Summer Study Guide

Summer by Edith Wharton

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Introduction

Like the protagonist in *Ethan Frome*, Wharton's most widely read novel today, Charity yearns for a fuller life than the one she lives in her small town, but social restrictions and a certain weakness of character prevent her from realizing her dreams. One of the first American literary novels to deal frankly with a young woman's sexual awakening, *Summer* begins with a chance encounter, has a passionate affair at its center, and ends with a wedding. In this bare outline, *Summer* appears similar to hundreds of "sentimental" novels of the period, but critics agree that Wharton's depth of feeling and rich prose have turned a conventional plot into art. The novel's contemporary reviewers argued heatedly over the meaning of the wedding, and the question continued to interest critics in the twenty-first century.

Author Biography

Edith Wharton was born Edith Newbold Jones on January 24, 1862, in New York City. Her parents, wealthy members of New York's social elite, had a large home in Manhattan and another home in fashionable Newport, Rhode Island. From the time Edith was four until she was about ten, the family lived and traveled throughout Europe, avoiding the economic downturn that occurred in the United States after the Civil War. Edith developed an ear for languages and a taste for art and architecture that stayed with her for her entire life. When the family returned to New York, she did not attend formal school as her two brothers did but was encouraged by her father to study literature and philosophy on her own. Fluent in German, Italian, and French, she read widely. She also began to write, completing her first satirical fiction while she was only fourteen. Her first publication was a small volume of poetry, *Verses*, published anonymously in 1878 when she was sixteen.

In April 1885, Edith married Edward "Teddy" Wharton, who was fifteen years older than she. Wharton reveals in her memoir *A Backward Glance* (1934) that she and Teddy were friendly but not passionate with each other; the couple never had children, and Edith did not discover sexual passion until an affair decades later. The couple settled in Newport, and Edith established the morning as her time to write. In 1891, the first story published under the name Edith Wharton appeared and was followed by dozens of stories in the most important magazines of the day. By the turn of the century, Wharton was an internationally renowned fiction writer. With the publication of the novel *The House of Mirth* in 1905, she became a celebrity. She and Teddy divorced in 1913, and Wharton lived an independent but not lonely life thereafter.

Over the next thirty years she published more than forty novels, collections of stories, and nonfiction books. A few, including *Ethan Frome* (1911) and *Summer* (1917), were set in rural New England among people of the middle and lower classes, but she is best known for her fiction exploring the lives and values of wealthy Americans in urban settings. In 1921 she became the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, for *The Age of Innocence*, a novel about the moral conventions of the nineteenth-century New York elite. In 1930, she was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. As she grew older, her literary output and success increased; she was very wealthy and lived extravagantly, with lavish homes in New England and France. She died after a series of strokes and a heart attack, on August 7, 1937, at Pavillon Colombe, her home in Saint Brice-sous-Forêt, France.

Plot Summary

Chapter 1

It is a June afternoon in the early part of the twentieth century as *Summer* begins, and nineteen-year-old Charity Royall stands on the doorstep of her home, about to set off for her job at the library. As she looks over the small New England town of North Dormer, she notices a stranger, a young man clearly from the city. Something about him captures her imagination, and she feels, not for the first time, that her small-town life is unsatisfying. She is flustered when he enters the library to ask for books about the local architecture, and he appears flustered as well, struck by Charity's beauty. His questions about the library's holdings remind Charity how little she knows about books, and she is both disappointed and relieved when he leaves.

Chapter 2

To clear her head, Charity heads for a hillside, where she lies among the wild flowers and observes the many signs of summer. She often comes here when she has thinking to do, and the scented breezes on her skin always cheer her. On this day she reflects on her life since she came to live in North Dormer. She is the legal ward, though not the adopted daughter, of Lawyer Royall, whose wife died seven or eight years after they took Charity in. Charity has given little thought to the man who provides for her. Once, when she was seventeen, he approached her bedroom at night and made a feeble attempt to seduce her, but she rebuffed him and has had no fear that he will repeat his actions. However, she has taken the library position hoping that eventually she can earn enough money to get away from North Dormer.

Chapters 3—6

Over the next few weeks, Charity and the stranger, Lucius Harney, become friends. Harney lives alone down the street and has arranged to take his meals at the Royalls' home. The young architect is sketching and measuring the old houses in the area, and with the horse-drawn buggy he rents from Royall he has visited several remote areas of the region with Charity as his guide. Charity has kept the amount of time she spends alone with Harney a secret, though she is not sure why. She tells herself that she does not care what the neighbors think and that she does not care that Harney has never spoken of love. When she takes him to a house in which some of the poor Mountain folk live, she is ashamed to be reminded again of how different her background is from his.

Chapters 7—8

Now hopelessly infatuated with Harney, Charity looks forward eagerly to their meetings. One evening, he does not appear for supper, and Lawyer Royall tells Charity that he will

not be coming again. Impetuously, Charity storms out and walks to Harney's house. Noticing a light, she goes to the back of the house and sees through a window that Harney is packing his bags and preparing to leave. Realizing that if she makes her presence known he will invite her in and their chaste relationship will become a physical one, she remains silent until Harney falls asleep and then returns home. The next day she learns that she was seen leaving the house after midnight, and the town gossips assume that she has had sexual relations. To protect her reputation, Lawyer Royall asks Charity to marry him and leave town, but she refuses. Harney comes to say goodbye to Charity and then sends a note asking her to meet him secretly in the next town.

Chapters 9—10

It is the Fourth of July, and Harney takes Charity to Nettleton for the celebrations. Everything is a wonder to Charity: the train ride, the shops and restaurants, the hotels full of glamorous and confident people, the doctor's office where an unfortunate acquaintance is said to have had an abortion. Harney shows her around the city, introduces her to the taste of wine, and even buys her a pin with blue stones□her first piece of jewelry. Later, they go to the lake where they watch a spectacular fireworks display and Harney gives Charity her first kiss. Flushed with excitement, Charity is stunned to run into Lawyer Royall, drunk and angry. He loudly calls her a whore and stumbles away.

Chapter 11

When she returns home after the Fourth of July celebration, Charity dreads encountering Lawyer Royall, but he does not return that day. Suddenly unable to bear society's condemnations, Charity decides to run away, to join her mother on the Mountain. She sets out on the fifteen-mile walk but does not get far before Harney finds her. He persuades her not to go to the Mountain, but she insists that she will not return home. Instead, they walk to an abandoned house in an orchard, and there their sexual relationship begins.

Chapters 12—14

At the end of August, the town of North Dormer is busily preparing for Old Home Week. Charity has been drafted to help make decorations, and Harney has returned to help design a stage for Town Hall. The two have been meeting secretly every afternoon. During the festivities, however, Charity sees Harney talking intimately with Annabel Balch, a sophisticated young woman from the city, and begins to doubt her hold over him. One afternoon, as she waits for Harney in the abandoned house, she is met instead by Royall, who has learned about the secret meetings. He urges Charity to break off the relationship before it is too late, but she refuses. When Harney arrives, Royall asks him whether he intends to marry Charity, but Harney will not reply.

Chapter 15

As he had planned, Harney leaves North Dormer the next day to return to his work in New York. He has made a vague promise that he will return and marry Charity when his affairs are settled, but has asked her not to tell anyone of their plans. Later, Charity learns that Annabel Balch was with him when he left town and that they are engaged. Charity also discovers that she is pregnant. When a letter from Harney seems to offer no hope of their eventual reunion, she decides to go to the Mountain at last and raise her child among her own people.

Chapters 16—17

With the added burden of her pregnancy, Charity finds the long trip to the Mountain exhausting. She is met on the way by the local minister, called to attend to Charity's mother, who is dying. When they arrive, Charity's mother Mary has died, and Charity sees for the first time how impoverished her existence has been. Mary's people are rough and unfeeling; they have had none of Charity's meager advantages. She knows that she cannot stay there to raise her child and heads wearily back for North Dormer. Before she gets very far, Royall, who has driven all night to rescue her, finds her. He picks her up, speaks kindly to her, and asks her once again to marry him.

Chapter 18

Royall and Charity take the train to Nettleton and are married. They take a room at a fashionable hotel in the city and have a nice supper in the hotel restaurant. Charity goes up to their room to go to bed. The lawyer comes up hours later to spend the night in the rocking chair, and Charity understands that he knows she is pregnant and that he will protect her. The next day, Charity sends Harney a letter telling of her marriage and returns to North Dormer with her new husband.

Characters

Annabel Balch

Annabel Balch, a young woman of about the same age as Charity, stands as the ideal type of womanhood to which Charity aspires, despite Charity's claims that she does not care what others think. Annabel is wealthy, educated, beautiful, and sophisticated. In contrast to Charity, who is described more than once as "swarthy," Annabel is blond and blue-eyed. A relative of Miss Hatchard, she visits New Dormer periodically, but she is a city girl from Springfield with all of the advantages that implies. Even when Charity feels that she is at her best□when she is preparing to wear her white satin dress and be admired by her lover□the specter of Annabel Balch is present, as it is Annabel's hand-me-down satin shoes that complete Charity's outfit. In the end Annabel wins what Charity cannot: Lucius Harney's true love and commitment to marriage. Annabel never speaks during the novel, but she is often seen from afar or remembered at a distance, as is appropriate for an unreachable ideal.

Lucius Harney

Lucius Harney is a young architect from New York who has come to North Dormer to stay the summer with his relative, Miss Hatchard, while he measures and sketches the important old houses in the area. Although when Charity first sees him he is clumsily chasing his windblown hat, his clothing marks him as a man from the city, and Charity develops an immediate infatuation with him. At the same time, even before she meets Harney she cannot help but compare herself to him and her life to his, making her feel small and dull. As soon as she sees him, Charity wants to be more than she is.

Harney uses Charity as his guide and driver. She shows him around the area, pointing out houses he might wish to sketch for his publisher. In turn, he is her introduction into a wider world she has only glimpsed. He speaks of books and architecture. He takes her to the city of Nettleton, buys Charity her first taste of wine and her first piece of jewelry, escorts her to her first fireworks display, and gives her her first kiss. For Harney, these pleasures are commonplace, but even though he meets them with a hint of superiority he does seem to enjoy sharing them with Charity. Later that summer, he initiates Charity into a sexual relationship, and though the double standard for sexual behavior is strong in North Dormer and the risk to Charity is much greater than it is to Harney, she cannot or does not resist his temptation. His very name, Lucius, derives from Lucifer, a name for the devil.

Harney is never quite honest in his dealings with Charity: he denies that he has given a bad report of her to Miss Hatchard; he prepares to leave town without saying goodbye; he fails to mention even once his engagement to Annabel Balch; and he promises to marry Charity once he has had time to "settle things." Clearly, he has no intention of speaking to her of marriage until Lawyer Royall forces his hand, and after his angry and

embarrassing confrontation with the older man Harney abruptly leaves town. Still, Harney is not ultimately a bad person□simply a young and a weak one.

Miss Hatchard

Miss Hatchard is the elderly great-niece of Honorius Hatchard, the founder for whom North Dormer's library is named. As the town's most respected and respectable citizen, she reigns over Old Home Week. She is the very model of the unmarried innocent, who knows nothing of sex and desire and who avoids thinking or knowing about anything unpleasant. When Charity turns to Miss Hatchard for help in escaping Lawyer Royall, Miss Hatchard fails to understand the problem and can offer no assistance or advice. She is surprised when Charity asks for the position as librarian but grants the request when Lawyer Royall makes it. Still, Miss Hatchard places a great value on the library that bears her great-uncle's name, and she is ready to have Charity replaced when she believes that the library is not being well tended.

Ally Hawes

Ally Hawes is Charity Royall's best friend in North Dormer and the poorest girl in the village. The two do not exchange confidences, but they pass pleasant afternoons together making small talk. Ally, who seems content with her simple small-town life, earns money as a seamstress, occasionally helping Charity supplement her modest wardrobe with clever if not lavish designs. Ally also works for Annabel Balch, and it is she who tells Charity that Annabel and Harney are going to be married. Ally is sweet and innocent and has no idea of Charity's secret passion. And although Julia, Ally's older sister, has fallen into disgrace, Ally loyally and secretly visits her sister when she can.

Julia Hawes

Julia Hawes, a few years older than Charity and Ally Hawes, is the young woman from North Dormer who turned to the bad. Sometime in the past, before the action of the novel, Julia was seduced by a young man who did not marry her. She was forced to leave North Dormer and have an abortion, which nearly killed her; she now works as a prostitute in Nettleton. No one in town speaks her name in public. Ally Hawes, her younger sister, has maintained a secret correspondence with Julia, and the young women of the town whisper Julia's name as a warning about what can happen to a young woman who is not careful. When Charity and Lucius Harney visit Nettleton on the Fourth of July they meet Julia, with her heavy make-up, showy clothing, and "coarse laughter," on the arm of Lawyer Royall. Julia mocks Charity's innocence, hardly guessing that soon a pregnant Charity will find herself in Nettleton, visiting the same abortionist who attended Julia.

Charity Royall

Charity Royall is the novel's protagonist, a young woman of some nineteen years. Although she lives with her guardian Lawyer Royall and uses his last name, she is in fact the child of a drunken convict and a prostitute, and this heritage, which places her in an even lower socioeconomic class than the rest of North Dormer, shames her. Lawyer Royall and his wife rescued Charity when she was five years old, but Mrs. Royall died seven or eight years later. Since then, Charity has ruled the Royall home and has grown increasingly strong-willed. After Mrs. Royall's death, Charity refused to go away to boarding school, fearing that Royall would be too lonely without her. Six or seven years later, a drunken Royall approached Charity's room and attempted unsuccessfully to seduce her. Since that time, the older man and young woman have lived essentially separate lives under the same roof, and Charity has taken a job at the town library hoping to earn enough money to leave North Dormer.

When Charity meets and becomes infatuated with Lucius Harney, her dissatisfaction with her life becomes her essential reality. She sighs, "How I hate everything!" As her relationship with Harney deepens, and she spends more and more time alone with him driving him around the countryside, she knows she is violating convention, but she does not care. For the first time, she feels sexual yearning, and she finds it thrilling and puzzling. Her infatuation for Harney is mixed with awe, and she finds herself relying on his judgment more than on her own. When he takes her to Nettleton for the Fourth of July, she lets him order her food and drink and select her jewelry. When he is ready for sexual intimacy, she follows his lead, and she does not ask for any assurances from him.

In the end, Charity's attempt to be independent fails. She finds herself pregnant and abandoned, and while she may not care what the town thinks of her, she knows she cannot hope to live as a single mother in North Dormer. In her desperation she finally becomes willing to look for good qualities in Lawyer Royall, and she marries him. She will not have the excitement or the independence she dreamed of, but she will have stability and contentment.

Lawyer Royall

Lawyer Royall (his first name is never mentioned) is the guardian of Charity, whom he rescued from extreme poverty when she was five. Royall is a widower, an angry man who drinks too much, a lonely man who has too much education and experience to find close friends in the backward town of North Dormer. His only close relationship is with Charity, but the fatherly feelings he felt for her in the past have changed to feelings of love and lust. Since his one attempt to gain entry to her room, however, he has maintained an honorable distance from Charity. Knowing that she wants to leave him, he has nevertheless helped her obtain her job, hired a cook to stay in the house with them, and kept silent about his disapproval over her relationship with Harney.

Royall is the most complex character in the novel and the most mysterious. Earlier in his career, he worked in the city, but some unnamed disappointment brought him back to North Dormer. He does not reveal his thoughts and feelings to Charity□or perhaps she simply does not care to see them□so she is surprised at his depth of knowledge when he converses with Harney and at his eloquence when he speaks at Old Home Week. When he confronts Charity after she is seen leaving Harney's house late at night and again in the abandoned house where she has been meeting Harney, his concern seems to be for her welfare, though Charity cannot see it. Yet when he publicly calls her a "bare-headed whore" at the Fourth of July festivities, his concern seems to be only for his own wounded feelings.

Critics have argued since the book's first publication over the sort of marriage Royall and Charity may have. They point to his drinking, his temper, his violent changes in mood. They point also to his quiet compassion and understanding, revealed in his spending his wedding night in the chair beside Charity's bed. Royall can never be the exciting lover that Harney has been. But in the end, it is Royall, not Harney, who stands by Charity in her trouble, who goes looking for her when she is lost, and who brings her home again.

Themes

Sexual Awakening

More than anything else, *Summer* is the story of a young woman's discovery of sexual desire. At the beginning of the novel, Charity is completely inexperienced when it comes to men; she has seen other people in the village break off into couples, but the young men of North Dormer hold no attraction for her. Harney is the first man Charity feels an interest in, and as she spends time with him her feelings change and develop. But unlike the heroines of many other novels, Charity does not dream of a cozy cottage or the domestic life of a wife and mother. Her desire is for sexual fulfillment.

The Charity who opens the novel is bored with everything and everyone. Though tired and cold, when Charity steps down from the buggy after being tenderly and platonically held by Harney in the rain she feels as though "the ground were a sunlit wave and she the spray on its crest." As she watches him through the window of his bedroom, she feels "All her old resentments and rebellions . . . confusedly mingled with the yearning roused by Harney's nearness." And when they have begun their affair, she feels that "all the rest of life" has become "a mere cloudy rim about the central glory of their passion." As she waits for Harney in their secret meeting place, Charity, who has been wanting to get out of North Dormer since she was mature enough to frame the thought, feels that he has "caught her up and carried her away to a new world." Charity does not question how sex fits into the rest of her life, or whether the relationship might last, or what its consequences might be. For her, for now, the delights of sexual experience are enough.

In Chapter 3, just after she has met Harney for the first time, Charity does daydream about marrying him. She sees herself walking down the aisle in her wedding dress and imagines him kissing her. As she pictures the kiss, she puts her hands in front of her face "as if to imprison the kiss," and the daydream is interrupted. Beyond this glimpse of a wedding, Charity never imagines what married life might be like. In fact, once they become sexually intimate she stops wondering about marriage altogether and does not think of it again until Lawyer Royall raises the issue when he confronts Charity and Harney in the old house. When Charity finds her dress for Old Home Week laid out on her bed looking like a wedding dress, she remembers dreaming about marrying Harney but notes that "She no longer had such visions . . . warmer splendors had displaced them."

Social Classes

In the early part of the twentieth century in the United States, social class was still an important factor in social interaction; that is, it was almost unheard of for members of different classes to become close friends or to marry. As her fiction demonstrates, Wharton believed that these conventions were especially strict among the very wealthy and among those rural people who found themselves cut off from the rest of the world.

Towns like North Dormer, with no railroad station or telegraph, were likely to be conservative in regulating people with clearly understood but rarely articulated codes of behavior. In North Dormer, it is understood that the different classes do not mix.

Three different classes move through the world of *Summer*. Most of the residents are middle-class people who earn their living as shopkeepers and seamstresses. Lawyer Royall, by virtue of his profession, is slightly out of step with the rest of the community, and he is widely thought to be slightly above the others, but he is more similar than different. Below the people of North Dormer are the folk from the Mountain, "humblest of the humble." Charity was born on the Mountain, of a prostitute mother and a father who was a drunken criminal, and she knows she is fortunate to be in North Dormer because "Everyone in the village had told her so ever since she had been brought there as a child." She even looks different from the others, with her "swarthy" face and her yellowish eyes. The two classes do not mix. People from North Dormer do not talk much about the Mountain people but show their "disparagement by an intonation rather than by explicit criticism." For their part, the Mountain people do not tolerate any intrusion from North Dormer (with the occasional exception of the minister), and the people from town are afraid to go to the Mountain, for fear of the reception they would find. Charity, however, knows the Mountain people "would never hurt her," because she will always be one of theirs.

The third social class, represented by Miss Hatchard and her relatives Lucius Harney and Annabel Balch, is educated, wealthy, and urbane. They read books, they have fine clothes, travel freely between the cities and the countryside, and they feel at ease moving through different communities. As her friendship with Harney deepens, Charity's greatest fear is that he will learn of her origins, that her origin "must widen the distance between them." She understands but soon forgets, that "Education and opportunity had divided them by a width that no effort of hers could bridge."

In his anger when Harney will not speak of marriage, Lawyer Royall utters the assumption that most of North Dormer has presumably been making about Charity all along: that her parentage being what it is, she cannot be expected to be virtuous. He tells Harney, "They all know what she is, and what she came from. They all know her mother was a woman of the town." Charity has feared all along that Harney would find out about her parents and think less of her because of them, and she is right to be fearful. Clearly, he has never planned to commit to Charity but has seen her as available and of a lower class, perfect for a summer romance. Charity benefits from the sexual energy that Harney would never consider expending on an unmarried woman from his own world, just as she wears the white satin shoes that Annabel Balch no longer needs. In the end, Harney does what he has intended to do all along: he marries Annabel, a woman of his own class. The novel does not explicitly challenge the notion that one's social class determines one's personality or one's place in the world. It simply shows what happens in a world where this notion is assumed to be true.

Style

Bildungsroman

Summer is a *bildungsroman* (from the German for "novel about education"), the story of a young person's development into adulthood. The tradition of the *bildungsroman* in English literature is strong and includes such important novels as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1849—1850). Typical of the form, *Summer* begins with Charity, a relatively sheltered young person on the verge of adulthood. Charity has no real responsibilities, and her basic needs are provided for. She is independent-minded but still rather childish, as when she murmurs, "How I hate everything!" She is not curious about books or about other people; she keeps telling herself that she does not care what anyone thinks of her but cannot stop comparing herself to Annabel Balch and the Nettleton ladies; she falls head over heels in love with the first city-born man she sees□in short, she is a typical adolescent. As she moves through the novel, Charity is forced to consider other lives than her own. As a jilted lover and finally as a wife and an expectant mother, Charity is finally forced to grow up.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, several novels had explored the maturation of a female protagonist. However, as Cynthia Griffin Wolff explains in an Introduction to *Summer*, Charity's story "is the first to deal explicitly with sexual passion as an essential component of that process." While Charity at first yearns, as earlier heroines had, for a safe and romantic soft-lens kind of love, her romantic fantasies pale beside her strong sexual urges, and in her passion she does not even wonder whether Lucius Harney will marry her. Knowing the difference between love and lust, or between a summer romance and a lifetime commitment, is an important lesson Charity must learn before she moves into adulthood.

Imagery

Unlike Lucius Harney and Lawyer Royall, who are primarily interested in books and buildings and ideas, Charity finds her most expansive self when she is alone in nature. When she has something to think over, she leaves the library and goes to a quiet hillside; while Harney sketches a historic house, Charity waits in a field. Throughout the novel, Wharton uses vivid imagery to draw parallels between the natural world and Charity, both, in summertime, bursting with life and energy and fertility. The novel is set in summer, the time of heat and growth. Everything around Charity is growing, bearing blossoms and seeds, throbbing with life: "a tuft of sweet-fern uncurle[s]," "a small yellow butterfly vibrate[s]," there is "bubbling of sap and slipping of sheaths and bursting of calyxes." She watches all of this carefully, perhaps sensing that the same process is alive in her. As Charity's passion increases, the air temperature does as well. But by the time of Old Home Week, when Charity is already pregnant and Lucius will soon be gone, autumn is already beginning, and in the jar on the table where Charity and Harney meet are not summer flowers but "purple asters and red maple-leaves." As

Charity walks to the Mountain where she hopes to raise her child, she sees more signs of autumn in the apple trees heavy with fruit and rose bushes "strung with scarlet hips" rather than the flowers that would have come before. That afternoon, the first snow of the year begins to fall. A few days later, as Charity and her new husband drive back to the red house, it is in "the cold autumn moonlight." As the imagery makes clear, summer□Charity's time for youth and carelessness□is over.

Historical Context

The first part of the twentieth century was a heady time for many women in the United States. For some thirty-five years, since the end of the Civil War, debate throughout the nation about what the new political role for African Americans would be had spilled over into debate about new roles for women. Active women's rights groups began to emerge in the late 1860s, demanding new rights for women: the right to vote, the right to attend colleges and universities alongside men, the right to work in the professions, the right to respectful and appropriate medical care, including information about birth control and abortion, the right to control property. Along with these political and economic demands, women also developed a heightened interest in literature that dealt with their lives and concerns. The bestselling novelists of the late nineteenth century in the United States were women, writing stories about women. Although most of these writers were not recognized by the literary establishment as serious or important, they served an important need in giving voice to women's experience.

In 1899, novelist Kate Chopin published her novel *The Awakening*, about a young woman who comes to understand that the life of a wife and mother is not satisfying to her. For Chopin's heroine Edna, there are almost no acceptable alternatives to domesticity. She would like to express herself through painting, to earn her own living, and to have passionate relationships with men. During the novel, she does have an affair with one man and feelings of love for another, in addition to her tepid relationship with her husband. The novel was met with a fury of angry criticism and accusations of obscenity, and it was banned in Chopin's hometown of St. Louis, Missouri. The novel went quickly out of print and was forgotten for more than half a century; Chopin never wrote another novel.

Like Chopin, Edith Wharton was typical of what was called the New Woman. She earned her own living from her own work (and in fact became the highest-paid novelist in the country); she divorced her husband; she traveled freely; she spent time with male friends, including the writer Henry James. Wharton did not join any women's organizations or campaign for women's rights; she preferred to keep to herself and fulfill her own dreams. In her writing, however, she created characters who had minds and hopes of their own and who frequently behaved in ways that did not conform to the rigid societal expectations for women. When Wharton published *Summer* in 1917, the "woman question" was still very much in debate. A minimum wage law for women existed in Massachusetts but nowhere else. Doctors could not discuss or prescribe birth control. Women were routinely denied educational and career opportunities. Women could vote in certain states but would not get the right to vote in federal elections until 1920. Young middle-class women like Charity Royall might have romantic dreams of more exciting lives, but other than by marrying above their class (something frowned upon and rarely accomplished) there were few ways to achieve these goals.

Critical Overview

Although *Summer* never became as popular as some of Wharton's other novels, its author was important enough that the novel was widely reviewed when it was published in 1917. Many reviewers praised Wharton for her skillful description and characterization, while others regretted that *Summer* was overall a slighter work than the previous novels. Reviewers also disagreed about the ending of the novel. Lawrence Gilman, writing for *The North American Review*, found no satisfaction in Charity's marriage to Mr. Royall, stating that her story "ends grayly, resignedly, with long anonymous years of kindly and terrible amelioration stretching vacantly before her." An unsigned review in *The Nation*, on the other hand, was among those that celebrated the marriage, stating that "Mrs. Wharton permits, nay, encourages, us to hope a good measure of happiness for them both." H. W. Boynton, a reviewer for *The Bookman*, agreed, noting that the marriage offers, "we really believe, some chance of happiness, or at least content."

Little critical attention was paid to *Summer* and Wharton's other work during the 1930s and 1940s. Wharton lived in France for the last years of her life and watched her reputation decline. As she herself noted somewhat bitterly in her 1934 memoir *A Backward Glance*, readers during the years following the Great Depression were less interested in stories of New York and New England wealth and manners and more interested in tales of the struggles of common laborers. The 1950s saw a cluster of Wharton studies, including Blake Nevius's overview *Edith Wharton: A Study of Her Fiction* and Josephine Lurie Jessup's *The Faith of Our Feminists: A Study in the Novels of Edith Wharton, Ellen Glasgow, Willa Cather*. Critics of this period took the opportunity, some fifteen years after Wharton's death, to examine her complete output and discern major themes and techniques that carried over from work to work. They paid little attention specifically to *Summer*. Nevius, observing Charity's "pride, willfulness, and ignorance," concludes that "Her clash with her guardian makes it clear that temperamentally they are akin." Jessup, on the other hand, sees the novel as a "feminine triumph," one of many examples in Wharton of stories in which "woman exceeds man."

The second wave of feminism in the 1960s and the opening of Wharton's sealed papers at Yale in 1969 led to a dramatic revival of Wharton studies which continued into the twenty-first century. Critics in this last period, more willing than their predecessors to explore the frankly sexual nature of Charity's awakening, published dozens of studies of *Summer*. Most of these studies grew out of a more fully realized conception of feminism than previous work. Kathy Grafton's essay in *Twentieth Century Literature* is one of several that trace Wharton's understanding of the work of Sigmund Freud and her use of sexual imagery to suggest "Harney's need for degradation and Charity's need for forbiddenness." Wharton's possible sexual attraction to her own father and the issues of incest suggested by Harney's marriage to Annabel Balch and Charity's to Lawyer Royall have been the subject of several studies, including William E. Hummel's article in *Studies in American Fiction*. A different feminist approach is demonstrated by Rhonda Skillern's contribution to *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton*, which draws on

semiotics to "trace the process by which Charity Royall, who represents the resisting feminine, is drawn into the symbolic order" but also "does manage to express her resistance to the symbolic order."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
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Critical Essay #1

Bily is an instructor at Adrian College in Adrian, Michigan. In this essay, Bily examines how Charity Royall receives and rejects clothing and other objects of adornment from men in Summer*.*

At the turn of the twentieth century there were strict social prohibitions against a gentleman giving a lady clothing or jewelry. An unmarried woman who received clothing from a man was considered to be "no better than she should be," a woman of loose morals. Married men could display their worth by the way they adorned their wives; a woman with expensive clothing and jewelry and the time to study the latest fashions was evidence that her husband had enough disposable wealth to support such conspicuous consumption. These social conventions were a small part of a rigid system that worked against women having autonomy within or without the bonds of marriage. Young women like Charity Royall in Edith Wharton's *Summer* had few means outside marriage for leading satisfying lives: denied higher education, professional careers, even the right to participate in government, they relied on husbands to advance them socially and economically.

Charity would like to believe that she can do as she pleases without the approval of society, and it is in this spirit that she enters into an affair with Lucius Harney. But throughout the novel, Wharton shows Charity as struggling against societal expectations. Every time Charity looks in a mirror or decides she cannot bear looking in a mirror, she accepts the ideology that says her worth is in how she appears to men. If she is to find any happiness in her unhappy situation, Charity will have to learn to stop caring how men see her. Only if she can gain that much self-worth can she become a wife and a mother without losing her soul.

Charity does not read books, but she has internalized the belief that the world can be read in its appearance, and she tends to form judgments of people quickly based on what they look like. She gauges her own reception to romance based on her willingness or unwillingness to change her appearance for a particular man. As she understands, a woman makes herself appealing to a man by ornamenting herself. When she considers falling in love with the young men of the village, she puts it in these terms and realizes she cannot imagine "curling her hair or putting a new ribbon in her hat" for any of them. It is Harney's "city clothes" that first makes him worthy of attention, and she puts a great deal of thought into a new hat and dress for the Fourth of July.

In Charity's important moments with Lawyer Royall, his clothing indicates how she will respond to him. In her youth, on the day Charity decides not to go away to school, he waits for her on the porch. He is clean-shaven and has "brushed his black coat," and Charity notes that "at such moments she really admired him." She looks at him closely again on the day of the Old Home Week festivities, when his face wears "the look of majesty that used to awe and fascinate her childhood. His frock-coat had been carefully brushed and ironed, and the ends of his narrow black tie were so nearly even that the tying must have cost him a protracted struggle." As he gives his speech, Charity hears

nobility in it that surprises her, and her willingness to hear the voice is connected with Royall's clothing. When Lawyer Royall looks his best, he is at his best, and vice versa. When Charity feels the most revulsion for him, he tends to be unshaven, and she attacks his appearance: "How long is it since you've looked at yourself in the glass?"

Charity knows instinctively that Lawyer Royall and Lucius Harney, the two men who want to dress her, also want to undress her. Twice, Lawyer Royall tries to dress up Charity, and twice she thwarts his attempts. The first time is when he has received payment from Harney for the use of the buggy, and he gives Charity ten dollars, saying, "Here□go get yourself a Sunday bonnet that'll make all the other girls mad." He makes the gift by "tossing a ten-dollar bill into Charity's lap," symbolically demonstrating what he hopes to buy with his money. When Charity does buy a new dress and hat with the money, however, it is to impress Harney, and she leaves home with the hat and dress covered up so Royall will not see them. On the morning after their wedding, Royall gives Charity forty dollars for clothes, telling her, "You know I always wanted you to beat all the other girls. . . . If it ain't enough, there's more where that come from□I want you to beat 'em all hollow." Royall is among those men who use women as competition; in helping Charity "beat" the other girls he hopes to "beat" the other men. If Charity uses this gift to buy stylish clothing now, she will be accepting a role for herself as an ornament, a mannequin to be dressed up for Royall's pleasure. But as we will see, she does not.

When Charity comes home with her husband to North Dormer, she is wearing the only two pieces of jewelry she has ever received in her life. On her breast she wears the blue brooch Harney bought her on the Fourth of July, and on her finger she wears Royall's wedding ring. Each piece was chosen by the man who gave it, and neither is quite right. The brooch, fond as Charity is of it, is a reminder of her dependence on Harney, her willingness to bow to his judgment even in matters that concern her more than they do him. At the jewelry store, where she sees jewelry close up for the first time, she is attracted to "a gold lily-of-the-valley with white flowers"□an understandable attraction for a woman who loves the natural world as much as she does. Harney, however, has shown little interest in the flowers and fields Charity loves; he is dedicated to the symmetry and geometry of architecture. "Don't you think the blue pin's better?" he asks her, and immediately Charity feels ashamed at her lack of perception. Why should she feel this way? The gift of the pin is meant to give *her* pleasure, but Harney is more concerned with ornamenting the woman he appears with than with giving her what she would enjoy.

Harney, of course, does buy sexual intimacy with the brooch, however cold-bloodedly a reader may see his intent. When Charity has her first close-up look at jewelry, she is struck by the "dark blue velvet" on which "brooches glittered like the moon and stars." A few hours later, as Charity and Harney watch fireworks that resemble "jeweled light" interspersed with "velvet darkness" (Charity absent-mindedly crushing the hat she bought with Royall's money), Harney kisses her for the first time. Charity has considered earlier that the money for the brooch might have bought an engagement ring instead, but she knows Harney will never buy her one. Nevertheless, it is not long before she becomes his lover.

The blue brooch plays an interesting role in the second half of the novel. Because she has no money, Charity must give the brooch to Dr. Merkle in order to have her pregnancy confirmed. At this time, Charity does not mind giving up the brooch, because she is still confident that when she tells Harney about the baby he will choose her over Annabel Balch. Once she realizes that he has already chosen Annabel, she decides not to tell him about the baby and determines that she must get the brooch back. Ironically, the money she uses to get the brooch back comes from her new husband, Lawyer Royall. Charity almost lets the brooch go, "But how could she leave her only treasure with that evil woman? She meant it for her baby; she meant it, in some mysterious way, to be a link between Harney's child and its unknown father." The pin "lay in her bosom like a talisman . . . It gave her strength." Actually, Charity's strength comes from her decision to buy back the brooch but not to take ownership of it; the brooch is for the baby, not for keeping a useless dream alive.

Charity's other piece of jewelry is her wedding ring, the sign that she belongs to Royall, not to Harney. (Unlike more recent customs, only women wore wedding rings at the early part of the twentieth century, as a sign that they□but not their husbands□were not available for sex.) Like the brooch, the ring was chosen for her, and it is only when she feels "a ring that was too big for her being slipped onto her thin finger" that she understands she is married. When did Royall buy the ring? How far in advance has he been preparing for this wedding to a woman who was not a part of the planning? Each time the ring is mentioned, it is as a symbol of loss, not of eternal love. When Charity looks out the window and sees the lake in the distance, she realizes "what she had done. Even the feeling of the ring on her hand had not brought her this sharp sense of the irretrievable." The next day, sitting down to write Harney a last letter, Charity is "possessed with a fear which had haunted her ever since she had felt Mr. Royall's ring on her finger: the fear that Harney might, after all, free himself and come back to her."

Why does Charity fear Harney coming back? Perhaps she knows now what a life with him would be like: that if he came back because of the baby or because of his desire for Charity, he and Charity would quickly grow weary of each other. He would not take her to New York and present her as his wife among his society friends, and neither would the couple be accepted and happy in North Dormer. She has known since her last meeting with Harney that "the gulf between them was too deep, and that the bridge their passion had flung across it was as unsubstantial as a rainbow." Now that she wears Royall's ring she has a chance at stability and contentment, if not passion, and she fears that she would cast it aside for one more embrace.

As the novel draws to a close, the newlyweds Charity and Royall are in their hotel room packing for their return to the red house as husband and wife. Royall cheerfully asks, "Well, did you rig yourself out handsomely? I haven't seen any bundles round." Charity, who has spent the money he gave her to get back Harney's brooch, answers that she would rather see to her own modest needs. Royall contemplates this for a moment and says, "Well, I wanted you to go back looking stylisher than any of them; but I guess you're right. You're a good girl, Charity." In rejecting Royall's attempt to dress her up, Charity has claimed for herself some control over her own role in the marriage. She will not be an adornment for Royall; she will make decisions, she will be autonomous, she

will be an equal. As for Royall (who, after all, has taken on a wife who does not love him and a baby that is not his), he accepts Charity's vision. When he says, "I guess you're right," Charity knows that marrying Royall was the right choice. "I guess you're good, too," she says.

Source: Cynthia Bily, Critical Essay on *Summer*, in *Novels for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Critical Essay #2

Covintree is a graduate student and expository writing instructor in the Writing, Literature, and Publishing department at Emerson College. In this essay, Covintree explores how settings and landscape mirror the emotional/moral life of the novel's main character, Charity Royall.

According to Marilyn French in her introduction to Wharton's novel, *Summer*, "Wharton's main theme, her deepest concern, was the emotional/moral life, especially in the area of sexuality." Wharton created a story of a young woman's coming of age through sexual experience and love. In many ways, this novel was ahead of its time. Long before essays on female identity were being written, Wharton created a female character exploring just these things. Much of Wharton's approach to the taboo subject of sexuality was brought to the reader through the imagery and environment in which she placed her characters.

When the novel's main character, Charity Royall, first visits Nettleton it is with the church youth group. At this time, the sights and sounds of such a place are overwhelming to her. They make her aware of the plain life she lives in North Dormer. What she remembers from this first visit are the "plate-glass fronts, . . . cocoanut pie, . . . and a theater [where she listened to a lecture on] pictures that she would have enjoyed looking at if . . . explanations had not prevented her from understanding them." With this experience, Nettleton becomes a place of newness and excitement. Wharton describes the town in an abundance of sensory images: what Charity can see, taste, and hear. It becomes a town Charity can fantasize about.

Charity needs something to fantasize about. Already an outsider because of her history with "the Mountain," she remains closed off to the interactions with the boys of North Dormer. In her essay "Development of Female Identity," Phyllis Katz asserts that "the major sex-role task of [the phase of later adolescence] involves the development of heterosexual interactions." At the beginning of the novel, Charity's history of interactions is marred by annoyance and invasion. She is annoyed at the couples who use the library to make out. She herself does not entertain male visitors there. Only her adoptive father, Lawyer Royall, shows interest of a sexual or marital nature. This, of course, is unacceptable to her, and so she is starved for real attention and affection from a man.

Wharton makes it clear to the reader that "North Dormer is at all times an empty place." Living in such an empty place, Charity's own needs and desires are stifled. She is unable to consider her own sexual needs or development. There are no men that she imagines being with. Charity's newfound dislike for North Dormer correlates with her female development. As a child, she "had long supposed it to be a place of some importance." It is only after her visit to Nettleton that she is no longer satisfied. However, North Dormer is not changing; Charity is changing. She is becoming aware of her own desires.

Until the stranger comes to the library, she can only see her own sexual power as something that appeals to her adoptive father. Her own need to be admired, then, works against her in her own home. The response to her own sexuality becomes a reaction to Lawyer Royall's propositions of marriage. Charity demonstrates this in the quick way she sends Royall out of her room and her means to gain another female in the house. She can see her own sexuality has power, but it is one that compromises the comforts of her own home. In this way, Charity's sexuality is a burden to her life in North Dormer. Both are isolated and repressed according to the strictures of the time.

If it were not for the nearby fields, it could be possible to believe that Charity had no concept of her own sexual desire. But, like the town of Nettleton that peeks at North Dormer through the train route, Charity is aware of what she is not often exploring. "She was blind and insensible to many things, and she dimly knew it; but to all that was light and air, perfume and colour, every drop of blood in her responded." The external sensory experiences are able to arouse an internal emotion. Her visits to the hillside are an escape and is one in which she can explore her own thoughts and feelings. In the introduction to her book *Female Adolescence*, Katherine Dalsimer explores the "possibility of pleasure, delight, or pride on the part of the female in her own genitals *as they are*, and in her own feminity." Above her empty town, Charity can "feel" and Wharton makes this point clear by repeating this one word four times in one paragraph. It is here, while lying in the grass, she first fantasizes about Lucius Harney.

Charity's evening ritual of washing her face becomes an opportunity to imagine "herself a bride in low-necked satin, walking down the aisle with Lucius Harney." Lucius has made it possible for her to take the feelings and desires she can experience in nature and find them within herself. Therefore, the affair between Charity and Lucius begins in her mind. It would almost seem enough that this be the resolution for Charity, that she tastes such desire and then returns to normal life, but this is not the case. Wharton pushes the emotion further. She brings the affair to fruition.

An affair so highly charged with emotion and desire cannot happen in the towns of Wharton's time, and so Wharton creates for them an environment where it is possible. The little house in the woods becomes their summer home. Though the walls are "sun-bleached to a ghastly grey," it contained, for Charity, a "secret sweetness." This sweetness is parallel to Charity's own confidence with her budding sexuality, which comes before Lucius arrives and "before [his] first kiss [blots] it out," or erases it because he brings his own sweetness. The house has a door, a table, a bed, and even a vase of flowers. This is the home that Charity wants for herself. The simple freedom of the landscape allows for more freedom between her and Lucius. Though it is all done in secret, it is a better representation of Charity's inner self. Here, she finds, "the wondrous unfolding of her new self, the reaching out to the light of all her contacted tendrils." She finds that love is not "something confused and furtive," but "as bright at the summer air."

Like the detail of the Mexican blanket on the mattress of the little house, their involvement with one another is filled with little intimacies. While they do not even kiss until late into their affair, they share experiences in places that are sensual or alluring. As Katherine Dalsimer points out in her introduction to *Female Adolescence*, Charity is

making "decisions . . . which will define adulthood; . . . with respect to sexual intimacy, to values that are expressed in ways of living." Lucius's surveying work allows Charity to rest in the grass in the kind of freedom she most enjoys. They are able to ride through the area in a comfortable silence. Though the relationship is actually tenuous, Charity makes decisions about it that demonstrate her ideal and most fulfilled version of herself.

When she and Lucius visit Nettleton, Charity is keenly self-conscious of every move they make. Wharton is also keenly aware of what sights they could see in Nettleton to allude to their desire. On this visit, the shop windows are not just reflections of "plate-glass." Now, Wharton describes the contents of the windows: "waves of silk and ribbon . . . hats [rising] like tropical orchids. . . . wax ladies in daring dresses, . . . pink corsets and transparent hosiery." Again Nettleton is filled with sensual images, but this time they are also sexual. They mirror Charity's own sexuality, as each image applies most strongly to women. Wharton lists the exotic and the hidden, showing how Nettleton can put it all in full view. Even objects that might not initially appear sexual are sexualized as Wharton writes: "the pink throats of gramophones opened their giant convolutions in a soundless chorus."

Charity is a character who begins the novel despising her town. As the story progresses, however, she begins to move through the town with exhilarating secrecy. This is the secret of her burgeoning sexuality. Like the gramophone, she is pink-throated, waiting to open. Once Charity does open, her fulfillment brings a power and awareness that lets her finally find comfort in her own town. In an age when such ideas were not discussed, Wharton makes it clear how liberating and satisfying awareness of sexuality can be.

Source: Kate Covintree, Critical Essay on *Summer*, in *Novels for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Critical Essay #3

Dupler is a writer, teacher, and independent scholar. In the following essay, Dupler discusses the role of nature and culture in Summer*, with particular attention to the part played by shame in the society of the novel.*

Edith Wharton's novel, *Summer*, is a classic coming-of-age story about a young woman. This type of story, called a *bildungsroman* (which translates from the German as "novel of formation"), generally contains a hero or heroine who is set in opposition to society and his/her upbringing in order to find his/her place in that society. Themes of coming-of-age novels often deal with love, with the conflict between adolescence and adulthood, and with the process of maturation and all the introspection and experimentation inherent in that process. In *Summer*, the female protagonist, Charity Royall, embodies many of the themes of the coming-of-age novel. In particular, Charity's character reveals a young adult's emerging individuality, or nature, in conflict with the society that has nurtured her.

At the beginning of Wharton's novel, the external world of nature plays a significant role. The story begins on a June afternoon, and the splendor of summer is all around. Wharton uses the imagery of nature both abundantly and carefully. In scene after scene, there is lavish description of the blooming summer world that serves as the backdrop for her characters' interactions. These scenes of nature may symbolize elements of the human story. For instance, in the beginning of the story, when Charity begins to fall in love, nature reflects the passion and abundance of her feelings, overflowing with life as it does in early summer. Later in the novel, when much has changed for Charity and she has experienced an "unfolding of her new self," the season has changed to autumn, When Charity becomes most distraught and has seemingly been abandoned by the world, the world is cold and wintry, and the optimism of summer is but a memory.

When Charity leaves her library job early one day and goes to lie in a summer meadow, Wharton describes the scene in great detail with smells, colors, and textures. In this verdant setting, "every drop of blood in her responded." Thus, nature is not only on the outside but on the inside of Wharton's human characters as well. Indeed, although Charity is a willful and free-spirited young woman, throughout the story there is also present an "undercurrent as mysterious and potent" as the force that "makes the forest break into leaf." Charity feels this force when she falls in love and she knows that "something transient and exquisite had flowered in her." She also experiences this force when she feels "pitted against unknown forces," and is "slipping down a smooth, irresistible current," which later feels "overwhelming."

Charity's character is influenced both by nature and by culture, and it reveals the conflict between the two. She is a natural woman who has an "animal secretiveness" about her, while at the same time she is considered to be intelligent and attractive by the community around her. She is clever enough in social roles that "in her narrow world she had always ruled." While in nature Charity becomes "absorbingly interested in

herself." This suggests that she experiences an increase in self-esteem when left alone in a natural setting. But when Charity is in human society, in culture, she feels most challenged; she has a pervasive sense of shame that is revealed throughout the story.

One way that society uses to shame Charity, to motivate her to conform and to stifle her individuality and her freedom, is to belittle her past. Charity has come from the "mountain," a "bad place" and "a shame to have come from." In the beginning, Charity exclaims, "How I hate everything!" which suggests her loss of self-esteem because of the shame of her origin; her very birth is considered unworthy by the town's arbitrary standards. Charity has been taught all her life that she should be indebted to Mr. Royall, the man who brought her down from the mountain and saved her from misery and poverty. This shaming mechanism subordinates Charity to the older and wealthier man who is her guardian.

On a number of occasions, Mr. Royall causes Charity to feel shame. When he speaks with Lucius Harney about Charity's humble beginnings, she is described as "choking with humiliation." When Charity tells Harney of Mr. Royall's presumptive advances, she is swept over by "a flush of shame." When Mr. Royall accuses Charity of improperly visiting Harney one evening, Charity's "shame weighed on her like a physical oppression." And when Mr. Royall sees Charity with Harney in the town of Nettleton, Mr. Royall shames Charity with profanity and disrespect. At the very end of the story, when Mr. Royall is trying to help Charity after she has been abandoned by Harney, his look makes her feel "ashamed and yet secure."

Although Lucius Harney at times seems to build Charity's self-esteem, nevertheless he brings out the deepest feelings of inadequacy in Charity. Next to him, Charity is painfully aware of her "ignorance of life and literature." Harney's worldly experience gives him an "air of power" that she is missing and that she is infatuated with. When attempting to write to Harney, Charity experiences an "inability to express herself." In another instance, lacking the proper words to write, Charity wonders "what a civilized person would have done," again pointing to her difficulties with culture. Harney represents a level of society that Charity, with her damaged sense of self, can only envy. Furthermore, Harney takes advantage of Charity, leading her to believe that he wants a permanent relationship with her but leaving her pregnant for another woman, which greatly increases Charity's sense of shame as a "leaden weight of shame" hangs on her, "benumbing every other sensation."

Others promote this sense of shame as well. An evangelist tells Charity that she must "confess her guilt," without having any specific reason for telling her to do so. Even the abortion doctor attempts to shame Charity, saying, "Ain't you ashamed," when Charity cannot make a payment. The community seems to be held together by the fear of shame. The town of North Dormer is described as full of "mean curiosities" and "furtive malice," ready to pounce on any citizens who dare cross its "harsh code of conduct." Even Mr. Royall is not free from feeling shame: "he despised himself" after Charity refuses his advances toward her one night.

Just like nature in the story, there are both internal and external manifestations of the shaming mechanism. For instance, Charity at different times in her relationship with Harney feels shame coming from within as a response learned from immersion in North Dormer society. There is also shame that is enforced by the other members of the community. When Charity, for example, spies on Harney one evening, Mr. Royall tells her that her reputation is ruined because the rumor that she improperly spent the evening with Harney has spread through the whole town.

Charity feels oppressed by shame and struggles to break free. She finds strength to do this from within herself, asserting her true nature over the demands of her society and its sense of shame. Charity spends time alone in nature, restoring herself away from culture's demands. Her natural intelligence gives her power in the household that she shares with Mr. Royall. The first time her guardian offends her, she gains the upper hand and demands that another female be hired in the household. It also becomes apparent in her relations with Harney that "she was the stronger" of the two. She confronts the shame of her impoverished background, when she admits to Harney that she comes from the mountain. Thus, Charity's nature overcomes the disadvantages that she finds in her position in society. In addition, she performs acts of rebellion. In spite of the warnings from the small town against men from the city, Charity chooses to pursue a relationship with Harney. She and Harney find an abandoned house, away from the rest of society, in which to spend time together.

Charity's transformation in the story comes about as she struggles with the sense of shame that her society has associated with her place of birth and with the sense of shame associated with her relationship with Harney. Although she fears "unescapable isolation" when she gets pregnant outside of wedlock and the man she loves runs away with her arch-rival, she confronts her fears and decides to go back to the mountain. On the mountain she is finds more despair, as her mother has just passed away. But when she views her dead mother's body, from what is probably the loneliest and saddest point in her life, she experiences a release of her shame. She realizes that, contrary to acting in a shameful way that tainted Charity's life, her mother acted in a way that gave her an opportunity. With this realization Charity experiences an opening, a "softness at her heart" that seems to create a shift in her character. In the end, Charity's willful nature gives way to "complete passiveness," and she accepts the marriage offer from Mr. Royall. The reader is uncertain whether this is a positive act for Charity, but Mr. Royall does rescue her from the impending difficulties of her situation. As the novel closes, the reader senses that Charity is relaxing into a new and safer fate, while retaining her fundamental freedom, as she can see the life around her with a "sudden acuteness of vision."

Source: Douglas Dupler, Critical Essay on *Summer*, in *Novels for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Adaptations

Books in Motion offers an unabridged audio recording of *Summer* read by Shaela Connor. It was published in 1992 on audiocassettes.

Another unabridged audio presentation is available on audiocassette and CD from Blackstone Audio Books. Recorded in 1994, the novel is read by Grace Conlin. A 1999 edition includes the novel and excerpts from *A Backward Glance*.

Topics for Further Study

Research the tradition of Old Home Week in New England villages near the turn of the twentieth century. What purposes does this tradition seem to have served? In what ways is Old Home Week like and unlike homecoming as it is celebrated at high schools and colleges today?

Research the availability of contraceptives and abortion in the early part of the twentieth century. What might Charity and Harney have done to avoid pregnancy? If Charity had decided to have Dr. Merkle perform an abortion, how safe might it have been?

The pin Harney buys for Charity costs $10□the same as the fare to ride around the lake in an "electric run-about." Using 1910 as the year Harney bought the pin, calculate the approximate cost in dollars used in the early 2000s. How nice a gift did he buy her?

Edith Wharton's original readers would have understood from the beginning that Charity and Lucius Harney would not last as a couple, because they come from different social classes. In the community you live in, what are the chances that two people from different social, ethnic or religious groups can form lasting bonds, supported by the larger community? Is the idea of sticking with your own kind out-dated or still important?

Are any old buildings in your town named after early citizens? Research the lives and contributions of one or more of these namesakes. What kinds of people are honored in this way?

Compare and Contrast

Early Twentieth Century: In 1914, Margaret Sanger, a nurse, is prosecuted for publishing *The Woman Rebel*, a newsletter promoting birth control. The newsletter is banned as obscene literature. Two years later, she opens a birth control clinic in New York City, one of the nation's first. It is illegal in most parts of the United States even for physicians to prescribe or discuss birth control.

Today: Although some religious groups oppose the use of birth control, it is widely available, and generally considered safe and reasonably (but not entirely) effective. Information about sex, conception, and contraception is easily obtained.

Early Twentieth Century: In Pittsburgh, the first American movie theater opens in 1905. Within ten years, all major cities in the United States have cinemas, showing silent spectacles, comedies, and newsreels. By 1912, five million people in the United States go to the movies each day.

Today: Most American cities have multi-screen cinemas showing full-length movies with color, sound, and big-budget special effects. Movies can also be seen on broadcast television or in various in-home video formats.

Early Twentieth Century: Travel is difficult and expensive for rural people. Bicycles and horse-drawn vehicles are common but naturally limit the distances one can travel. Automobiles are still largely a novelty. Women are discouraged by social convention from traveling without chaperones. As a result, poor and rural women might spend their entire lives within a few miles of their homes.

Today: There are more automobiles in the United States than there are licensed drivers. Airplanes, buses, trains, and cars make it easy to get from one town to another. Millions of Americans live in one town and are employed in another.

Early Twentieth Century: Communication is cumbersome, making it difficult to send and receive private messages. Private homes in small towns like North Dormer do not have telephones or home mail delivery.

Today: With telephones, email, instant messaging, and mail delivery, it is easy for couples to communicate quickly and privately.

What Do I Read Next?

Ethan Frome (1911) is Wharton's other short novel of rural New England. Its title character is an unhappily married man who comes to believe he has a chance at real love when his wife's cousin Mattie comes to stay.

The Age of Innocence (1920) is Wharton's Pulitzer Prize—winning novel of social life in New York City during the 1870s. The novel's upperclass characters are just as bound by convention and just as fearful of gossip as the middle-class characters in *Summer*.

The Awakening (1899), by Kate Chopin, tells the story of a young woman's gradual realization that being a dutiful wife and mother is not enough for her. The novel was greeted with anger and scorn because it did not condemn its central character for committing adultery.

Among the most frequently borrowed material from the Hatchard Memorial Library is the poetry of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, an immensely popular poet of nineteenth-century New England. His *Ballads and Other Poems* (1841) included "The Village Blacksmith," "The Wreck of the Hesperus," and other favorites which were still widely anthologized in the early 2000s.

North of Boston (1914) is a collection of poetry by Robert Frost. Published shortly before *Summer*, it includes several poems, including "Mending Wall" and "The Death of the Hired Man," that depict life in rural New England.

The *Ladies' Home Journal*, a magazine for women readers, has been published since the nineteenth century. Issues from the early part of the twentieth century, collected and available in many public libraries, offer fascinating looks at the advice given to women about their appearance, their responsibilities for maintaining a home, and their behavior.

Further Study

Lauer, Kristen O., and Margaret P. Murray, *Edith Wharton: An Annotated Secondary Bibliography*, Garland, 1990.

Although no longer up to date, this volume offers the most complete information about virtually every important piece of criticism of Wharton's work from original publication through 1987.

Lewis, R. W. B., *Edith Wharton: A Biography*, Harper & Row, 1975.

At well over five hundred pages, the Pulitzer Prize—winning *Edith Wharton* was a groundbreaking biography of Wharton, written with the help of thousands of pages of letters, journal, and other documents that were sealed for thirty years after Wharton's death. Lewis's biography offered the first substantive look at Wharton's relationships with the various men in her life.

Pennell, Melissa McFarland, *Student Companion to Edith Wharton*, Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003.

Part of Greenwood's Student Companions to Classic Writers Series, this volume is an introduction to Wharton's life and work written specifically for the general reader. Included are a biography and a critical overview of Wharton's place in American literature as well as a chapter dedicated to characters, plot, structure, and interpretation of *Summer*.

Singley, Carol J., ed., *A Historical Guide to Edith Wharton*, Oxford University Press, 2003.

This volume collects original articles about Wharton's place and time, providing a historical and cultural context for her works. Materials especially relevant for studying *Summer* include a brief biography by Shari Benstock, an analysis of women's fashions by Martha Banta, a narrative bibliography by Clare Colquitt, and an illustrated chronology.

Wolff, Cynthia Griffin, *A Feast of Words: The Triumph of Edith Wharton*, rev. ed., Addison-Wesley, 1995.

Wolff's biography is a thorough and insightful psychological study of Wharton's life and work.

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Wharton, Edith, *A Backward Glance*, D. Appleton-Century, 1934.

□□□, *Summer*, 1917, reprint, Perennial Library, 1979.

Wolff, Cynthia Griffin, Introduction, in *Summer*, by Edith Wharton, Perennial Library, 1979, p. x.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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