially below them. There are indeed some characters like this in the book, but they are not exclusively from the upper class. Neither are all the upper-class characters as shallow as the name "snob" might suggest.

Perhaps the most crucial factor about the term "snob" is that it is not a description anyone gives to themselves. When the narrator and Lady Uckfield are discussing whether Edith is a suitable wife for Charles, Lady Uckfield insists she does not reject Edith out of snobbishness. She insists she is not a snob, which the narrator can hardly refrain from laughing at. He explains that Lady Uckfield and people like her really do not think of themselves as snobs, but they live in such an exclusive social world they don't recognize snobbery when they see it. It is a term that is only meaningful to people who have been looked down upon by others, and of course living at the top of the social world as Lady Uckfield does, she has never been looked down on.

In contrast to Lady Uckfield are characters who make a point of being snobs. These are not members of the upper class but are characters like Eric Chase, who has married into the Uckfield family and acts very rudely toward wait staff and people he considers outsiders. His behavior contrasts sharply with the gracious manners of the characters who are of the upper class. Although their underlying attitudes toward outsiders may be similar, it is considered impolite to make them overtly known.

When Edith becomes Countess Broughton, the narrator notices she begins to adopt some of the upper-class mannerisms and ways of speaking that come off as snobbish. The narrator's wife, Adela, who herself has an upper-class background, notices that Edith's manner with her is slightly condescending. She does not appreciate this and gets back at Edith by chatting with Charles about several members of their social circle that Edith does not know.

This constant name-dropping is one of the regular patterns of conversation among the upper class, the narrator explains. Although it is mainly used to confirm everyone's place within the exclusive social circle of the upper class, it can also be used as Adela uses it, and as Jane Cumnor uses it when first meeting Edith, to exclude anyone within hearing who does not belong to the same class of people. It is a snobbish thing to do, and these sections demonstrate that sometimes the upper-class snobbery is intentional.

Styles

Point of View

Snoobs is narrated by an unnamed male character who provides the main point of view for the novel. The narrator is an actor who has had some success in television roles, and he is also from an upper-class English family. As someone who can move freely between different social circles he is positioned to relay to the reader the various viewpoints and motivations of the characters. For some sections of the book, the point of view shifts to other characters, primarily Edith and Charles, adopting an omniscient viewpoint that provides insight into the thoughts and motivations of the main characters.

The larger point of view is suggested by the title of the novel, "Snoobs." The title suggests that the characters in the novel are defined by a feeling of superiority over other classes of people. Although this accusation of snobbery is usually directed at members of the upper class, it might also be pointed at some of the characters who are not in the upper class but aspire to be. The character of Eric Chase, for example, acts in a very rude and snobbish manner even though he is not considered by the upper class characters to really be one of their own kind.

The truly upper-class characters like Lady Uckfield are also snobs, but the point of view taken by the author is that they really cannot help it because it is how they have been conditioned to think for generations. In this way the overall point of view is sympathetic to the "snobs" of the upper class, demonstrating that behind their attitudes of superiority they also have feelings and troubles.

Language and Meaning

The author of "Snoobs" is English, and he writes using British English spelling and idioms. He makes frequent reference to places and locations that would be familiar to a British reader but may not be as obvious to readers outside the country.

The narration of the novel is mostly in the first person, related by an unnamed character who takes part in the events of the story. This first-person technique addresses the events of the novel directly to the reader and creates a more relaxed flow to the story. Giving the narration a personal slant based on the narrator's own opinions and experiences enlivens the language and makes for a more interesting account than a straight narration of events might.

The limitation of relying on a first-person narration, however, is that the narrator must be present in a scene in order to describe it. The author gets around this limitation by occasionally shifting to a third-person point of view with an omniscient narrative voice. These scenes are able to describe the inner thoughts of the characters in a way the narrator character cannot and add depth to the characters.



The author makes extensive use of dialogue in the novel, and uses spoken language to help define his characters. He describes the outwardly friendly but actually very guarded manner of Lady Uckfield's speech which allows her to seem like she is being gracious when she might actually be snubbing someone. Her character is given more depth when she drops this formal manner of speech with the narrator and pleads with him directly.

Other characters are defined by their dialogue as well. The charming Simon Russell, along with being good looking, has a winning conversational style that entertains even the reserved Lady Uckfield. Charles Broughton, on the other hand, speaks in the direct and uninspiring way that many men of his class adopt. Characters like the unintelligent Lord Uckfield do not utter much more than grunts.

Structure

Snobs is a novel consisting of twenty-two numbered chapters and an epilogue, divided into three parts which are given Italian names like the movements of a musical performance. It tells the story of Edith Lavery and her sometimes troubled marriage to Charles Broughton, and is arranged in chronological order. Much of the novel is written in the first person, told from the viewpoint of an unnamed narrator who interacts with the other characters and is part of the plot of the story. The narration diverges from this first person viewpoint in occasional sections that shift to an omniscient narrative voice that describes the inner thoughts of the characters. This omniscient narration is used in scenes when the narrator character is not present during the action.

The first part of the book, entitled "Impetuoso-Fiero," is made up of eight chapters. In this opening section most of the main characters are established and the meeting and romance of Edith and Charles is described. Charles and Edith meet in the first chapter and the section ends with them on their honeymoon with Edith mostly happy but having had a minor spat with Charles.

Part Two of the book is entitled "Forte-Liano" and also consists of eight chapters. This part of the book describes the central conflict of the story, which is Edith's affair with Simon Russell and the reaction of Charles and his family. It opens after Edith has been married for a few months and has settled in to life at Broughton Hall and ends with her living in an apartment in London with Simon, but contemplating her future with him and thinking about returning to Charles.

Part Three of the book is called "Dolente-Energico" and again opens after a gap of a few months. Edith has continued to live with Simon but has not divorced Charles. This portion of the novel is made up of six chapters and describes the conflict between Edith and Charles' mother, Lady Uckfield, who wants to prevent Edith from getting back with her son. The main portion of the story ends with Chapter Twenty-two, when Charles and Edith finally do meet again and he agrees to take her back.

An epilogue is included at the end of the novel which describes the fates of the main characters over the few years after the reuniting of Charles and Edith.



Quotes

No, the difficulty was that despite living two miles from Broughton Hall itself, despite Isabel's telling her girlfriends over lunch in Walton Street what luck it was having the house 'practically next door', still, after three and a half years, they had never set foot in it, nor succeeded in meeting one single member of the family.

-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 4)

Importance: This quote describes the desire of some upper-middle class characters like the Eatons to be thought of as members of the upper class.

It is quite customary for the English, when asked if they have met so-and-so, to say, 'Yes, but they wouldn't remember me,' or 'Well, I've met them but I don't know them,' when they have not met them. This is because of a subconscious urge on their part to create the comforting illusion that England, or rather the England of the upper-middle and upper classes, is criss-crossed with a million invisible silken threads that weave them together into a brilliant community of rank and grace and exclude everybody else.

-- Narrator (Chapter 2 paragraph 12)

Importance: The sometimes hypocritical behavior of the upper class is described in this quote, which suggests that the exclusiveness they enjoy is largely imaginary.

Still, if she was ambitious and reluctantly committed to the idea that it would be a man who would open the golden pathway to fulfillment, it would not be true to say that Edith was fundamentally a snob. Certainly not compared to her mother. (Chapter 3 paragraph 25)

Importance: This quote provides important insight into Edith's mindset. She is not strictly speaking a social climber, although she does intend to marry well. It also suggests that being a snob is not limited to the upper class.

Dinner was delicious, which was a surprise. I had been expecting the usual country house fare dispensed by my parents' generation, more redolent of a girls' prep school than the kitchens of the Ivy but I was not then used to Lady Uckfield's command of detail.

-- Narrator (Chapter 4 paragraph 46)

Importance: This quote establishes the narrator's familiarity with the habits of the upper class and also foreshadows his developing connection to Lady Uckfield.

Charles stopped walking for a minute and stood, looking mutely about him. 'Do you know what really depressed me about that?' We both had some pretty good ideas but naturally said nothing. 'It was because I suddenly realised how absolutely bloody stupid most of the people I know really are. These are supposed to be twelve of my best friends, for God's sake!' He chuckled bitterly. 'I'm embarrassed for them and I'm embarrassed for myself.'



-- Charles Broughton (Chapter 5 paragraph 59)

Importance: Charles Broughton displays some impatience with the shallow and snobbish behavior of his friends in this quote, establishing a depth of character the narrator had not previously seen.

Altogether, as they boarded the aeroplane for Madrid, the first leg of their journey to Mallorca, Edith and Charles were able to stare into each other's eyes in a deliberate imitation of two people who were as 'happy as newly-weds'. (Chapter 7)

Importance: Charles and Edith appear to be quite happy immediately after their wedding, but this is just a "deliberate imitation." This quote foreshadows the difficulties they will face in their marriage.

It might seem that Charles, rich and titled as he was, and really not that bad-looking in his 1930s-ish way, held all the aces, which of course in the long view he did, but Simon Russell, feeling successful and busy and as handsome as a man can be, bristled or rather shone with charismatic confidence that night. To all the onlookers at the table Charles paled before him and I at least felt a pang of real pity for this man who had everything.

-- Narrator (Chapter 12)

Importance: The two rivals for Edith's affection are compared in this quote. While Charles is the apparently more attractive choice, given his wealth and social status, Simon has a charisma that is equally attractive to Edith.

I don't actually think Lord Uckfield had any idea why he had been forced to dress up and sacrifice a perfectly good afternoon when he might have been watching racing on the box, but Lady Uckfield, I believe, liked me by this time and also, I suspect, wished to establish a beachhead on Edith's only pre-marriage friend that had made the transition into her new life.

-- Narrator (Chapter 14)

Importance: The relationship between the narrator and Lady Uckfield is referred to in this quote, which displays the narrator's ability to see the motives behind the actions of other characters.

Well, she thought as she lay back watching the dawn and listening to Simon snoring gently beside her, she had chosen private fulfillment over public splendour and she was glad of her choice. Glad, that is, in the night, when she lay naked and satisfied and far from the world. It was in the morning that she had to make up her mind all over again. (Chapter 16)

Importance: This passage illustrates Edith's dissatisfaction with both Simon and Charles and describes her dilemma of which man to stay with.



I think one would have to be very hard-hearted indeed not to feel some sympathy for them, poor things, even if their goal was a worthless one. It is easy to laugh at the pretensions of others – particularly when their ambitions are trivial – but most of us have a thorny path of it in some area of our lives, which is not worth the importance we give it.

-- Narrator (Chapter 17)

Importance: The narrator is sympathizing with the people from the upper-middle classes who aspire to join the upper class. It is ultimately a trivial desire, he believes, but it is human nature to sometimes give importance to trivial things.

In truth, I was pretty sure that I too was on Lady Uckfield's side when it came down to it. The facts were simple enough. Edith had married Charles without loving him in order to gain a position. She had then made a complete failure of that same position, abandoned it, broken her faith with Charles, made a great scandal and caused him a good deal of pain. Lady Uckfield now wished to be rid of her once and for all and, frankly, could anyone wonder at it?

-- Narrator (Chapter 20)

Importance: The point of view of the narrator is revealed in this quote, where he admits he sides more with Lady Uckfield than with his friend, Edith.

She broke off a half-open bud and fed its stalk through the top buttonhole of my shirt. 'The fact is, I'm happy enough.' I did not question her statement. I am glad she was and is happy enough. That is a good deal happier than a large proportion of my address book.

-- Narrator (Eplilogue)

Importance: In some of the final words of the novel, Edith admits to the narrator that she is "happy enough." She has learned that she cannot have everything she wants and has accepted what she has contentedly.