



ETHAN FROME

by **Edith Wharton**

LEGEND

- About Edith Wharton
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ABOUT EDITH WHARTON

E.W. was born in 1862 (year that she kept secret) in New York city in a very (Puritan) religious, wealthy and socially prominent family.

At this time there was a civil War in her Country, and for this reason her family moved to Europe.

She was an atypical girl.

Despite her lifelong love for Walter Berry, in 1885 she married Edward Robbins Wharton, who soon started suffering from acute depression, that influenced also herself, who suffered from asthma too. When her husband's mental state was determined to be incurable, she divorced from him and chase as new partner Morton Fullerton.

She died of a stroke in 1937 in Saint-Brice-sous-Foret.



HOW HAS HER LIFE INFLUENCED HER WAY OF WRITING?

Writing novels was Edith Wharton's way of coming to terms with the disappointments of her life and her inner side:

- the Puritanism is a central influence in her writings: she represents people in very low conditions (ex: Zeena and Ethan), married women known only with their husbands' surname (ex: Zenobia Frome) and the pressure created by gossip → you have to appear as perfectly normal in front of the others and this inhibits your personal fulfillment (ex: Ethan)
- she presents difficult love relationships, as some of hers (Mattie and Ethan)
- it is celebrated her love for culture and the importance given to it by the Puritan society (ex: Ethan and Mrs Hale)
- in "Ethan Frome" the engineer is emblematic for the immigration occurring at those times in the USA

EDITH'S DESCRIPTIVE STYLE

Her descriptive style is useful to give more realism to her products and convey better the personality of a character (ex: the parallelism between Starkfield and Ethan's former and Zenobia's lives)

“Young Ethan Frome walked at a quick pace along the deserted street, past the bank and Michael Eady's new brick store and Lawyer Varnum's house with the two black Norway spruces at the gate. Opposite the Varnum gate, where the road fell away toward the Corbury valley, the church reared its slim white steeple and narrow peristyle. As the young man walked toward it the upper windows drew a black arcade along the side wall of the building, but from the lower openings, on the side where the ground sloped steeply down to the Corbury road, the light shot its long bars, illuminating many fresh furrows in the track leading to the basement door, and showing, under an adjoining shed, a line of sleighs with heavily blanketed horses.”



THE NARRATIVE VOICES IN “ETHAN FROME”

Throughout the whole novel we meet two narrators:

- The first one is the first person narrative voice in the prologue and the epilogue.
“I saw him for the first time; and the sight pulled me up sharp. Even then he was the most striking figure in Starkfield”
- The second one is a third person omniscient narrative voice.
“Now he thought she understood him, and feared; now he was sure she did not, and despaired.”

LOVE IN “ETHAN FROME”

Love is presented as prohibited and tragic.

This kind of love probably interested Edith for her own experience of love and for her Puritan origins.

“It pleased Ethan to have surprised a pair of lovers on the spot where he and Mattie had stood with such a thirst for each other in their hearts; but he felt a pang at the thought that these two need not hide their happiness.”

I am attracted by this kind of love because it generates suspense.



WHAT DOES ATTRACT ETHAN?

Ethan was attracted by Zeena because he saw her as a possibility to escape silence and loneliness. However, she completely changes after marriage; he will consequently be attracted by her cousin Mattie because she has opposite qualities, almost all positive; however, the latter will reverse after the accident, so he will live with “two Zeenas”.



THE VICTIMS OF THE NOVEL

I consider victims both Zeena and Ethan.

If Zeena is only partly a victim (because in the end she has her revenge), Ethan is a victim all along the novel.



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