THE SCAPEGOAT MOTIF IN THE NOVELS OF EDITH WHARTON

DEBRA JOY GOODMAN

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THE SCAPEGOAT MOTIF IN THE
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ABSTRACT

Many of Edith Wharton's novels reveal a characteristic narrative pattern. Wharton's protagonists are first tantalized by the possibility of greater romantic and sexual fulfillment; then, they are not only denied this fulfillment, but severely punished for their incapacity to achieve it. Wharton's tendency to treat her protagonists with unnatural severity is the scapegoat motif discussed in this dissertation.

Analysis of the scapegoating phenomenon in Wharton's fiction reveals Wharton's ambivalence towards experience—sexual initiation. In some novels—Ethan Frome is the best example—her characters suffer extreme punishment because of their hopeless entrapment and their inability to triumph over circumstance. In others, such as The Reef and The Age of Innocence, characters such as Sophy Viner and Ellen Olenska, who are sexual initiates are thwarted and isolated; while the lives of Anna Leath and Newland Archer, who cannot seize the "flower of life," reveal the costs of irremediable innocence. Frequently, Wharton's treatment of her characters seems linked to her own life experience and suggests that scapegoating, in some cases, may be a kind of self-punishment.

During the course of her long career, Wharton's tendency to scapegoat her characters seems to have
diminished. This impulse is at its most intense in the earlier novels, more ambivalent and complex in the novels written later. In her last and posthumous novel, The Buccaneers (1938), Wharton expresses a new serenity; here Wharton seems to have moved towards reconciliation with her personal past and towards a resolution of the conflicts that pervaded her earlier work.

Chapter I of this dissertation discusses Ethan Frome (1911) as the extreme example of Wharton's tendency to scapegoat her characters. Chapter II discusses The Reef (1912), and focuses, in particular, on Wharton's ambivalence towards innocence and experience. Chapter III, on Summer (1917), considers a special instance of the scapegoat motif, with emphasis on the balance between the denial and gratification allotted to the characters. Chapter IV, on The Age of Innocence (1920), considers the dark meaning of innocence in America, and the limited growth possible to an American character. Finally, Chapter V discusses Wharton's last novel, The Buccaneers (1938), and the resolutions it seems to imply. Throughout I consider the evolution of the scapegoating impulse in Wharton's fiction and the modification in the balance between denial and gratification that that evolution entails.
INTRODUCTION

I

What is most characteristic of Edith Wharton's writing is a peculiarly bleak pessimism, an emphasis on all the forces that frustrate the aspirations of the individual. In The House of Mirth (1905), the novel which first made Wharton famous, her heroine, the beautiful and charming Lily Bart, dies because her ideals unfit her for a life in a crass and materialistic society, and yet Lily cannot accept a life without comfort, grace, or privilege outside that society. In The Fruit of the Tree (1907), a more ironic and less naturalistic novel, Wharton's protagonist, Justine Brent, suffers alienation and ultimate defeat because her husband misunderstands her selfless motives for performing euthanasia. In Ethan Frome (1911), Ethan and his wife's young cousin, thwarted in their romantic hopes, are crippled in a toboggan accident and doomed to spend the rest of their lives in misery and obscure rural poverty. In Summer (1917), Charity Royall who had hoped to escape a bleak Berkshire town, is deserted by her lover and forced by pregnancy to marry her elderly step-father. And Newland Archer, in The Age of Innocence (1920), sacrifices his hopes of fulfillment to the demands of
sterile duty and the conventional New York society in which he is trapped.

In some cases, in their emphasis on renunciation, the settings and basic situation of Wharton's novels resemble those in the novels of Henry James. But renunciation in Wharton rarely takes the typical Jamesian form—the abandonment of a problematical sexual intimacy in order to preserve the continuity of personal identity. In James, renunciation meant the sacrifice of a lesser good to a higher one. In Wharton, the higher good is what is lost: the achievement of a rich, fulfilled personality is grudgingly abandoned in favor of the partial and atrophic.

To some extent, appreciation and understanding of Wharton's novels has been dulled by detrimental comparisons with James's work. More recently, however, critics have disputed the discipular relation with James and argued that despite similarities in situation and setting, some agreement on technique, and some stylistic echoes, James did not exert a significant influence on Wharton's fiction. Although the complexities of the James-Wharton literary and personal relation cannot be summarized here, one essential difference in personal vision must be acknowledged, because it is pervasive and crucial to an understanding of Wharton's novels. Where James used
the world of the rich and socially elite as a setting for complex dramas of moral and spiritual growth, Wharton—whether her novelistic milieu was the early 20th century beau monde of *The House of Mirth*, the New York of the 1870's in *The Age of Innocence*, the French setting of *The Reef*, or the small Berkshire town of *Ethan Frome*—offers the ironic contemplation of misery, of characters trapped in despair or resignation in lives that mock their hopes and require a grim stoicism to endure. Kazin summarizes this difference when he remarks that James was "obsessed by the moral complexity" of his theme, while Wharton "specialized in tales of victimization." To James, the "emotional problems of his characters were the representative expression of a larger world of speech, manner, and instinct—whose significance was psychological and universal"; but Wharton expresses a sense of tragedy in her novels, a sense of evil forces in the world that trap her characters.

Wharton's fatalism has led some writers to associate her with a European, and particularly French, spirit of conservative rationalism, and others to link her novels with those of Hardy and Gissing. As Howe says, she may have shared the late 19th century view that "the universe—which for her is virtually to say, organized society—was profoundly inhospitable to human need
and desire" as well as the "malaise which troubled so many intelligent people during her lifetime -- the feel-
ing that they were living in an age when energies had run
down, meanings collapsed, and the flow of organic life
been replaced by the sterile and mechanical..." Famil-
liar as she was with the French naturalistic tradition
beginning with Flaubert, and knowledgeable about the work
of Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, and other evolutionists, it
is not surprising that Wharton seems to have been influ-
enced by the naturalistic tradition, particularly in The
House of Mirth and Summer. Inevitably, however, critics
have speculated that the extent to which Wharton employed
the naturalistic mode may have been influenced by personal
factors, so that the workings of fate in Wharton's novels
become an intellectual metaphor for a darkness of vision
that is finally private and personal. Blake Nevius, for
instance, puts it this way: "Naturalism allies itself
conveniently -- and, if need be, temporarily -- with a
personal mood of despair, and I think it likely that
this is what happened in Mrs. Wharton's case."

Other, more psychologically-oriented critics,
see an even slighter intellectual and literary
influence on Wharton's pessimism and claim, as Kazin
has, that the "tales of victimization" she wrote were
essentially her own story:
It is easy to say now that Edith Wharton's great subject should have been the biography of her own class, for her education and training had given her alone in her literary generation the best access to it. But the very significance of that education was her inability to transcend and use it. Since she could do no other, she chose instead to write in various forms and with unequal success, the one story she knew best, the story that constituted her basic experience—her own.  

Similarly, Edmund Wilson, in his essay "Justice to Edith Wharton," has viewed the progress of Wharton's career as directly related to her personal situation, and the varying intensity and bitterness of the novels as dependent on particular events or stages in her life. Her career began, he writes, as "the desperate product of a pressure of maladjustments; and it very soon took a direction totally different from that of Henry James. . . . At her strongest and most characteristic she is a brilliant example of the writer who relieves an emotional strain by denouncing his [sic] generation." One of the strains of Wharton's life was her husband's descent into insanity. Wilson has argued that "the tragedy of The Bunner Sisters is probably a transposition of this [marital suffering]; and the relief of the tension in Summer (written after her divorce) is evidently the result of her new freedom."
Increasingly, readers of Wharton's novels have argued that her art is intimately related to her life, that it is "intensely personal in the manner, if not to the degree, of Thomas Wolfe's or the recent Hemingway's," and that her tendency to "maim and massacre" her characters reflects, to some extent, her personal misfortunes and her grievances with the world she was brought up in. For a long time a paucity of biographical information limited this kind of approach and perhaps contributed to her neglect by critics.

However, R. W. B. Lewis's recent biography of Wharton has provided much of the biographical information that was previously unavailable. Although this dissertation will focus on Wharton's novels, on the nature of their pessimism, and especially on Wharton's tendency to "maim and massacre" her characters, a brief biographical summary will be presented here, since Wharton's biography seems to provide a paradigm for the conflicts and paradoxes that recur insistently in her fiction.
Edith Wharton is known as a society lady turned society author, as the awesome "grande dame" of the New York aristocracy who was the "proud descendant of Rhinelanders and Gallatins..."[^1] She is also known as an expatriate and as a Francophile who returned to America only once after the war, and then to accept an honorary doctorate from Yale after she had received the Pulitzer Prize in 1921 for *The Age of Innocence*. Not so well known, and more important for an understanding of Wharton's novels, is the story of her long struggle to reach this eminence and to free herself from the conventions and claims of her family, her marriage, and her class. Dubbed "our literary aristocrat,"[^15] she was in fact the "captive, in her private life, of the values that accrue to a social group which is as firmly based in economic power as in lineage..."[^16] Wharton's autobiography, *A Backward Glance*, is reticent in many areas, but it does clearly express her early sense of intellectual and emotional isolation, her resentment of a frivolous society that thwarted her creativity, and the paradoxical efforts that lasted well into her middle age to conform to the expectations of those who made up her world.

As a child and as a young woman Wharton read, studied, and wrote poems and stories with little encour-
agement, and, as she herself testifies, had "to fight her way to expression through a thick fog of indifference, if not of tacit disapproval. . . ."17 Forbidden to read novels, she educated herself on the classics in her father's library while at the same time learning good manners and the love of pretty clothes and developing the ambition to become, like her mother, the best-dressed woman in New York.18

Wharton made her debut a year early, at seventeen, because her parents had "decided that she spent too much time in reading . . ."; the result was an evening that was, like many of her social ventures, "a long cold agony of shyness." Then life became the social round of fashionable Newport, which included outings with friends, swimming, riding, and "reading and dreaming"; but her childhood "dream of a literary career . . . soon faded into unreality. How could I ever have supposed I could be an author? . . . I had never even seen one in the flesh."19 For, her "parents and their group, though they held literature in great esteem, stood in nervous dread of those who produced it. Washington Irving, Fitz-Greene Halleck and William Dana were the only representatives of the disquieting art who were deemed uncontaminated by it."20

After her marriage to Edward Wharton, the social round of her life continued in Newport, in New York, and
in the frequent trips to Europe that she and her husband both enjoyed. At the same time Wharton became immersed in her home and in interior decoration, and for some years her intellectual and creative life was submerged in the domestic. Eventually, in the process of remodeling an old house on the Rhode Island shore, Wharton met the architect Ogden Codman and discovered that they shared many innovative ideas on interior decoration. Soon they began collaboration on the book called The Decoration of Houses that was finally published in 1897.

Lewis describes next a period of about four years when Wharton seemed to suffer a series of nervous breakdowns:

One can only employ the phrase "severe identity crisis" to describe the terrible and long-drawn-out period Edith Wharton was passing through: a period of paralyzing melancholy, extreme exhaustion, constant fits of nausea, and no capacity whatever to make choices or decisions. Those more knowing in these matters tell us that such a condition may itself be a decision of sorts -- a deliberate, if unconscious, putting off of commitment.

This period of apparent mental illness seems to have ended when she began to write in earnest.
The publication of *The Greater Inclination* (1899), her first volume of short stories, marked the beginning Wharton's independent growth, as well as the beginning of her writing career. The significance of this volume is made clear in *A Backward Glance*: "I had as yet no real personality of my own, and was not to acquire one till my first volume of short stories was published. . . ." At this time Wharton was thirty-seven and had been married for fourteen years. She continues:

The Greater Inclination broke the chains which had held me so long in a kind of torpor. For nearly twelve years I had tried to adjust myself to the life I had led since my marriage; but now I was over­mastered by the longing to meet people who shared my in­terests. . . . What I wanted was to get to know people who lived for the things I had always secretly lived for. . . .

At the urging of friends, the Whartons went to London so that she might meet some "men of letters," but Edward Wharton "was bored in London, where he would have been amused only among the sporting set;" they left London quickly. Wharton's account of the episode ends with this resigned statement: "The people about me were so indifferent to everything I really cared for that complying with the tastes of others had become
a habit, and it was only some years later, when I had written several books, that I finally rebelled, and pleaded for the right to something better."25

The next ten years included the publication of more than ten volumes — novels, short story collections, travel books, and a book of verse. Among her friends and family Wharton's new thriving literary career was a source of consternation:

"None of my relations," she writes, "ever spoke to me of my books either to praise or blame — they simply ignored them; and among the immense tribe of my New York cousins, though it included many with whom I was on terms of affectionate intimacy, the subject was avoided as though it were a kind of family disgrace, which might be condoned but could not be forgotten." 26

Moreover, the successes of these years exacerbated the already-strained relations between the Whartons.

In addition, during these years Edward Wharton's health, which had never been good, broke down with increasing frequency and severity. He had periods of severe depression, and possibly the problem of alcoholism as well. Although the specific details of his illness are not known, it is clear that during these years he was more frequently ill and that his illness became a great burden to his wife. His mental instability also threatened their
financial affairs, which he managed unreliably. During the next five years, 1908-1913, the Whartons were apart more and more, she in Paris and he at home with a companion and for a time in a sanitorium in Switzerland. Henry James wrote that during this period Edward Wharton was "truly as slatedly, and swaggeringly, and extravagantly mad as he can be. . . ."27 In A Backward Glance Wharton briefly describes her husband's struggle with the "creeping darkness of neurasthenia" which had grown steadily worse since the first years of their marriage: "All the neurologists we consulted were of the opinion that there could be no real recovery; and time confirmed their verdict."28 Treatment was difficult to find and Edward Wharton's family seemed to believe he should be cared for at home. Wharton's account continues: "Such borderland cases are notoriously difficult, and for a long time my husband's family would not see, or at any rate acknowledge, the gravity of his state, and any kind of consecutive treatment was therefore impossible."29 Wharton's family also opposed the idea of their divorce, but with the help of friends they were finally persuaded, and Edith Wharton obtained the decree in 1913; Edward Wharton lived in seclusion and mental darkness until his death in 1928.
During the troubled period in her life which preceded her divorce, Edith Wharton depended on Walter Berry and Henry James, who had both become close friends and confidantes. James's letters to her reveal not only his sympathy and his moral support but also his amazement that she should have made such a disastrous marriage.\(^3\) Berry, a lawyer who resided in Paris and who was descended from the old New York family, the van Rennsalaers, had been Wharton's friend since the year before her marriage and had served as her literary advisor since the publication of *The Decoration of Houses*. Berry remained one of Wharton's closest friends until his death in 1927, although, according to Lewis, Wharton was often hurt by his tendency to neglect her for long periods of time and finally disappointed by his failure to offer marriage after her divorce from Edward Wharton.

The one wholly romantic experience in Wharton's life seems to have been her relationship with Morton Fullerton during the years 1907-1910. Wharton's diary entries during the winter of 1907 and the spring of 1908 record the tumultuous period of her love for Fullerton. A diary entry for April reads:

> At such moments I feel that all the mysticism in me — and the transcendentalism that in other women turns to religion — were poured
into my feeling for you, . . .
In one of these moods, the other day, when you were reproaching me for never giving any sign of my love for you, I felt like answering: "But there is a contact of thought, that seems so much closer than a kiss." ³¹

The next month she returned to her home in Lenox, Massachusetts, and to her husband; at the end of the month she described this incident in her diary:

In the train yesterday I was reading Locke's Heredity and Variation, and struck by a curious and rather amusing passage held it out and said: "Read that!" The answer was: "Does that sort of thing really amuse you?" I heard the key turn in the prison lock. That is the answer to everything worth-while! Oh, Gods of derision! And you've given me twenty years of it! Je n'en peux plus. ³²

Nevertheless, although the "mortal solitude" was "terrible," in June she tried to make a final break with Fullerton:

Let me face at once the fact that it is over. Without a date to look to, I can't bear to go on, and it will be easier to make the break now, voluntarily, than to see it slowly, agonizingly, made by time and circumstances... my adored, my own love, you who
have given me the only
moments of real life I
have ever known, how am
I to face the long hours
and days. . . . 33

Although Wharton returned to Paris, and the alliance with Fullerton continued to flourish intermittently, by the end of 1910 Fullerton had deserted Wharton. The intense moral conflict that Wharton felt on entering into this relationship, and the pain that its end caused her, both amply recorded in Lewis's biography,34 seem to have left their mark on the fiction that she wrote after this time.

After the war years, during which she worked as fund-raiser and organizer of a large relief agency in Paris, Wharton spent less and less time in her apartment in the Rue de Varenne in Paris. She withdrew to Pavilion Colombe, an 18th century estate outside of Paris, and to her winter home in the South of France. Increasingly alone in her later years, she devoted herself to her writing and her gardening, and depended increasingly on a small circle of friends that included Bernard Berenson, Desmond MacCarthy, Robert Norton, Gaillard Lapsley, the Tylers, and, occasionally, Walter Berry. In August of 1937, after a brief illness, she died at Pavilion Colombe. She was buried in Cimetière des Gonards in Versailles, near the grave of Walter Berry.
III

In many substantial ways Wharton's novels reflect her life, since their plots generally focus on a clash between a sensitive person who reaches out for greater personal fulfillment and the social constraints that prohibit the development of a rich and fulfilled personality. Although Wharton's career finally enabled her to extricate herself from the demands of her social position, the liberation that came with her divorce at the age of fifty-one may have come too late for personal fruition. Moreover, Wharton seems to have compensated in her fiction for certain violations of convention in her own life -- a hypothesis that has gained support from Lewis's recent biography.

Wharton's attitude towards her literary protagonists, the sensitive person who half belongs and half rebels against societal constraints, is ambivalent: as Irving Howe has said, "much of Mrs. Wharton's work contains a somewhat chill and detached sympathy for those very rebels in whose crushing she seems to connive."35 Necessarily, the extent of Wharton's sympathy, like the intensity of her irony, varies from novel to novel; but, in general, Wharton's rebels are tantalized by the possibility of fulfillment through another person who appears
in their closed milieu and embodies the potential for a richer life. Fundamentally, they seem to seek transcendence through romantic and spiritual love—a state that Wharton refers to as "beyondness." But Wharton's characters are either incapable of or prohibited from participating in the offered initiation into experience. Having reached out for fulfillment, Wharton's protagonists are then crushed, by varying means, into defeat and abnegation.

Artful and dramatically appropriate as these dark resolutions may be, they seem always to convey a punitive spirit that goes beyond thematic and narrative necessity. Wharton's protagonists are sacrificed, it seems, in fulfillment of requirements quite beyond the tacitly novelistic ones. This almost ritualistic tendency of Wharton's to defeat her own characters may be explained in part by the psychological mechanism of scapegoating. While scapegoating is best known as an overt ritual of punishment practiced by primitive peoples, it also occurs as an unconscious psychological phenomenon frequently reflected in literature. Fundamentally, scapegoating is a way an individual or a group has of dealing with the guilt produced by an inability to live up to the ideals of his society, which are also the ideals of the individual. It occurs when an individual or group consciously holds high
ideals and yet is unconsciously aware of another darker side of the psyche where there are buried needs, impulses, and desires in direct conflict with the values consciously held. This dark side of the personality cannot be acknowledged openly, and yet its existence produces guilt. Consequently, the dark impulses, rather than being acknowledged openly as part of the self, are "transferred to the outside world and experienced as an outside object..."38 That outside object, which may be a group or an individual, becomes the scapegoat, and is then "combated, punished, and exterminated as 'the alien out there' instead of being dealt with as 'one's own inner problem.'"39 Once the scapegoat, the bearer of guilt has been punished, there is a relief from guilt through the purging. Scapegoating may also be defined more simple as the "tendency to blame others for moral offenses, real or imaginary, that a person would like to commit himself."40 In these cases the supposed offender is then punished with unnatural severity. In short, then, scapegoating is a means of externalizing one's guilty desires, of reducing one's own internal conflict, and of enforcing allegiance to the values of one's society. Scapegoating is one means of dealing with the inevitable strain of conformity to societal demands. As Irving Howe has said, Freud's "Civilization and Its Discontents" might well serve as an epigraph to Wharton's fiction.41
The psychological process of scapegoating offers a way of understanding Wharton's relation to her protagonists who, in varying degrees, express socially unacceptable needs and impulses and are subsequently punished for their transgressions of the social code. Viewing Wharton's narratives in this way helps to account for some of the inconsistencies that have been noted in her novels; it may explain why her novels are usually "tales of victimization," as Kazin has called them; and it offers, and not only in regard to *Ethan Frome*, a convincing alternative to Trilling's view that "only a moral judgment cruel to the point of insanity could speak of [the ending of *Ethan Frome*] as anything but accidental."

While scapegoating describes the relation of Wharton to her characters, its effect on the fictional lives of her protagonists can best be described in terms of denial and gratification; her protagonists suffer and are prevented from achieving their goals. However, denial is actually complete in only a few novels; in many there is a balance between denial and gratification that seems to reflect the balance of Wharton's life. In the earlier novels, denial frequently predominates and seems to peak with *Ethan Frome*. In *Summer*, a balance is
revealed and there is a kind of compromise: while Wharton's heroine is deprived of the happiness she most wants, she is allowed certain minor compensations for her loss. As Edmund Wilson has said, it is in *Summer* that Wharton began "to relent in the cruelty of her endings . . . her blinding bitterness is already subsiding . . . ." In *The Reef* (1912) and *The Age of Innocence* (1920) Wharton expresses ambivalence towards both the initiation into sexual experience and the refusal of such initiation in the balance of denial and gratification that her characters experience. Increasingly, however, she depicts the dark meaning of innocence. In the later works, especially after *The Age of Innocence*, Wharton's tendency towards denial in her fiction diminishes, tension subsides, and her last, incomplete novel, *The Buccaneers* (1938), seems to promise that life will be better for a new generation, if not for her own.

Chapter I of this dissertation will discuss *Ethan Frome* (1911) as the extreme example of Wharton's tendency to scapegoat her characters. Chapter II will discuss *The Reef* (1912), and focus, in particular, on Wharton's ambivalence towards innocence and experience. Chapter III, on *Summer* (1917), considers a special instance of the scapegoat motif, with emphasis on the balance between the denial and gratification allotted to the characters.
Chapter IV, on *The Age of Innocence* (1920), extends the discussion to the dark meaning of innocence in America, and the limited growth possible to an American character. Finally, Chapter V will discuss Wharton's last novel, *The Buccaneers* (1938), and the resolutions it seems to imply. Throughout I will consider the evolution of the scapegoating impulse in Wharton's fiction and the modifications in the balance between denial and gratification that that evolution entails.
CHAPTER I

ETHAN FROME: BLAMING THE VICTIM

Ethan Frome is Wharton's bleakest novel. It is set against the harsh landscape of the Berkshire mountains, an environment which Wharton refers to as the "negation of life" (7); and in this grim landscape she has created a world of negation and death. In Frome Wharton does not simply "connive," as Irving Howe puts it, in the destruction of characters whose longings for personal fulfillment represent dark and forbidden impulses. Here Wharton's characters are lacking in life and vitality from the beginning: Ethan and Mattie are created broken and masochistic, and then "maimed and massacred"--for the weakness with which they have been endowed. This cruel strategy is only partially concealed by the narrative technique that Wharton employs. The first-person narrator of the tale provides something of an authorial disclaimer, since he presents the story of Ethan and Mattie as his own "vision;" (25) and further because he is in some ways a double for Ethan, he partially conceals the distortions with which Wharton has endowed her primary characters. When the narrator's bias is revealed, however, Wharton's attitudes towards
her characters and her fury at what was blocking her at this period become increasingly clear.

Ethan Frome was written during a very difficult period in Wharton's life. Although she had begun the tale years before it was published, as an exercise in French, she did not finally decide to complete it until she returned to her home in the Berkshires during the summer of 1910. In A Backward Glance she explains that "a distant glimpse of Bear Mountain brought Ethan back to memory, and the following winter in Paris I wrote the tale as it now stands, reading my morning's work aloud each evening to Walter Berry. . . ."4 At this time Edward Wharton's condition was deteriorating rapidly, and the Whartons had begun to live apart more and more. Henry James wrote during the summer of 1910 that "Teddy is cerebrally and nervously bad (I fear very bad) again; and a catastrophe is sooner or later due there."5 That autumn Edward Wharton embarked on a long cruise to Japan with a companion, and his wife was freed to return to Paris and her writing. In October she was "putting in the pent-up energy of lots of wasted months in a new opus"6 and "trying to get back her lost balance."7 Although Edith Wharton did not finally obtain her divorce until two years later, after prolonged negotiations with her husband's family, it is clear that Ethan Frome was in part the product of a time of emotional strain
when she must have feared herself permanently tied to the husband James described as "wholly quarrelsome, abusive and impossible." In this light Ethan Frome seems, as Bell has pointed out, "much closer to her intimate experience than has generally been supposed. . . ." Bell continues: "Ethan Frome may actually have more to do with the tragic frustration of Mrs. Wharton's own life than with those other lives she claimed to know so well. And in its hopelessness . . . it probably reflects her own bafflement at her personal situation rather than any insight into conditions likely in Starkfield." 

It is not surprising, then, that Wharton adopted the harsh winter landscape of the Berkshires as a setting for her work during this period. Here, as later in Summer, her use of vernacular characters and setting was liberating and allowed her the expression of extreme emotional states and freedom from the constraining realism of her New York novels of manners. Ethan Frome, like Summer, is not a novel, but a tale. Its folk characters are abstract and symbolic, rather than "fluent or complex to the degree that the novel requires." Ethan, Mattie, and Zeena are static, one-dimensional figures, the embodiments of emotional forces, as Wharton seems to have suggested when she referred to them as her "granite outcroppings, but half-emerged from the soil" (vi). Bell, among other, has also noted that Wharton's characters are "only postulated
and not realized with the fullness and elaboration of human complication." Like the characters, the plot development is also that of the tale, rather than the novel: it is "abrupt, jagged, and truncated." And the book as a whole is over-stated, exaggerated: the characters are grim caricatures, the setting is unreliedly bleak, the accident is melodramatic, and the concluding tableau is an image of total wretched entrapment. In Frome, as in Summer, Wharton's choice of the vernacular setting and its folk characters has served to release powerful symbolic quantities.

The liberating vernacular mode allows a grimly inverted world to emerge in Ethan Frome, in which sickness and death are the norm, and health, life, and fulfillment are aberrant. The world of Frome is irrational and symbolic and, as we shall see, this novel is the extreme example in Wharton's writing of the unconscious psychological mechanism of scapegoating. In discussing the moral issues of Ethan Frome, Lionel Trilling declared that the novel presented no moral question, that Frome is a "factitious" book, and that "only a moral judgment cruel to the point of insanity" could find any relation between the moral life of Ethan and Mattie and their eventual fate. That relation is explained by the scapegoating process and by the contradictions between the deceptive pathos of the narrator's tale and the
extent of angry cruelty that Wharton has in fact ex-
pressed.

Clearly, the intensity of the scapegoating im-
pulse at work in Ethan Frome determines the structure
of the tale; or more exactly, the extreme symbolic
qualities released by the vernacular situation demand
a complexly defensive narrative structure. Thus Ethan
Frome is the only one of Wharton's novels with a narra-
tive frame. The novel begins and ends with the narra-
tor's encounters in Starkfield, while the body of the
book -- the story of Ethan and Mattie -- is the narra-
tor's vision and is contained within the frame. The
narrator, a young man who has been sent to Starkfield
by his employers, is impressed by Frome's maimed, yet
heroic appearance and attempts to understand the man's
plight. He finds a clue to understanding, he says,
when he is invited into the Frome farm during a bliz-
zard and Ethan conducts him toward the run-down farm-
house through the "smothering medium" (23) of the snow
and into the barren kitchen where Zeena and Mattie sit.
Having encountered this grim scene, he began "to put
together this vision" (25) of Frome's story. Thus,
when the story of Ethan and Mattie reaches the reader,
it is in the form of a "vision"; it is remote in time,
since it has been twenty-four years since the accident;
and it is based on insufficient sources -- on gossip
and the narrator's brief glimpse of Zeena and Mattie in the farmhouse. In short, their story comes to us almost entirely as the narrator's creation, a fabrication on slight evidence. In part because of this lack of hard sources, readers of *Ethan Frome* have often found the narrative structure puzzling and contrived.

In her Preface, Wharton defended her "scheme of construction" (vii-viii) while acknowledging that it had met with the "immediate and unqualified disapproval of the few friends" (viii) to whom she had outlined it. Beginning with Henry James who "laughed rather unkindly at Mrs. Wharton's fictitious 'I'," readers have criticized the role of the narrator. Bell suggests that his role was questioned because of his "implausibility... his inadequate connection with the story and his lack of individual interest." John Crowe Ransom also pondered Wharton's handling of point of view and concluded that she temporized:

She invented a special reporter for Ethan in the person of a young man of sensibility and education very like her own. In theory it gained for her this, that the reporter became a man; and this, that not being herself he need not render quite the complete spiritual history of events associated with her name as an author. In effect, it gained her very little."
However, the freedom not to "render quite the complete spiritual history of events" was critical. It permitted Wharton to give the fullest range to her dark surmises. The primary critical point that Ransom misses is that the unnamed narrator is very much a shadow of Frome himself, a part of the same projection of the author.

The narrator's lack of separate identity, suggested by his lack of a name, is supported by the few facts the reader is told: the narrator is an engineer, as Frome had been, and they are interested in the same books; they share a memory of a winter spent in Florida; and the narrator is one of the very few to gain access to the Frome house in a period of twenty years. These similarities are all we know about the narrator, beyond the fact that he is in the area because he was sent there by his employers.

The narrator becomes duplicitous because of his intimate connection with Frome. As a shadow of Frome he relates or creates events with a sympathetic bias towards Frome and thereby inverts the meaning of Frome's story and conceals, in part, the author's extreme negativism towards her characters. His identification with Frome obscures the grim inversions of Frome's world. From the beginning, the narrator feels a mysterious attraction to Frome. He sees him as the "most striking figure in
Starkfield" (3) who has "a careless powerful look" (3). Recalling Harmon Gow's remark that "most of the smart ones get away" (6), he responds, "But if that were the case, how could any combination of obstacles have hindered the flight of a man like Ethan Frome?" (9) The narrator sees and presents Frome as an heroic figure whose "brown seamed profile, under the helmet-like peak of the cap, relieved against the banks of snow [resembled] the bronze image of a hero" (14). And he romanticizes Frome's situation:

I simply felt that he lived in a depth of moral isolation too remote for casual access, and I had the sense that his loneliness was not merely the result of his personal plight, tragic as I had guessed that to be, but had in it, as Harmon Gow had hinted, the profound accumulated cold of many Starkfield winters. (14-15)

The narrator in these and similar statements attempts to make Frome a tragic figure, a victim of his environment, his circumstances, his own noble scruples. His perceptions of Frome's life imply Frome's potential for life and choice; and, by implication, he glorifies the anti-life values of the Frome world. But the narrator's explicit sympathetic bias is betrayed by both the images that surround Frome and by the events of the tale. The narrator's function is to conceal the fact that Wharton
has created defeated, even dead, characters and then, finally, destroyed these destructive elements.

Although Wharton's narrator attempts to establish Frome's "useful, even heroic possibilities," Frome is a thwarted and defeated man from the outset. Harmon Gow reports:

"That Frome farm was always 'bout as bare's a milkpan when the cat's been round; and you know what one of them old water-mills is wuth nowadays. When Ethan could sweat over 'em both from sun-up to dark he kinder choked a living out of 'em; but his folks ate up most everything, even then, and I don't see how he makes out now. Fust his father got a kick, out hay-ing, and went soft in the brain, and gave away money like Bible texts afore he died. Then his mother got queer and dragged along for years as weak as a baby; and his wife Zeena, she's always been the greatest hand at doctoring in the county. Sickness and trouble; that's what Ethan's had his plate full-up with, ever since the very first helping."(13)

Despite the narrator's explicit statements, it is evident that Frome has been made a "prisoner for life," as he himself recognizes, and images of being "caught, bound, and trapped" pervade the tale. In what is, astonishingly, the controlling metaphor of the narrative, pointing
to both the masochism and entrapment Wharton has weighted on her character, Ethan, walking through a graveyard near his farm, notices an old headstone which "had interested him deeply as a boy because it bore his name" (80).

Ethan is a man of darkness and negation. In an early episode he stands outside the church in the "pure and frosty darkness" (29) watching Mattie among the dancers, while the dance floor seems "to be seething in a mist of heat" (29). Ethan is excluded from warmth and light, continually surrounded with images of darkness that are also suggestive of death and cold. Stressing these same aspects of Ethan's character, Bernard describes his courtship of Mattie:

Later he catches up to her "in the black shade of the Varnum spruces. . ." He stands with her in "the gloom of the spruces," where it is 'so dark... he could barely see the shape of her head," or walks with her "in silence through the blackness of the hemlock-shaded lane. Blackness is his element....Their love is a bloom of night...Frome's favorite spot is a secluded place in the woods called Shadow Pond. On their last visit there the darkness descended with them, dropping down like a black veil from the heavy hemlock boughs..." Frome's kitchen, on their return from the village has "the deadly chill of a vault after the dry cold of night."
Frome's negation and emotional barrenness later lead the narrator to identify him repeatedly with his natural environment: "He seemed a part of the mute melancholy landscape, an incarnation of its frozen woe, with all that was warm and sentient in him fast bound below the surface..."(14). Although the narrator implies that Frome's plight is a result of his circumstances and his environment, the same forces are apparent in him as a young man, in the circumstances of his marriage, in his "funereal satisfactions,"24 and in his limited and futile fantasies of escape with Mattie.

Frome has endured seven barren years of marriage to the sickly Zeena in the cold house where "a dead cucumber-vine dangled from the porch like the crape streamer tied to the door for a death..."(51). He married the aging and unattractive Zeena to replace his mother, whom Zeena had nursed through a final illness, and to avoid the utter isolation of his farm:

After the funeral, when he saw her preparing to go away, he was seized with an unreasonable dread of being left alone on the farm; and before he knew what he was doing he had asked her to stay there with him. He often thought since that it would not have happened if his mother had died in spring instead of winter. ...(70)
Frome's marriage, begun in weakness and dependence, sug-
gests that he has been trapped from the beginning.

Similarly, Frome's masochism and his tendency to
conspire with his circumstances in his own destruction is
evident in his reaction to Mattie's presence. For, after
Mattie becomes part of the household, Frome is reconciled
to his life in Starkfield. Mattie's presence satisfies
him, and he cannot aspire to more than the continuation
of their present life. Looking at the Frome gravestones,
his fantasies are hopeless and funereal:

For years that quiet company
had mocked his restlessness,
his desire for change and
freedom. "We never got away--
how should you?" seemed to be
written on every headstone...
But now all desire for change
had vanished, and the sight of
this little enclosure gave him
a warm sense of continuance
and stability. (50)

The weight of his entrapment descends on Mattie in his
fantasies: "I guess we'll never let you go, Matt. . . .
We'll always go on living here together, and someday
she'll lie there beside me. He let the vision possess
him as they climbed the hill to the house. He was never
so happy with her as when he abandoned himself to these
dreams" (50). Death and the continuation of death-in-
life are Frome's inverted aspirations. Throughout he
is passive, content to live in these fantasies, incapable
of contemplating action that would change his life and Mattie's:

He set his imagination adrift on the fiction that they had always spent their evenings thus and would always go on doing so.... I've been in a dream, and this is the only evening we'll ever have together. The return to reality was as painful as the return to consciousness after taking an anaesthetic. His body and brain ached with an indescribable weariness, and he could think of nothing to say or to do that should arrest the mad flight of the moments, (95)

Again Frome's impotence is apparent when his fantasies are shattered by Zeena's decision to replace Mattie with a hired girl. Then, momentarily, he has a fairy-tale vision of escape to the West and to a new beginning, but is immediately thwarted in his imaginings by the impossibility of raising enough money to get to the West:

The inexorable facts closed in on him like prison-warders handcuffing a convict. There was no way out -- none. He was a prisoner for life, and now his one ray of light was to be extinguished. (134)

Although we are told that "all the healthy instincts of self-defense rose up in him against such waste (131), he succumbs immediately to circumstances, to his scruples
about leaving Zeena and borrowing money from the kindly Hales. His instinct for life is virtually non-existent; although the narrator blames Frome's circumstances and tends to conceal his nature, the images that surround him, as well as his acts, reveal that all of his instincts seek self-destruction and death.

Only once, at the moment when Zeena announces her decision to send Mattie away, does Ethan almost emerge from his death-like passivity. Then he sees Zeena as an "evil energy" (118), and "for a moment such a flame of hate rose in him that it ran down his arm and clenched his fist against her " (118). But he dares not even speak on Mattie's behalf and cannot sustain the anger that might have brought him to life; the force of emotion is alien and he collapses: "He took a wild step forward and then stopped. 'You're -- you're not coming down' he said in a bewildered voice" (118).

In the cold world of Frome, Mattie Silver is a fragile center of warmth and sensuality. She is Ethan's source of light, she is imaged with light and warmth as he is with darkness and cold, and her appearance in Ethan's life is "like the lighting of a fire on a cold hearth"(33). Nevertheless, Mattie's weakness is innate and overwhelming. Before she enters Frome's life, she has already been broken. She is a penniless orphan, cast out by relations who believed her father had swindled them and sent to live
with Zeena only because "the clan had seen a chance for exacting a compensation" (59) from her. By the time she arrives at the Frome's she has ruined her health working as a shopgirl, and she remains pale and sickly without the strength or competence to perform her household chores. Mattie is a weak dependent, living in fear of Zeena's strange looks; she is utterly powerless, more isolated, trapped, and helpless than Ethan himself. Although she bears some resemblance to the defeated Charity Royall who, at the end of Summer, marries her elderly guardian, she has none of the pagan, passionate strength that Charity was initially endowed with. In Ethan Frome the force for life -- Mattie's timid warmth -- is weaker than in Summer, and the forces of negation are proportionally stronger.

Zeena represents that force of negation, and her destructive power is immediate and overwhelming. Moreover, unlike Lawyer Royall, she remains unchallenged. For Frome, Zeena is "the ever-present representative of that environment, a silent brooding power from which he cannot escape. She represents no one particular oppression, such as Puritan tradition, but the whole range of suspicions, obligations, and restrictions, large and small, that arise in an isolated and impoverished community."26 As the narrator and Frome perceive her, she is the force that has thwarted him in his tentative
awakening with her decision to send Mattie away:

All the long misery of his baffled past, of his youth of failure, hardship and vain effort, rose up in his soul in bitterness and seemed to take shape before him in the woman who at every turn had barred his way. She had taken everything else from him; and now she meant to take the one thing that made up for all the others. (118)

As a figure of repression, Zeena is amazingly powerful, although, while the romance between Ethan and Mattie briefly flourishes, she weakens slightly and then becomes increasingly ill and develops "complications." Through her, however, defeat and negation quickly triumph: she returns from Bettsbridge, having hired a girl to replace Mattie, and, at the same time, she has mysteriously regained her health. Having triumphed, she is stronger, more expansive:

At dinner Ethan could not eat. If he lifted his eyes they rested on Zeena's pinched face, and the corners of her straight lips seemed to quiver away into a smile. She ate well, declaring that the mild weather made her feel better, and pressed a second helping of beans on Jotham Powell, whose wants she generally ignored. (148)

Zeena thus regains her health as her repressive power
subdues the weak assertion of life implicit in Ethan and Mattie's relation. More conspicuously, Zeena relinquishes her mysterious symptoms altogether after Ethan and Mattie are crippled. As Mrs. Hale reports,

It was a miracle, considering how sick she was — but she seemed to be raised right up just when the call came to her... she's had the strength to care for those two for over twenty years, and before the accident came she thought she couldn't even care for herself. (179)

Zeena is in fact a bizarre creation — a sickly and pathetic woman who weeps as she carries the fragments of her broken pickle dish out of the kitchen but who is, nevertheless, a force of great power in the narrator's tale of Ethan and Mattie. Exercising the full prerogatives of convention, she is a convincing vehicle of Wharton's destructiveness.

Her power hovers over Ethan and Mattie even when they are alone. Her name paralyzes conversation between them the night she is away; her cat begins a "spectral rocking" (95) in her rocking chair; and when Mattie sits in her chair, Zeena's presence "obliterates" the features of the younger woman (89). And finally, when Ethan's hand touches Mattie's as they both reach for the milk jug, Zeena's cat knocks the prized pickle dish on the
floor. In this oppressive environment, Ethan and Mattie remain weak and helpless.

Sexuality, in this environment, predictably emerges in a remote and distorted form. Bernard has argued that Mattie has tried to usurp Zeena's place in the marriage by stealing and using the red pickle dish, one of Zeena's wedding presents, and that, consequently, Ethan and Mattie's evening together is not so innocent as it appears. Moreover, Bernard continues, Zeena herself, as represented by her cat, has destroyed her own marriage, which the breaking of the pickle dish symbolizes, by her own sexual incapacity. This view, which implies Ethan and Mattie's freedom and responsibility, overlooks the entrapment and masochism which Wharton has weighted on her characters, although Bernard sees their eventual disaster as a result of Ethan's "negation of life."

In fact, in this episode, Ethan and Mattie have only a spurious chance to weight their love and their strength against the absent Zeena and the power of her conventional prerogatives. But they are already defeated, and this episode functions to reveal more fully the distortions with which they have been created. Thus Ethan becomes assertive in response to Mattie's desperation:

"It's all right, Matt. Come back and finish supper," he commanded her.
Completely reassured, she
The narrator presents the suicide attempt as the inevitable and passionate climax to Ethan and Mattie's thwarted love. On their last afternoon together they relive tender moments of their courtship, and their desperate situation leads Ethan to a "strange exaltation of mood" (163) and a fit of boastfulness after their first time down the hill: "The least swerve, and we'd never ha'
come up again. But I can measure distances to a hair's breadth — always could " (163). Finally, after their first open avowals, Mattie becomes the catalyst of their disaster. Driven by her helplessness, she pleads with him: "Ethan, where'll I go if I leave you? I don't know how to get along alone. You said so yourself just now. Nobody but you was ever good to me" (166). For Ethan her avowal made "the other vision more abhorrent, the other life more intolerable to return to" (166), and he agrees to the suicide: "Her sombre violence constrained him: she seemed the embodied instrument of fate" (167). Ethan and Mattie seek death as a release, but even here Zeena's presence intervenes:

The big tree loomed bigger and closer, and as they bore down on it he thought: "It's waiting for us: it seems to know." But suddenly his wife's face, with twisted monstrous lineaments, thrust itself between him and his goal, and he made an instinctive movement to brush it aside. (170)

The narrator's account surrounds their masochistic solution with romantic fatality while Zeena, again the powerful embodiment of conventional demands, thwarts their escape. Ethan's fantasy of Zeena "thrust itself between him and his goal" (170) again, although here he rights the sled and seems about to achieve his goal, and Zeena's
role as a fantasy -- or projection -- is apparent. Ethan's final acceptance of suicide is the culmination of his negative instincts"; as Bernard claimed, Ethan is "a failure, but not a mystery."²⁹

In this tale's final episode, however, Ethan's weakness is less obvious than Wharton's arbitrary treatment of her characters. Ethan and Mattie, as a result of their suicide attempt, have been punished by Mattie's crippled body and by the maiming of Ethan, who is marked, Cain-like, by a red gash on his forehead, the warped, shortened side of his body, and by the "lameness checking each step like the jerk of a chain" (3). During the narrator's brief visit to the Frome house, the reader is presented with the reality that concludes the story of Ethan and Mattie and is outside the narrator's "vision" -- an image of unending punishment, of physical and emotional suffering that has continued for twenty-four years. Mattie is the center of the cruel scene, and now she is embittered, aging, indistinguishable from Zeena, her voice a "querulous drone" (173):

Her hair was as gray as her companion's, her face as bloodless and shrivelled, but amber-tinted, with swarthy shadows sharpening the nose and hollowing the temples. Under her shapeless dress her body kept its limp immobility, and her dark
eyes had the bright witch-like stare that disease of the spine sometimes gives. (173-174)

Yet, according to Mrs. Hale, it is Ethan who suffers the most as he listens helpless and futile, to Mattie and Zeena vent their bitterness on each other. The scape-goating is complete: there is not "much difference between the Fromes up at the farm and the Fromes down in the graveyard" (181).

Understandably, many readers have criticized the ending of Ethan Frome on the grounds that "crass accident has determined the outcome — the survival of Ethan and Mattie — which, as some of the reviewers felt, is not 'necessary'."30 And it is the final tableau which Trilling vividly described in his attack on Ethan Frome:

...there is in Ethan Frome an image of life-in-death, of hell-on-earth, which is not easily forgotten: the crippled Ethan, and Zeena, his dreadful wife, and Mattie, the once charming girl he had loved, now bedridden and querulous with pain, all living out their death in the kitchen of the Frome farm... It is terrible to contemplate, but the mind can do nothing with it... Ethan Frome is a factitious book, perhaps even a cruel book....31

"All that Edith Wharton has in mind," Trilling continues,
"is to achieve that grim tableau of which I have spoken. . . " Wharton herself, in her Preface to Ethan Frome, seems to bear out Trilling's view of her goal: "The problem before me, as I saw in the first flash, was this: I had to deal with a subject of which the dramatic climax, or rather the anticlimax, occurs a generation later than the first acts of the tragedy" (vi). 

Trilling, as well as other critics who deplore the ending of Ethan Frome, tends to do so on moral grounds:

Whenever the characters of a story suffer, they do so at the behest of their author — the author is responsible for their suffering and must justify his cruelty by the seriousness of his moral intention.

The cruelty of Frome is undeniable, and it can only be explained, though not justified, by the psychology of scapegoating. But the process of scapegoating itself, by implication, makes a moral statement.

Scapegoating is related to the process that is known now as "blaming the victim," a view which makes the victim responsible for his own dilemma and pervades societal treatment of blacks, women, and other disadvantaged and damaged individuals. Its counterpart is the tendency of the victim to blame himself, to internalize rage in the form of self-destructiveness that might
properly be directed outwards towards the sources of oppressive power. The difficulty is that the sources of oppression are also a part of the self. In Ethan Frome Wharton has created this dilemma in all of its emotional complexity.

Ethan and Mattie are aspects of the trapped, dying self — Ethan more masochistic, Mattie more broken by the external circumstances of their lives. Zeena is the source of power, though her power is that of convention, granted her by those whom she oppresses. Wharton's final attitude towards her characters, as her cruelty towards them makes plain, is hatred; hating her own trapped state, she externalizes and destroys weakness. Yet she is constrained by powerful social and personal forces from expressing her rage at the weakness that succumbs to traditional mores; hence the narrator who obscures her anger and presents Ethan and Mattie in a sympathetic, even romantic, light. Ethan and Mattie, if they are understood as projections of the author, are scapegoated because Wharton's anger is, in one sense, turned inward and directed against the self. However, in destroying her characters, in writing a book of consummate cruelty and destructiveness, she may have exorcised her own demons. As Edmund Wilson noted years ago, Wharton, after this period in her life, seemed to
become "comfortably adjusted" to life in Paris and no longer tended to relieve personal strain "by denouncing her generation."³⁴ Certainly in the novels written after her divorce, her anger is muted, her characters are not victimized to the same extent, and her tendency to scapegoat is more often concerned with the limits of personal freedom than with the right to life.
CHAPTER II

THE REEF: INVINCIBLE INNOCENCE

The Reef\(^1\) (1912), published just one year after Ethan Frome, is known as Wharton's most Jamesian novel. It is an experiment in technique, with the point of view shared by two major characters; it is a tightly controlled psychological study, the "elaborate working out on all sides of a central situation,"\(^2\) rather than a chronicle like The House of Mirth or a vernacular tale like Summer; it lacks Wharton's characteristic interest in the social milieu and instead suspends its characters in a void, stripping them, as Wharton once said of James's characters, "of all the human fringes we necessarily trail after us through life;"\(^3\) and, finally, the situation of The Reef is reminiscent of The Golden Bowl, since the plot turns on the shifting relation between Anna Leath and George Darrow, her fiancé, when it is discovered that Darrow has had an affair with a young woman, Sophy Viner, who is, at once, governess to Anna's daughter and the fiancée of Anna's stepson, Owen Leath. Although The Reef is not an "international" novel, despite its French setting, its theme is the relation between innocence and experience; as Millicent Bell has said, the novel "probes the innocence—symbolically American—.
of Anna Leath, and contrasts it with the experience of Sophy Viner who is after the fall."

Although *The Reef* is, as critics such as Irving Howe and E. K. Brown have agreed, Wharton's "greatest discipular work," it also expresses Wharton's own special ambivalence towards experience, particularly sexual experience, that also appears in *Summer* and *The Age of Innocence*; and it suggests as well Wharton's growing tendency to count the high costs of an irremediable innocence. In *The Reef*, Anna and Sophy, the dark lady and the fair, are "doubles," like Newland Archer and Ellen Olenska in *The Age of Innocence*; and they reveal, as Robert Rogers says in his psychoanalytic study of the double in literature, "an obsessive balancing or undoing of one idea or force with its opposite."

Symbolically, Anna Leath and Sophy Viner represent a split heroine, a divided embodiment of one identity. While Sophy is the representative of experience, and Anna of innocence, the two women's identities are closely intertwined. Elizabeth Ammons states the details of the case:

Both love the same man, Darrow. Both are closely attached to another man, Owen -- Sophy as his fiancée, Anna as his stepmother. But because they "have always been on odd kind of brother-and-sister terms" (114),
Anna thinks of herself as Owen's sister, which makes Sophy more like Anna's future sister than daughter-in-law. Indeed, if Sophy were to marry Owen, Anna and Sophy, like sisters, would share the same mother-figure (Madame de Chan­telle) just as they already share the care of the same child (Effie).7

The Reef expresses Wharton's struggle to integrate these two women, to reconcile the sexual experience of Sophy with the super-ego forces that Anna represents; yet Wharton's own ambivalence towards the conventions she attempted, at times, to reject is such that the experiment fails; Anna is left pursuing the banished Sophy, both figuratively and literally.

At the conclusion of the novel, Sophy, as the sexual principle, is rejected. In the guise of a "feminine" -- and Jamesian -- renunciation, she is driven from Givré, Anna's French estate, and loses not only Darrow, whom she had selflessly loved, but also Owen, whom she might happily have married, and is consigned to the position of secretary in the home of the vulgar Mrs. Murrett, which she had previously fled. Yet this dark lady is, simultaneously, endowed with remarkable dignity and worth. As Millicent Bell has said, "Nothing is as interesting and as infrequently remarked upon as the warmth of Edith Wharton's portrait of Sophy; almost
despite herself, she has given this representative of 'experience' a strength which raises her to Anna's level and makes the contrast intensely dramatic.\textsuperscript{8} Although Sophy is ultimately, and irrationally, punished for her sexuality, Anna is similarly denied fulfillment. Anna, of whom James remarked that "I'm not sure her oscillations are not beyond our notation,"\textsuperscript{9} who tortures herself with questions concerning Sophy and Darrow's relation, suffers through a "fiery initiation" (318) and a recognition of the "dark places" (353) in her own heart that nevertheless stops short of full initiation into maturity. In Anna's inability to move beyond pain and shame into a fuller acceptance of life, Wharton expresses a lingering allegiance to convention and the sacrifices it entails.

According to R. W. B. Lewis' recent biography of Wharton, The Reef was written during a particularly troubled period in the author's life, a time just before her divorce from her husband and a year after the conclusion of her three-year affair with the American journalist Morton Fullerton. According to Lewis, The Reef is "possibly the most autobiographical work of fiction she ever wrote."\textsuperscript{10} A friend of Wharton's, Robert Curtis concurred, saying that the portrait of Anna is a "masterly self-diagnosis."\textsuperscript{11} Many details of Anna's early life and marriage, as well as her personality -- her
shy repressed manner and her sense of special untapped resources -- seem to accord with other descriptions of the young Edith Wharton. Yet Wharton, by the age of forty-five, had overcome her shyness and her scruples sufficiently to become passionately involved with Ful­lerton -- a passion that is amply recorded in her jour­nal and in the love poetry that she wrote during this period. In particular, a poem "Terminus" describes in detail a night she spent with Fullerton: Lewis writes that the

London experience in 1909 out of which Edith wrote her poem "Terminus" is reenacted in The Reef at the Terminus Hotel next to the Gare du Nord in Paris, where Darrow and Sophy Viner are sharing adjacent rooms. It is rain­ing steadily in the fictive Paris of 1912, as it had been in the actual London of June 1909, and the room in which the act of love takes place, as Darrow surveys it, is a replica of the bedroom in the suite at the Charing Cross Hotel as Edith des­cribes it in "Terminus". The poem "Terminus," written almost immediately after the event it describes, is a happy, almost ecstatic recreation of the experience, while at the conclusion of the affair in The Reef, Darrow is filled with self­loathing and disgust. Wharton's attitude towards her
affair seems to have changed in the succeeding year, perhaps as a result of its end and, equally, in response to her new knowledge of her husband's frequent liaisons during the same period. Wharton's experience thus is expressed in the experiences of her three major characters: in Sophy's unrequited love for Darrow and, especially, her later suffering; in Darrow's self-indulgence and subsequent disgust; and, especially, in Anna's seemingly endless "oscillation" as she attempts to include this new reality of experience into her view of life and her relation with Darrow. All of Wharton's characters suffer because of Sophy and Darrow's affair -- and perhaps the young Owen Leath, in particular, who suggests the young Kathleen Fullerton, to whom Morton Fullerton was engaged during the years of his affair with Edith Wharton. The Reef, as Edmund Wilson recognized, is "a relapse into psychological problems." In the suffering of her characters Wharton once again, as in Summer, Ethan Frome, and later in The Age of Innocence, engaged in, as R. W. B. Lewis said, "a mode of self-punishment" which is, in turn, simply another way to view the scapegoating process.

This psychological view of The Reef illuminates certain of the flaws that critics have noted in the novel. Despite the general praise of The Reef for its "Jamesian" characteristics, Wharton's most perceptive
critics — Percy Lubbock, Irving Howe, Blake Nevius, and James himself — have commented on revealing ambiguities in Wharton's tone, in her handling of point of view, and above all, in the final disposition of her characters. Howe, while agreeing with E. K. Brown as to the Jamesian characteristics of The Reef, adds that "the refined agonies of conscience which Anna Leath experiences in the novel are of a kind that depend on Mrs. Wharton's 'feminine' side and thereby are mostly beyond the reach of James, while the ending of the novel, so painfully tendentious and damaging to all that has preceded it, is also dependent on Mrs. Wharton's 'feminine' side, as this time it takes upon itself the privilege of moral retaliation." Nevius comments on the uncertainties of Wharton's tone and moral posture, on the limitations of the point of view (shared between Darrow and Anna) and the consequent difficulties of defining Wharton's attitude toward her characters, and the differences in Wharton's final treatment of Sophy and Darrow. James and Lubbock both similarly express concern with the point of view, James in a letter to Wharton saying, "I suffer or worry a little from the fact that in the Prologue, as it were, we are admitted so much into the consciousness of the man, and that after the introduction of Anna . . . we see him almost only as she sees him," while Lubbock claims that, with the shift to Anna's
point of view, Sophy and Darrow are not the "same Darrow and the same Sophy that we saw before." Examination of the novel cannot refute these charges; but they can be understood in terms of Wharton's ambivalence towards "innocence" and "experience," her reversal of feeling towards the relationship with Fullerton, and, especially, through her familiar tendency to scapegoat her characters as a "mode of self-punishment."

In the Prologue (Book I) of The Reef, Sophy, as seen through Darrow's eyes, is the new American woman, "free without hardness and self-assured without assertiveness" (27). Throughout this section of the book, and in striking contrast to Books II-IV, Darrow compares her favorably to Anna. Initially, she appeals to him through her unconventionally frank acceptance of his help (13). Later, on the train as Sophy sleeps unselfconsciously next to him, Darrow contrasts Sophy's spontaneity with Anna's correctness. Anna "would not have talked too much; she would not have been either restless or embarrassed; but her adaptability, her appropriateness would not have been nature but 'tact.' The oddness of the situation would have made sleep impossible, or, if weariness had overcome her for a moment, she would have waked with a start, wondering where she was, and how she had come there, and if her hair were tidy; and nothing short of hairpins and a glass would have restored her self-
possession. ..." (29). Darrow's view of his conventional fiancée continues to suffer as Sophy's frankness and directness make him forget conventional categories: his early acquaintance with her, which he feared would be "awkward," proved "as much outside such definitions as a sunrise stroll with a dryad in a dew-drenched forest" (36). Darrow reflects that "mankind would never have needed to invent tact if it had not first invented social complications" (36). Sophy is spontaneous, natural, sensual, and an "extraordinary conductor of sensation" (51). As Sophy and Darrow begin to enjoy Paris together, she is a radiant naïf, whose sensitive "receptivity" (33) to experience puts to shame Anna's jaded taste and privileged state (33). Like Ellen Olenska, whose lack of affectation is a scandal in the New York of The Age of Innocence, Sophy "would either accept his suggestions, or she would not: but at least she would not waste time in protestations and objections, or any vain sacrifice to the idols of conformity" (37). And Darrow's view of Anna increasingly prefigures Newland Archer's view of May Welland in language remarkably similar to that of the later book: Darrow begins to wonder "whether the 'sheltered girl's bringing-up might not unfit her for all subsequent contact with life... What were all [Anna's] reticences and evasions but the result of the deadening process of forming a 'lady'? The freshness
he had marvelled at was like the unnatural whiteness of flowers forced in the dark" (29). As the "lady" appears to him more and more remote from "real life," Sophy retrieves lost sensitivities for him: through her eyes a Greek play "regained for Darrow its supreme and poignant reality. He pierced to the heart of its significance through all the artificial accretions with which his theories of art and the conventions of the stage had clothed it, and saw it as he had never seen it: as life" (60).

Sophy Viner is the center of vitality in Book I of The Reef, as Charity Royall and Mattie Silver, to a lesser extent, are in Summer and Ethan Frome; and Sophy's early circumstances, like theirs, make her especially vulnerable to Darrow's seduction while, at the same time, revealing again Wharton's tendency to associate vitality and sexuality only with those characters outside the protected and conventional upper class. Sophy is an orphan, ignored by her only relative, a sister, and robbed of her inheritance by her guardian's widow. She has been a governess in New York, a secretary in London, a lady's companion. Unusual from Darrow's perspective because she is neither a lady nor the opposite, but a young woman decidedly alone, hoping for "luck," for her chance, she is distinguished "from the daughters of wealth by her avowed acquaintance with the
real business of living, a familiarity as different as possible from their theoretical proficiency" (27).

But Darrow, like another Winterbourne, has no experience with this impecunious Daisy Miller and cannot reconcile her economic self-sufficiency and her unprotected independence with her, to him, surprisingly unsus­picuous naivete. When he deliberately deceives her in order to keep her in Paris longer, he suspects briefly that it is "he rather than she who was childishly trust­ful... Considering what her experiences must have been, such trustfulness seemed open to suspicion" (67). Again, when Sophy writes to her friends instead of tele­graphing, he suspects her motives, seeing in this choice "an artful device to gain more time" (56), and only belatedly recognizes the measure as an economic expedient. Darrow can never fully accept her "odd mingling of pre­cocious wisdom and disarming ignorance" (61), and so, ultimately, she becomes his victim. Drawn to her in part through "pity," largely through "wounded vanity" (47), the "excitement of pursuit" (71) and a desire to make "so responsive a temperament... vibrate for his own amusement" (52), he seduces her. As he barely refrains from saying to her, she is "the very creature to whom it was bound to happen" (73). Nevertheless, Sophy's vi­brantly honest presence, her pathetic pleasure in Darrow
and the wonders of Paris, dominate the Prologue and seem to express some of the joy and abandon that characterized Wharton's own experience of 1909.

The class of differences between Anna, the lady, and Sophy, the new American woman, are emphasized in their initial presentations. In the rain and confusion of the port, Darrow's first view of Sophy is of an umbrella caught by wind and rain "at the end of a helpless female arm" (11). At the beginning of Book II, Anna is described as a "lady" holding a parasol above her head in the protecting shadow of her stately country home. While Sophy is struggling among the throngs of people, Anna is "halfway between house and drive" (83), a position that comes to symbolize Anna's indecisive lingering on the threshold of experience. The house is Givré, a chateau near Paris, that had once seemed "to hold out to her a fate as noble and dignified as its own mien" (84); but it had become, during the long unsatisfactory years of her marriage, "the very symbol of narrowness and monotony" (84). Anna has been, as she confesses to her stepson Owen, "too subject to Givré" (103), to the pressure of conventions and traditions that Givré represents and which Owen feels would also "gradually gobble him up" (145). While Darrow exclaims that Anna and Givré "look so made for each other" (118), Anna, knowing what subjection to
Givré has cost her, stands in the courtyard that is "full of a latent life" (85), feeling a similar "latent animation" glowing in herself (85).

Anna Leath's life has been a "grey shadowy tale" (96), not only in the emptiness of her marriage to Fraser Leath, but also in her New York girlhood when a "veil . . . had hung between herself and life" (86). Anna is a "model of lady-like repression" (87) who recognizes that others were "possessed of some vital secret which escaped her " (87). As in the case of Isabel Archer, ignorance of the "vital secret" led to her marriage to Fraser Leath, another Gilbert Osmond, who lived abroad collecting snuff boxes and expressing "revolutionary sentiment" (91) about the conventions of New York while "he exacted a rigid conformity to his rules of non-conformity. . . ." (93). His skepticism "had the absolute accent of a dogma" (93). Anna's marriage "had the effect of dropping another layer of gauze between herself and reality . . . the old vicious distinction between romance and reality was re-established for her, and she resigned herself again to the belief that 'real life' was neither real nor alive . . . even the irreducible crude fact of child-bearing assumed, in the Leath household the same ghostly tinge of unreality" (95-96). With her growing awareness Anna comes to see her husband as an inhuman fixture of the great house, as a "gilt console screwed to the wall "(93);
and she similarly recognizes the image of her own lonely trance-like state in the portrait of her dead predecessor, the mother of Owen, "a poor lady, elegantly dressed, and seated in the middle of a large lonely canvas, in the blank contemplation of a gilt console, [who] had always seemed to Anna to be waiting for visitors who never came. . . . Of course they never came. Anna had more than once apostrophized her, with a derision addressed rather to herself than to the dead" (99).

Repeatedly, Anna's own death-like state is emphasized by her comparison with static works of art. To Darrow, "she suggested a fine portrait kept down to a few tones, or a Greek vase on which the play of light is the only pattern" (127); and again, Anna was "like a picture so hung that it can be seen only at an angle" (130). And in an image that testifies to Anna's untapped strength and vitality, she is like "an amazon in a frieze" (193), while she and Darrow are "like the ghostly lovers of the Grecian Urn, forever pursuing without ever clasping each other" (30). By marrying Fraser Leath and rejecting Darrow after a youthful courtship, Anna has sacrificed "the divine gift of self-renewal" (30) and is "fated to wane into old age repeating," like May Welland in The Age of Innocence, "the same gestures, echoing the words that she had always heard, and perhaps never guessing that just outside her glazed and curtained consciousness,
life rolled away, a vast blackness starred with lights, like the night landscape beyond the windows of the train" (30). Anna is one of those American women, as Wasserstrom described them in Heiress of All the Ages, to whom "American society denied . . . the most fertile kinds of consciousness and, instead, furnished pieties that sensitized the soul but tortured the flesh."¹⁹ Through her experience with Sophy and Darrow, Anna is challenged to move from the stasis of art toward the more fertile consciousness of initiation and experience.

However, in a burst of what Irving Howe has called Wharton's "feminist resentment,"²⁰ she makes clear that the uninitiated, pious lady is the one who is desirable as a wife. Wharton contrasts in some detail Darrow's attitudes towards Anna and Sophy: Anna is "the kind of woman with whom one would like to be seen in public. It would be distinctly agreeable to follow her into drawing-rooms, to walk after her down the aisle of a theatre, to get in and out of trains with her, to say, 'my wife' of her to all sorts of people. He draped these details in the handsome phrase 'She's a woman to be proud of. . .'" (130). By contrast, reencountering Sophy five months after their brief affair, he is repelled by his knowledge of her sexual experience: "He tried to get away from the feeling, to isolate and exteriorize
it sufficiently to see what motives it was made of; but it remained a mere blind motion of his blood, the instinctive recoil from the thing that no amount of arguing can make 'straight'" (188). Instinctively, unwillingly even, he sees Sophy as unclean; his revulsion from her, mingled with fear and a strange lingering possessiveness, makes him "desperately want to prevent her marrying Owen Leath" (188).

What Irving Howe called Wharton's "feminine bitterness, a profound impatience with the claims of the ruling sex," is nowhere more chillingly expressed than in the character of Darrow. He is, as Anna sees, "double": the Darrow that "she worshipped was inseparable from the Darrow she abhorred" (299-300); she could not love Darrow "without fear that his double's shadow would desecrate it" (299). Darrow is "double," as Sophy and Anna are, because his nature obviously includes the double standard that allowed him to enjoy Sophy Viner sexually, in his role as single young man and, later, in his role as Anna's fiancé, to attempt not only to prevent Sophy's marriage, but also to feel genuine pangs at the thought of delegating to her the education of Anna's daughter: "the fact of having had to urge Anna to confide Effie to her was peculiarly repugnant to him. . . . he found himself in the intolerable position of appearing to press it on the woman he desired above all others
to protect" (167). In his easy exploitation of Sophy and in his poised assurance later with Anna, he asserts the male prerogatives of a world in which, as Wharton says, there are two types of women. Darrow is "disposed to assume that they had been evolved... for administering to the more complex masculine nature" (260). Part of Darrow's complexity is that he finds with Sophy an "utter sense of well-being" (261), while, beneath his pride in possessing Anna, there also lies an "elemental sense of well-being in her presence" (129). Both of these women—who form what Robert Rogers calls a "puritan-provacatress pair"—testify not only to masculine "complexity" but also, more positively, to a greater integration in Darrow of the sexual and spiritual than either Anna or Sophy, who express opposing tendencies, have been able to achieve. This integration, though treated ironically, also enables Darrow to recognize the dangers inherent not only in Anna's lady-like repression but also in Sophy's insensitivity to "remoter imaginative issues" (62). Therefore, despite Darrow's obvious weaknesses and evasions, and Wharton's equally evident "feminist bitterness," Darrow nevertheless expresses a coldly realistic point of view and a pessimism that Wharton herself expresses elsewhere. In The Fruit of the Tree, for instance, she wrote that "life is not a matter of abstract principles, but a succession of pitiful compromises
with fate, of concessions to old traditions, old beliefs, old tragedies, old failures."\(^2\)\(^3\) Echoing the spirit of these words, Darrow says to Anna, "When you've lived a little longer you'll see what complex blunderers we all are: how we're struck blind sometimes, and mad sometimes -- and then when our sight and our senses come back, how we have to set to work, and build up, little by little, bit by bit, the precious things we'd smashed to atoms without knowing it. Life's just a perpetual piecing together of broken bits" (313). Coming near the end of *The Reef*, Darrow's statement sums up the hard lesson that Anna must struggle to learn. However unattractive and self-serving his words may be, they are still the lesson of reality, and express Wharton's sense of the pervasiveness of waste in human affairs and the tyranny that circumstances can exert over human will and desire. The world, as Howe puts it, "is hardly such as to persuade her of its goodness; it is merely such as to persuade her of its force."\(^2\)\(^4\) Darrow, in fact, is one of the few characters in Wharton's fiction who embodies the kind of grim worldly wisdom that accords with Wharton's own non-fictional utterances; and as such, Darrow is the embodiment of ego forces which must moderate between Sophy, the reckless dryad, and Anna's "characteristically and exasperatingly impossible"\(^2\)\(^5\) voice of conscience.
The two settings of *The Reef*, Paris and Givre, exploit the conventional city/country dichotomy to advantage and also underline the "doubleness" of Wharton's two female characters. As Henry James pointed out, Paris was hardly necessary as the setting of Darrow and Sophy's sexual sin, since Boston or New York would have done as well. Nevertheless, it is Paris that provides the appropriately free ambience. In Paris, Sophy blooms, expanding in the rich air of its parks and theaters; conversely, at Givré, she is stifled by the climate of convention, by the restrictions of her role as governess, and by the oppressive controls of Anna and Madame de Chantelle. Sophy is diminished at Givré, her only influence being on Anna's daughter Effie who "expands" in her "gay" and "human" presence (222); Anna, knowing that Madame de Chantelle will provide, in her own absence the "necessary restraints" (222), seeks precisely this influence for her daughter. At Givré, since Wharton's attention has turned to Anna and to retributions and reprisals, we see little of Sophy. It is worth noting, however, that Owen, her fiancé, is her counterpart.

Owen and Sophy are repeatedly described in similar terms. As Sophy is, repeatedly, a "dryad," so Owen is a "young faun strayed in from the forest" (155). Anna and Darrow agree that the "faun in flannels" might be well matched by a dryad lurking in blue-and-gold woods"(119)
of Givré. Owen is, evidently, a "natural" creature, a young man of moods, passions, and sudden enthusiasms who senses and rebels against the deadening powerful restraints at Givré: "I want to get out of it [Givre] into a life that's big and ugly and struggling" (145). And he recognizes its emptiness: "Poor empty Givre! With so many rooms full and yet not a soul in it. . . . I've such a mad desire to say outrageous things to it--haven't you? After all, in old times there must have been living people here" (105)! Owen Leath is a "boisterous embodiment" (98) of his father's unused and decorative theories who goes in for "crude revolutionary dogmatizing" (97), and occasional "visions of desultory artistic indulgence" (145) that had more recently been "superseded by the resolute determination to plunge into practical life" (145). Owen shares Sophy's spontaneous emotionality: he, "like Sophy Viner, had the kind of face which seems less the stage on which emotions move than the very stuff they work in" (175). Again, like Sophy, Owen intuitively responds to the currents of emotion at Givré: throughout Darrow's visit there, "some smouldering apprehension had lain close under the surface of his security" (237); unlike his step-mother Anna, whose theories and ideals preclude a direct emotional response, Owen senses the tensions that disturb
the tranquil surface of their country life. They—Owen and Sophy—respond to life freely and intuitively, rather than analytically and rationally as Anna and Darrow are inclined to do. At Givré, the forces of vitality and sensuality are generally suppressed by the repressive force which Givré represents and Anna embodies; they break forth only in Owen's dark moods and the passionate eruption that precipitates his own and Sophy's departure.

In part, The Reef exploits the conventional contrast between city and country, between freedom and repression, which emphasizes Wharton's shift from indulgence to punishment. In the country, Sophy, as the center of sensual vitality, is weakened, demeaned, and ultimately banished with all of her chances for fulfillment destroyed, while Anna, as the expression of super-ego forces, must attempt to accept the reality of Darrow. Yet, the solutions of The Reef are inconclusive; Wharton's own ambivalence remains expressed in Anna's still incomplete search for integration and through her highly ambiguous treatment of Sophy.

Even when defeated by Anna and Darrow, Sophy retains a dignity that affirms, rather than repudiates, the value of initiation. By risking herself and her future, she has strengthened her individuality: "she went on almost exultantly: 'Don't for a minute think I'm sorry! It was worth every penny it cost. My mistake
was in being ashamed, just at first, of its having cost such a lot. . . . I tried to take your attitude about it, to play the game and convince myself that I hadn't risked any more on it than you. Then, when I met you again, I suddenly saw that I had risked more, but that I'd won more, too -- such worlds!"(259) Wharton allows Sophy this compensation for her sacrifice; and Sophy leaves Givre not embittered, but ennobled by her sacrifices and her protection of both Darrow and Owen. Although Sophy becomes Wharton's scapegoat, she is nevertheless allowed a certain psychological, even moral, victory. Wharton, here, is closer to her own romantic experience, and is more than usually sympathetic toward the impulses Sophy represents. Moreover, Sophy's value is attested by Anna's growing respect and dependence on her.

Initially, Anna recognizes in Sophy a vitality and involvement with life that she lacks. Anna

had always felt a romantic and almost humble admiration for those members of her own sex who, from force of will, or the constraints of circumstances, had plunged into the conflict from which fate had so presistently excluded her. There were even moments when she ought somehow to have af­ronted the perils and hard­ships which refused to come to her. And now, as she sat
looking at Sophy Viner, so small, so slight, so visibly defenseless and undone, she still felt, through all the superiority of her worldly advantages and her seeming maturity, the same odd sense of ignorance and inexperience (234).

Increasingly, as Sophy's tale unfolds, Anna feels her inadequacy, her inferiority to Sophy's "sad precocity of wisdom" (281), and fears that she will never know what Sophy has known (292). During their confrontation in Paris, Sophy's courage gives her a superiority: "she seemed animated by an eager resoluteness that made Anna ashamed of her tremors" (304), and is "conscious of being in the presence of an intenser passion than she had ever felt" (307). Anna is "motionless, subdued and dominated" (307) by Sophy's strength; through Anna's tortured meditations "ran the undercurrent of an absolute trust in Sophy Viner" (319). Anna's sense of inferiority grows after Sophy has left Givre: "The girl had kept her word, lived up to the line of conduct she had set herself; and Anna had failed in the same attempt. . . . It irritated her obscurely that the girl should have been so much surer of her power to carry out her purpose" (345). Ultimately, she has come to need and depend on Sophy's strength and fixity of purpose: "It was Sophy Viner only who could save her--Sophy Viner
only who could give her back her lost serenity" (360).
Although Anna feels that she and Darrow are "as profoundly and inextricably bound together as two trees with interwoven roots" (360), she cannot overcome her scruples and seeks an "external chance" (360) to provide her with an escape: "She would seek the girl out and tell her that she had given Darrow up; and that step once taken there would be no retracing it, and she would perforce have to go forward alone" (360). And so Anna determines to find Sophy.

In seeking out Sophy, after Sophy has left Givré and the story of her affair with Darrow is known, Anna once again acknowledges her own incompleteness and her doubleness with Sophy. She needs to integrate into herself the principle of vitality that has grown out of Sophy's initiation into worldly experience. Only through such an integration can she accept -- or reject -- Darrow in a way that is an enriching choice, rather than a de-meaning compromise. Anna is attempting not only to make a decision, but also to find grounds, other than purely theoretical ones, on which to base her decision. Like Isabel Archer, who, as Wasserstrom says, "had been reared in a place where sex is not supposed to help mold decisions,"27 Anna is unable to distinguish among choices which involve the application of its force. Anna, like Isabel, combines "inflated ideals" with "meagre knowledge"
and is similarly "foredoomed." Anna, however, hovers on the brink of initiation in the later books of *The Reef*. She comes to value Sophy almost appropriately, and the sexual response that Darrow awakens in her nearly allows her to understand and accept Sophy and Darrow's relation; Anna might have found, as Wasserstrom says Wharton and James believed, that the "wages of sin were life." But Wharton's ambivalence serves to prevent such a resolution, the ideal resolution which James reserved for Maggie Verver in *The Golden Bowl*. The final episode of the novel, in which Anna seeks Sophy and finds her older sister Laura instead, reveals just how far Wharton can go towards reconciling herself with the primary value of sexual experience.

In this key chapter, which Nevius has called "one of the most regrettable passages in Edith Wharton's fiction" because of its "narrow sense of human values," Laura is in her bed in a cheap hotel when Anna arrives. Laura's lover, her masseur, and her poodle surround her, creating an unpleasant disarray. Surprisingly, we are told that the plump and vulgar Laura "presented to Anna's startled gaze an odd chromo-like resemblance to Sophy Viner, or a suggestion, rather, of what Sophy Viner might, with the years and in spite of the powder-puff become. . . . As she stretched her bare plump arm across the bed she seemed to be pulling back the veil from dingy distances
of family history" (365). By association Wharton has condemned Sophy and obliterated the warmth and respect Sophy's portrait had previously evoked; the change, though it is merely sordid rather than horrifying, is reminiscent of Mattie Silver's transmutation into a querulous elderly drone at the end of Ethan Frome. Wharton's scapegoating of Sophy is completed here, in the gratuitous and circumstantial disparagement of Sophy. Wharton's ambivalence toward her representative of experience is nowhere more clearly expressed than in this denigration of the woman who has previously been something of a moral exemplar for both Darrow and Anna.

As Nevius has argued, Anna's visit to Laura and its supposed exposure of Sophy's sordid background may have the effect of exculpating Darrow and thereby freeing Anna to marry him. However, Anna's own moral development is truncated by this event, for it is Anna's view of Laura and Sophy that we are given in the final chapter; and Anna's prejudicial repudiation of the scene before her symbolizes a final rejection of the values which Sophy represents. Anna may or may not marry Darrow, but she clearly will not experience a full initiation into maturity. Like Newland Archer in The Age of Innocence, Anna cannot accept the opportunity for life that she believes she has always longed for. By the end of The Reef, Wharton has, once again, defined the
limits of both innocence and experience and implied the impossibility, for the protected, upper-class American woman, of achieving an integration of thought and feeling, of "nature" and civilization into a "fruitful consciousness."  

Although the limits of Anna's growth are clearly defined, the moral perspective of The Reef is still somewhat blurred, since Wharton apparently condones the unequal justice meted out to Darrow and to Sophy. Wharton has in fact punished the victim of the situation by scapegoating Sophy. First she honors and then repudiates Sophy's vitality. The focus of her interest then turns to Anna, who seems to express her own dilemma in coming to terms with sexual experience. Wharton herself seems, at this time, to be struggling with Anna's question of integrating into her own moral nature the reality of sexual experience: Anna, without Sophy, is clearly less than a complete human being. Neither in The Reef nor in her later novels did Wharton create Maggie Verver, a character in whom the ideal of integration has been achieved. Wharton seems to argue that not for her, or for any American woman of her generation and social class, was such an achievement possible, although in her last book, The Buccaneers, she would be more hopeful for a future generation of American women. In The Reef, and
in subsequent novels, Wharton continues to measure the costs and gratifications of innocence and experience, of initiation and its refusal. In *The Reef*, for the first time in her writing, Wharton examines these questions through the frank presentation of the protagonist's struggle with sexual inhibition and prejudice.
CHAPTER III

SUMMER: IDYLL AND INVERTED INITIATION

*Summer*¹ (1917) was written in Paris at the height of Wharton's involvement in the war effort. Although this short novel, a companion piece to *Ethan Frome*, has been somewhat overlooked by critics, Wharton considered it one of her best works² and commented in *A Backward Glance* (1934) that "the tale was written at a high pitch of creative joy. . . . I do not remember ever visualizing with more intensity the inner scene, or the people creating it."³ *Summer* like *Ethan Frome*, is set in the Berkshires of Massachusetts and, as in *Frome*, Wharton's choice of rural setting freed her from the constraining social realities of the New York world she knew best and allowed her a greater freedom of imaginative expression than is usual in her novels of manners.⁴ In *Summer*, as in *Ethan Frome*, there is a clear emergence of the scapegoat motif.

While in *Ethan Frome* Wharton crippled and destroyed her already weak and masochistic characters, in *Summer* she creates an opposite world in which romantic sexual love flourishes briefly, before her protagonist suffers punishment for her sexual initiation. As the mood of *Ethan Frome* corresponds to the darkest period of
Wharton's life, so *Summer* in part reflects the freedom that she had gained through divorce and, perhaps, some of the joy of her relationship with Morton Fullerton. In both *Ethan Frome* and *Summer*, Wharton's theme is the issue of sexual and romantic initiation — in *Frome* the price of its refusal, in *Summer*, the guilt and punishment attendant on its acceptance.

The plot of *Summer* is simple, even conventional, in outline: Charity Royall is a young country girl who lives with her guardian in the isolated hill town of North Dormer. Although Charity hates the town, her prospects for escape are dim. When Lucius Harney, a young architect, comes to town for the summer, Charity is readily seduced, although she attempts to hide the affair from her jealous guardian, lawyer Royall. At the summer's end, Harney returns to New York and his fiancée, leaving Charity pregnant and desperate. Hoping to find her mother and a home, Charity travels on foot to the mountain community where she was born; once there, however, she finds that her mother has died and that the community consists of a depraved band of outcasts. Lawyer Royall arrives on the mountain to bring Charity home, as he had done when she was a child, and eventually they are married.

North Dormer is barren and moralistic, its code of behavior rigid and repressive. Defined by negations,
North Dormer is

...a weather-beaten sunburnt village of the hills, abandoned of men, left apart by railway, trolley, telegraph, and all the forces that link life to life in modern communities. It had no shops, no theatres, no lectures, no 'business block'; only a church that was opened every other Sunday if the state of the roads permitted, and a library for which no new books had been bought for twenty years, and where the old ones mouldered undisturbed on the damp shelves (6).

In its negations and rigidity, North Dormer is an environment especially conducive to the scapegoating process. The townspeople are pious towards the past, resistant towards the future, and hostilely evasive towards unpleasant realities of the sort that Julia Hawes reminds them. Wharton's major characters -- Charity and Mr. Royall -- are like the characters in a romance and tend to represent simple elemental passions.

In her protagonist, Charity Royall, Wharton has created an unusual figure, and one apparently unrelated to her other protagonists. Charity is a primitive, a gypsy, the daughter of a whore and a convicted murderer. She is passionately emotional and sensual, undeveloped intellectually, and an alien to order, structure, and control. Frankly sexual and naturally responsive, she is
blind and insensible to many things, and dimly knew it; but to all that was light and air, perfume and colour, every drop of blood in her responded. She loved the roughness of the dry mountain grass under palms, the smell of the thyme into which she had crushed her face, the fingering of the wind in her hair and through her cotton blouse. . . (13-14).

Charity is fiercely proud, quick to anger, and destructive in her rages: "she had never known how to adapt herself; she could only break and tear and destroy" (163). An angry scene with her friend Ally had "left her stricken with shame at her own childish savagery . . . she could not imagine what a civilized person would have done in her place. . ." (163).

Charity embodies all of the uncivilized emotions and impulses that are incompatible with life in society. She lacks the mask of the socialized being and the self-control to conceal her primitive urgings.\(^5\) Unique in Wharton's fiction, Charity is a pure, and unrealistically simplified, pagan spirit who, before her victimization, expresses all that is antithetical to the values of Wharton's New York world. As the anti-ethical principle, Charity transgresses the repressive code of Wharton's hill town, first by despising the town and longing for a more fulfilling life and then, more seriously, by her
frank sexual adventure with a man from the city.

When Lucius Harney appears in North Dormer, Charity reaches out for escape from the sterility of the town towards the "first creature who had come toward her out of the wilderness..." (31). Her energies rush into a passionate attraction to Harney, and the world of Summer becomes a sensual garden that is unique in Wharton's fiction:

All this bubbling of sap and slipping of sheaths and bursting of calyxes was carried to her on mingled currents of fragrance. Every leaf and bud seemed to contribute its exhalation to the pervading sweetness in which the pungency of pine-sap prevailed over the spice of thyme and subtle perfume of fern, and all were merged in a moist earth-smell that was like the breath of some huge sun-warmed animal (38-39).

For Charity, waiting in a secret, deserted house for her lover,

the only reality was the wondrous unfolding of her new self, the reaching out to the light of all her contracted tendrils. She had lived all her life among people whose sensibilities seemed to have withered for lack of use...(138).

Harney, the young lover, is educated and artistic and, to
Charity, the embodiment of knowledge and civilized worldliness. But Harney is a weak and fleeting presence in the novel, a stock figure from the conventional novel of seduction.

In contrast to North Dormer, the other setting of Charity's drama is a pagan mountain community which casts a shadow of fear on the townspeople below. High up on a desolate peak, where the trees have disappeared into wind-damaged shrubs, a band of outlaws live, depraved by poverty and isolation and reduced to subhumanity. In this savage community Wharton has created a place of horror and disorder. As Nevius says, "We have been led back by another extraordinary route into the heart of Conrad's primeval darkness, whose savage inhabitants are the shapes of half-forgotten fears and instincts." A dead woman lies disheveled on a bed "like a dog in a ditch" (193), and the children run wild or huddle like puppies against the mother for warmth; the inhabitants are "herded together in a sort of passive promiscuity in which their common misery [is] the strongest link" (193). This mountain community was Charity's birthplace and her home until the age of five, when lawyer Royall brought her down to the civilization of North Dormer.

The foremost man of North Dormer is Charity's guardian, lawyer Royall, who is superior to the town
intellectually and in experience, since he had once ventured forth to practice law in the city and failed there before returning to North Dormer and a dwindling practice. As the voice of North Dormer, he is appropriately "a magnificent monument of a man" (18) whose past hopes are "ruined and unforgotten" (48); and he is the bearer of the town's values of rigid suppression. In Charity's drama Royall is not only guardian and later her husband, but also the law-giver and judge who condemns her. Royall is also given to secret debauches of drinking and whoring in Nettleton, and in these passionate eruptions, he is an image of the novel's conflicting worlds of rigidity and chaos. Once Charity has been sacrificed and broken, Royall's own demonic impulses vanish; Royall is thus an encapsulation of conflicting impulses, and in his final personal triumph over chaos he embodies the ruling aesthetics of the novel.

The process of Charity's victimization begins when the burden of guilt is transferred to her by the town and, primarily, by Royall. First the townspeople come to believe, though wrongly, that she has spent a night with Harney. Outraged as her guardian, jealous as her suitor, Royall pleads with Charity to marry him, offering her "a fanciful picture of renewal" (85) in the city. Charity's loathing of him builds with each of his attempts to thwart her and to win her. Then, when
she goes with Harney to a Fourth of July celebration in
Nettleton, Royall confronts her while he is in the com-
pany of whores:

He stood staring at them, and
trying to master the senile
quiver of his lips; then he
drew himself up with the tre-
mulous majesty of drunkenness,
and stretched out his arm,
"You whore -- you damn --
bare-headed whore -- you!" (Ill)

Here Royall becomes the accuser whose pronouncement of
guilt finds its echo in Charity, though her affair with
Harney has not yet begun: "Her guardian's words had
stripped her bare in the face of the grinning crowd and
proclaimed to the world the secret admonitions of her
conscience" (117). In anguish Charity decides to flee
to the Mountain, and along the way she is accosted by an
evangelist. Again she is accused and her sense of guilt
depens:

"Sister, your Saviour knows
everything. Won't you come
in and lay your guilt before
him?" he asked insinuatingly,
putting his hand on her arm.
Charity started back and
flushed. For a moment she
thought the evangelist must
have heard a report of the
scene at Nettleton... (118).

Her answer to the evangelist is the truth spoken ironi-
cally: "I only wish't I had any to lay!" (118). Charity
has accepted the scapegoat's burden of guilt and immediately after joins Harney for the first time at the deserted house in Creston River.

The forces that threaten Charity emerge clearly at North Dormer's celebration of Old Home Week. Harney's fiancée appears and Charity begins to fear the unknown parts of Harney's life and "all the mysterious attractions that must even now be dragging him away from her..." (146). In addition, lawyer Royall's role becomes clear when he appears as the main speaker at Old Home Week. Charity notices as he ascends the stage that "his gravely set face wore the look of majesty that used to awe and fascinate her childhood. . . nothing in his grave and impressive demeanour revealed a trace of the lamentable figure on the wharf " (141). Royall's speech defines North Dormer. It is addressed not to those who have succeeded in making lives in other places but to those who have been forced by failure to return to North Dormer. His own history, he says, "has its lesson. . . . One way or another, things had gone wrong with us. . . . what we'd dreamed of hadn't come true . . . if you come back against your will -- and thinking it's all a bitter mistake of Fate or Providence -- you must try to make the best of it, and to make the best of your old town" (143). North Dormer, he continues, might have been a bigger and better
place, "if those who had to come back had come with that feeling in their minds—that they wanted to come back for good... and not for bad... or just for indifference" (143).

With this declaration of principles, the roles of Royall and Charity become clear; they are now the judge and the accused: he "sat close to her, his eyes on her face; and his look seemed to pierce to the very centre of her confused sensations" (146). And Charity, beginning to know her fate, "stared straight ahead of her and then, dropping her flowers, fell face downward at Mr. Royall's feet" (147).

Soon after, Royall again intervenes as spokesman for the law and enters the deserted house where Charity and Harney meet. This time he shatters Charity's fragile romance by challenging Harney and forcing the question of marriage:

"Ask him when he's going to marry you, then..." There was another silence, and he laughed in his turn—a broken laugh, with a scraping sound in it. "You darsn't!" he shouted with sudden passion. He went up close to Charity, his right arm lifted not in menace, but in tragic exhortation (153).

Although Harney leaves Charity with the promise to settle his affairs in New York and return to marry her,
increasingly she is "passively awaiting a fate she could not avert" (159). A visit to Dr. Merkle in Nettleton confirms her fear that she is pregnant, and so she waits: "The more she thought of these things, the more the sense of fatality weighed on her: she felt the uselessness of struggling against the circumstances" (163).

Charity's extreme incapacity and passivity make clear that, as E. K. Brown said of Lily Bart in The House of Mirth, "there is a prisoner in the dock." All escapes are cut off. Charity refuses to have an abortion because it offers her "immunity for some unthinkable crime" (166-7); she cannot find the money to go to Harney in New York and "let his memories speak for her" (173); nor can she write him since "she found nothing to say that really expressed what she was feeling" (173); and she cannot accept the "fate of the girl who was married to make things right" (173) or bear "to make things hard" (173) for Harney. Finally, Charity is driven toward her punishment on the Mountain, which now seems "the inevitable escape from all that hemmed her in and beset her" (175). There she expects to find freedom from the harsh laws of North Dormer and welcome from her mother who "could hardly help remembering the past and receiving a daughter who was facing the trouble she had known" (178).

Charity's exile to the Mountain is the scapegoat's traditional exile to the wilderness. Preceded by "a
deadly faintness" and "a circling about in some terrible wheeling darkness" (178), this is a journey backward to her own beginning and to a time and a place of primitive disorder. Charity is guided toward this strange underworld by the Christian minister Mr. Miles, whose presence underscores the journey's inevitable outcome. The destruction of her pagan spirit begins when Charity meets a girl who may be her sister, who might have been herself, who is a "fierce bewildered creature" who frightens her by the "secret affinity" Charity feels for her (193). And then Charity finds her mother lying dead "like a dead dog in a ditch" (186), her face "thin yet swollen, with lips parted in a frozen gasp above the broken teeth. There was no sign in it of anything human" (185). To her sense of "unescapable isolation" (180) is added the nightmarish degradation of the funeral service counterpointed by the drunken squabbles of the outlaws:

"We brought nothing into this world and we shall take nothing out of it...."

There was a sudden muttering and a scuffle at the back of the group. "I brought the stove," said the elderly man with lank hair...

"Sit down, damn you!" shouted the tall youth...

"For man walketh in a vain shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain..."
"Well, it are his," a woman in the background interjected in a frightened whine...

"Now is Christ risen from the dead..." (187)

Charity's purgatorial night on the Mountain becomes a "tragic initiation" (193). Where she had expected to find freedom, she finds the "savage misery" (193) of the lawless band; and where she had expected to find her own mother, she instead confronts the fact of her own approaching motherhood. During her night's vigil in old Mrs. Hyatt's hut, the life of her child becomes the one significant fact that shakes her out of "mortal lassitude":

...her mind revolted at becoming one of the miserable herd from which she sprang, and it seemed as though to save her child from such a fate, she would find strength to travel any distance, and bear any burden life might put upon her (194).

Through the death of her mother, the horror of the Mountain, and finally, the life of her child, Charity is brought to relinquish her own dreams in favor of her hopes for her child:

...every other consideration disappeared in the vision of her baby, cleaned and combed and rosy, and hidden away somewhere where
she could run in and kiss it, and bring it pretty things to wear (194).

Finally, as she leaves the hut at dawn, she steals the Hyatts' breakfast bread without compunction, since "she had her own baby to think of" (195).

Clearly Charity's initiation marks the death of a part of herself. It is not the usual initiation journey from childhood and its illusions, through experience, and toward mature knowledge and personal freedom. Rather, it is an inverted initiation, not an introduction to a richer adult life, but to the death of the very capacities that might have made such a life possible. For those capacities -- her emotional and sensual nature and her longings for experience and personal fulfillment -- have been defined as those aspects of the self that are most reprehensible. Charity has become the scapegoat, and the role of the scapegoat is sacrifice and submission to authority.

The "crushing experience" of Charity's night on the Mountain has completed the sacrifice of the scapegoat (187). When Charity awakens to the "daylight world" (196) she is reborn as a daughter of the town and follows lawyer Royall as "passively as a tired child" (204). Her fierce independence and her hedonism have vanished. Beginning to live, her "return to life is so painful that the food choked in her throat and she sat at the table in
silent anguish" (200). Broken to acceptance and even
gratitude for the security Royall offers, she no longer
struggles against his offer of marriage. She relinquishes
all control to him and feels "only a confused sensation
of slipping down a smooth irresistible current" (203). At
the clergyman's house Royall tells her to fasten back
her wind-loosed hair and she acquiesces in his confine­
ment of her sensuality, feeling that "if she ceased to
keep close to him and do what he told her to do, the
world would slip away from beneath her feet" (206). With
the marriage ceremony that, for her, echoes the funeral
service of the preceding night, Charity's submission is
formalized; as her Mountain initiation was "tragic," so
her marriage is a doom, a death of the self in resigna­
tion and despair.

With her defeat, Charity's view of Royall has
changed drastically. He had been "hateful and obstruc­
tive," a "dull-witted enemy" (204,205); now he has be­
come the grave friend whose "depths of mournful toler­
ance" (201) offer her asylum. In fact, Charity's sacri­
fice has purged him as well, for "the dark spirits had
gone out of him" (211). Her experience has freed him
of his own unlawful impulses, as the scapegoat purifies
the group of its anti-ethical shadow. Charity and her
guardian have been purged in this ritual, and despite
"her own immeasurable desolation" (205), Charity is
surprised by "a sudden sense of their nearness to each other" (205). With this recognition, Charity senses the psychological basis of scapegoating: Royall once had felt yearnings and passions similar to her own and was broken, finally, to a like acceptance of his lot.

Once Charity is safely married to Royall, the tension of the novel decreases; the dues paid, the mood becomes benign. As a compensation for her sacrifice, Charity retrieves the brooch Harney gave her, as a token for their child, even though Dr. Merkle threatens to blackmail her and then adds, in a final irony, "I just put it to you as your own mother might" (214). At the same time Charity writes a brief, but significant, note to Harney, saying, "I'm married to Mr. Royall. I'll always remember you" (215). These last words were "not in the least what she had meant to write; they had flowed from her pen irresistibly. She had not had the strength to complete her sacrifice; but, after all, what did it matter? Now that there was no chance of ever seeing Harney again, why should she not tell him the truth?" (215)

Although Charity has sacrificed her lover and her hopes of fulfillment in a greater world outside North Dormer, the words she has written are still an act of self-assertion that diminishes the extent of her sacrifice.

The incomplete nature of Charity's sacrifice reveals an important ambivalence in Wharton's treatment
of this novel's conflict, and one that also suggests the nature of Wharton's own compromise with the values of a "hostile and alien culture." For Charity's brief note avows two allegiances: first, she announces that she is married to Royall, and thereby affirms her allegiance to the repressive ethic that he represents; but second she affirms her fidelity to Harney's memory and to the love, freedom, and possibility that he meant to her. The truth that Charity cannot refrain from telling is therefore a violation, however minor, of her renunciation; she has not fully accepted the terms of her "tragic initiation" (193).

Analogously, Wharton's career as a novelist vitiated the self-denial of her life and violated her commitments to her marriage, her family, and her class. Not only, as Kazin has said, did "she attain by the extension of her powers the liberation she needed as a woman "10; not only did she make her career by evading the fundamental obligations of her class11; but also, the very act of writing was itself, like Charity's final truth-telling, a denial of the values of her time and her family and her class, which she in some measure accepted. In her unpublished autobiography _Life and I_. Wharton describes this powerful conflict as she felt it during her childhood when it seemed a conflict between
social propriety and the truth, or as she puts it, between her mother and God. Despite the fact that her mother only demanded politeness, she had, Wharton, says,

worked out of my inner mind a rigid rule of absolute unmitigated truth-telling, the least imperceptible deviation from which would inevitably be punished by the dark Power I knew as "God". . . for years afterward I was never free from the oppressive sense that I had two absolutely inscrutable beings to please -- God and my mother -- who, while ostensibly upholding the same principles of behaviour, differed totally as to their application. And my mother was the most inscrutable of the two. Nothing I have suffered since has equalled the darkness of horror that weighed on my childhood in respect to this vexed problem of truth-telling, and the impossibility of reconciling "God's" standard of truthfulness with the conventional obligation to be "polite". . .

In this early conflict between social propriety and truth, we may see a paradigm of Wharton's later struggle between the self-denial demanded by her marriage and convention and the self-expression of her career that was truer to her own needs; and in her novels the conflict is manifest in the struggle between the inner needs and longings of her protagonists with the stifling laws
and conventions that Wharton persistently enforced on her fiction. But in *Summer*, as in Wharton's own case, the self-denial is finally incomplete; no more than the heroine/victim of *Summer* did Wharton complete the sacrifice demanded by her conscience.

Moreover, before the submission to law at the end of *Summer*, Wharton has written an extremely romantic and sensuous fantasy of fulfillment. Charity's passionate response to Harney is fully and richly chronicled; and in certain specific emotions, impulses, and even phrases, closely echoes Wharton's diary entries of 1907-1908. In addition, although the ending enforces submission to the ethic of repression, it is less savage, less punitive than, for instance, the conclusion of *Ethan Frome*. Edmund Wilson sees in *Summer* "the first sign on Mrs. Wharton's part of a relenting in the cruelty of her endings," and suggests that the intensity of conflict in her fiction has begun to subside because she has gained her own freedom through divorce and become comfortably adjusted to life in Paris.

Charity's fate, then, is less harsh than Ethan Frome's or Lily Bart's, in *The House of Mirth*; although she sacrifices her pagan spirit and succumbs to a civilized compromise in marrying Royall, she is not killed or maimed. Moreover, her capitulation and finally her
rebirth are presented in terms of her approaching motherhood. Seeing the life on the Mountain, Charity forgives her own mother first, and then thinks of the life of her own child: "What mother would not want to save a child from such a life? Charity thought of the future of her own child, and tears welled into her aching eyes and ran down over her face" (183). It is the thought of her child that shakes her out of "mortal lassitude": "But for it she would have felt as rootless as the whiffs of thistledown the wind blew past her. Her child was like a load that held her down, and yet like a hand that pulled her to her feet" (197). Charity's submission, presented in terms of her motherhood, suggests the price that is paid by the individual for the safety of living in a civilized society, as well as the woman's motive for making that compromise.

Frequently, in her novels of manners, Wharton scapegoats those characters who are incapable of initiation into sexual maturity; in Summer, Wharton has portrayed the opposite situation, and scapegoated that character who embodies the pagan sexual principle. In The Age of Innocence, as we shall now see, Wharton's continuing theme is the dangers of both the refusal and the acceptance of sexual experience.
The Age of Innocence\(^1\) is Wharton's most complex and carefully wrought novel of manners. It is a novel that commemorates the New York of the 1870's, of Wharton's youth, and it reveals clearly what Millicent Bell has called Wharton's tendency to "memorialize.\(^2\) Not surprisingly, The Age of Innocence has sometimes been read as a nostalgic tribute to brownstone New York, as though Wharton's precise rendering of a lost way of life constituted a reconciliation with the world that she had earlier rebelled against. Wharton evidently suspected that she had been misunderstood in this way. Shortly after The Age of Innocence had been awarded the Pulitzer Prize, she wrote to Sinclair Lewis: "When I discovered that I was being rewarded by one of our leading Universities -- for uplifting American morals -- I confess, I did despair"; and later, in another letter to Lewis, she added that "irony seems to have become as unintelligible as Chinese."\(^3\) Wharton's reconciliation with old New York was dubious, at best: in fact, The Age of Innocence, despite its nostalgia for a vanished time, expresses sharply ambivalent feelings not only toward the
peculiarly American innocence of old New York, but also toward its alternative, initiation into European experience.

As R. W. B. Lewis has said, *The Age of Innocence* constitutes a "retrospective act of self-confrontation,"\(^4\) comparable to James's in "The Jolly Corner," in which Wharton explores in her portrayal of Newland Archer, the near-rebel, the American she might have become without the career and the divorce that led to her permanent expatriation. Similarly, the character of Ellen Olenska, the European initiate, suggests other, less conventional aspects of Wharton.\(^5\) In effect, Wharton has projected onto her characters the antithetical and conflicting tendencies in her own life and personality—on the one hand, her anger and frustration, commingled with a submerged loyalty, toward the forms and conventions of New York; and, on the other, her compelling need to attain, in a more sympathetic environment, greater opportunity for personal and creative growth. By employing the now-familiar strategy of dividing and personifying contradictory components of her own personality, Wharton has made Archer and Ellen into "doubles."\(^6\) At the age of fifty-seven, seven years after the immense struggle she had undergone to obtain her own freedom, Wharton recreated in Archer and Ellen aspects of her personal dilemma and, in addition, reevaluated her own choices in her depiction of their lives.
Predictably, since the existence of "doubles" presupposes conflict and precludes harmony and reconciliation, Wharton again "connives" in such a way as to deprive her characters of fulfillment. Wharton scapegoats both Archer and Ellen and through her denial of gratification to them reveals her dissatisfaction with the forces and impulses that each represents. Until the epilogue where some measure of reconciliation is achieved, Wharton satirizes Archer's inadequacy, his refusal to accept initiation into life, his clinging to the seductive surfaces of innocence. The consequences of Archer's weakness are immense: he becomes, like James's Marcher in "The Beast in the Jungle," the "dwindling figure of a man to whom nothing was ever to happen" (227); and only in the epilogue, thirty years after his sacrifices, does he achieve a degree of initiation as a tardy, and minor, compensation for his loss. Through Archer's fate Wharton defines the dark meaning of innocence in America and the limited growth possible to an American character. But Ellen, the Europeanized American, fares no better. She, like Charity Royall in Summer, embodies all of those impulses and attributes most unacceptable to a repressive community. But Ellen's experience and maturity not only threaten Archer and his society; Wharton herself repudiates Ellen's sexuality, despite its obviously enhancing
concomitants, by depicting Ellen's initiation as a "sulphurous apotheosis" (61), rather than an enriching and fulfilling entrance into maturity. Moreover, in later years, she becomes a shadowy figure in the novel whose experience and expatriation has been costly in human terms. In _The Age of Innocence_ the obsessive impulse toward scapegoating so much in evidence in Wharton's earlier novels thus appears again, though in more muted, subtle, and complex form.

In Wharton's vernacular novels, _Summer_ and _Ethan Frome_, her tendency to scapegoat her characters was expressed through and embodied in figures of repressive power like Zeena and Lawyer Royall or, even more abstractly, in _Frome_, in the "profound accumulated cold of many Starkfield winters"; in _The Age of Innocence_ the scapegoating mechanism is similar, though it is muted by the conventions and rhetoric of the novel of manners. Here, it is the stultifying social landscape and the leaders of Archer's tribal world who seem responsible for Archer's fate. The forms of society, like the negations of Starkfield, become Archer's prison; more convincing because they include marriage and family, they nevertheless tend to obscure Archer's similarity to Frome and to conceal the self-destructive passivity with which Wharton has endowed him.
Many critics, including Edmund Wilson, Blake Nevius, and Irving Howe, have recognized the intensely personal component of Wharton's attack on New York and the exaggerated "innocence that seals the mind against imagination and the heart against experience" (146). In an early essay Wilson identified an "impulse of protest" against the society that had harmed her as the "main motive" of Wharton's writing, and Blake Nevius concluded, in assessing Wharton's attitudes towards New York, that the "indictment outweighed the defense." Irving Howe noted Wharton's complexity of feeling for old New York and wrote that it is "hard to imagine another writer in American literature for whom society, despite its attractions of surface and order, figures so thoroughly as a prison of the human soul." In fact, however, the negative aspects of Wharton's attitude toward New York are even more intensely expressed in The Age of Innocence than these writers suggest: the imagery of death and burial dominates Wharton's portrait of New York and Archer's imprisonment there.

In particular, the images which surround the leaders of New York society reveal the suppression of human life and the burial of human feeling. The "venerable ancestress" (27) of New York, Mrs. Manson Mingott, is the ruling deity, and her image defines
the city. Once she had been a "plump active little wo-
man with a neatly turned foot and ankle" (28), but after
she settles in her Central Park home an "immense accre-
tion of flesh. . . descended on her in middle life" (28)
and transformed her humanity into "something as vast and
august as a natural phenomenon" (28). The human im-
pulses of New York's inhabitants have perished under the
reified forms and conventions that have accrued through
the years; Wharton emphasizes, in this regard, the dom-
inance of ritualistic behaviour that pervades the society
and stifles natural responses. As Wharton's portrait
of Mrs. Mingott continues, it suggests that although
human feeling has been submerged in ritual it has not
been totally extinguished: Mrs. Mingott, "in extreme
old age was rewarded by presenting to her mirror an al-
most unwrinkled expanse of firm pink and white flesh,
in the center of which the traces of a small face sur-
vived as if awaiting excavation" (28). The mirrored
"traces" of humanity are, however, sufficiently remote
and abstract that they bear only a faint suggestion that
a resurrection of the society might occur. Mrs. Min-
gott is the symbol of a city that devours vitality, a
deity who has fattened on human sacrifice: "We need
new blood and new money. . . the carnivorous old lady
declared" (31) in reference to Mrs. Lemuel Struthers.
And of Ellen she concludes that her life is "finished... with the cold-blooded complacency of the aged throwing earth into the grave of young hope" (154). As the spirit of New York, Mrs. Mingott implies the costs to the members of her society.

The city has become a "necropolis" (311), as Brenda Niall has pointed out, and its death-like ambience is reflected in the images that surround other leaders of New York as well. The Van der Luydens, for example, "two slender faded figures, seated side by side in a kind of viceregal rigidity, mouthpieces of some remote ancestral authority" (55), live in a "mausoleum" (131) in the country where "the surprise of the butler who at length responded to the call was as great as though he had been summoned from his final sleep" (131). The Van der Luydens, themselves, in their chilly drawing room have been "rather gruesomely preserved in the airless atmosphere of a perfectly irreproachable existence, as bodies caught in glaciers keep for years a rosy life-in-death" (53).

The images of sterility and death are not, however, limited to the old and venerable; the aura of the city enfolds the entire life of the society and its younger members. May Welland, as Archer perceives her on their wedding day, is lifeless, too, like a statue or a mummy. She represents, Archer thinks, a "type,
rather than a person, as if she might have been chosen
to pose for a Civic virtue or a Greek goddess. The blood
that ran so close to her fair skin might have been a pre­
serving fluid rather than a ravaging element" (189).
With her look of "indestructible youthfulness" (189) May
is, like the Van der Luydens, outside of time, outside
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Ellen's initially naive perceptions of New York provide an ironic view of the necropolis. On her first night at the opera she acknowledges that she has been
away a long time and adds, "I'm sure I'm dead and buried, and this dear old place is heaven" (18). Repeatedly, she refers to New York as heaven, though her tone increasingly suggests that this heaven leaves human needs unfulfilled. At Skuytercliff she comments to Archer that women in New York seem not to have needs "any more than the blessed in heaven" (133); and then, as he inquires about her sudden departure from the city she responds, "Does anything ever happen in heaven?" (133) Ellen continues to isolate the characteristics of "heaven": "Does no one want to know the truth here, Mr. Archer? . . . Does no one cry here, either? I suppose there's no need to, in heaven. . . ." (78). Finding herself too "different" (239) from New Yorkers, Ellen first joins the Blenkers, the Boston intellectuals, and then decides to try Washington "where one was supposed to meet more varieties of people and opinion" (239) before returning to settle in Paris. She swiftly rejects the sterility of New York, although from Archer's point of view she is merely "bargaining for attar-of-roses in Samarkand" (76).

The innocence of New York, strikingly presented through the images of death and sterility that surround the novel's major figures, is fully defined by negations -- by the absence of those characteristics which define Europe, "an incessant stir of ideas, curiosities,
images and associations thrown out by an intensely social race in a setting of immemorial manners" (359). The absence of intellectual and artistic life is emphasized throughout The Age of Innocence: Ned Winsett's function in the novel is to reveal the cost of American deficiency in these areas, deficiencies which are further emphasized by M. Riviere, whose primary interest in life is good conversation. Winsett's house in the unfashionable bohemian quarter, where Ellen has chosen to live, forces Archer to ask "if the humanities were so meanly housed in other capitals" (124). Winsett, who has "a savage horror of social observances" (124), is a journalist and, like Mr. Riviere, lives for ideas and art in a society that has no interest in either. He is "a pure man of letters, untimely born in a world that had no need of letters" (124), and though still young, has been defeated and has succumbed to a "sterile bitterness" (125). His statement on the culture of New York is Wharton's condemnation:

Culture. Yes, if we had it! But there are just a few little local patches, dying out here and there for lack of well hoeing and cross-fertilizing: the last remnants of the old European tradition that your forbears brought with them. But you're a painful little minority: you've got no center, no competition, no
audience. You're like the pictures on the walls of a deserted house: "The Portrait of a Gentleman" (126).

Wharton emphasizes the separateness of the arts from society by defining the attitudes of those who, like Mrs. Mingott and Julius Beaufort, might have brought these disparate worlds together. But Mrs. Mingott has a "parvenu indifference" (103) towards the arts and, for Beaufort, cash values predominate. Although Archer accepts these attitudes as part of "the structure of the universe" (103), he also knew that "there were societies where painters and poets and novelists and men of science, and even great actors, were as sought after as Dukes" (103). In these moments, reflecting on the place of intellectual and artistic matters in America, Archer has been influenced by Ellen who alone had books in her drawing room, "a part of the house in which books were usually supposed to be out of place" (104). Moreover, in these statements, Archer's perceptions seem to be those of the author, who repeatedly expressed the view that at a more advanced "stage of manners" (104) the artistic, intellectual, and social worlds would "naturally merge" (104).

The innocence of New York is life-denying in other basic spheres as well. Archer's tribe is as detached from political and civic activity as from the arts. Ned
Winsett again, urged Archer to become more than a decorative portrait and to engage himself in the world of public action: "You'll never amount to anything, any of you, till you roll up your sleeves and get right down into the muck" (126). And later the Governor of New York had said to Archer: "Hang the professional politician! You're the kind of man the country wants, Archer. If the stable's ever to be cleaned out, men like you have got to lend a hand in the cleaning" (346). Heeding the call of the "great man's friendship," Archer served a year in the state assembly, without being reelected, and then settled for "obscure if useful municipal work" (346). Archer became a good citizen in a minor way without ever overcoming entirely the dictum of New York that a "gentleman simply stayed at home and abstained" (126). In professional life, similarly, Archer found that "no one was deceived by his pretense" (126) of work at the law firm: in Archer's generation "none of these young men had much hope of really advancing in his profession, or any earnest desire to do so, and over many of them the green mould of the perfunctory was already perceptibly spreading" (127).

Ultimately, innocence in New York is an evasion of reality and a rejection of experience in every human dimension -- as the performance of Faust at the beginning
and end of Book I ironically emphasizes. Most obviously on the personal level, it implies a code which demands that "the mother and son should [never] allude to what was uppermost in their thoughts" (38); that May and Archer "carry to its utmost limit that ritual of ignoring the unpleasant in which they had both been brought up" (26); that Archer in discussing Ellen's divorce must decide that it is "better to keep on the surface in the prudent old New York way, than risk uncovering a wound he could not heal" (112); that Archer and May's marriage in their "hieroglyphic" (45) world must be lived out in a "deaf-and-dumb asylum" (356); and that, finally, at his moment of choice Archer must recognize the "superiority of implication and analogy over direct action, and of silence over rash words" (356). While Archer ventures slightly beyond the narrow boundaries of New York in intellectual and artistic matters, he continues to feel that in personal and moral matters "it would be troublesome -- and also rather bad form to strike out for himself" (8). When he must decide finally between May and Ellen, between life and its denial, he is controlled by "conformity to the discipline of a small society .... It was deeply distasteful to him to do anything melodramatic and conspicuous, anything that Mr. Van der Luyden would have
deprecated and the club box condemned as bad form" (322). Repression and inhibition of feeling are at the core of New York innocence.

The primary victims of New York's innocence are of course its women, and with Ellen's arrival Archer begins to be aware of how crippled the women of New York are by slavery to its conventions. The young girl in New York was the center of an "elaborate system of mystification" (45); she was "frank, poor darling, because she had nothing to conceal, assured because she knew of nothing to be on her guard against" (45-46). Having seen knowledge in Ellen's eyes, Archer looks at May and doubts that even when marriage permits will she be able to see the world:

... how many generations of women who had gone into her making had descended bandaged to the family vault? He shivered a little, remembering some of the new ideas in his scientific books, and the much-cited instance of the Kentucky cave-fish which had ceased to develop eyes because they had no use for them. What if, when he had bidden May Welland to open hers, they could only look out blankly at blankness (83).

And May does remain incapable of seeing beyond the confines of her household, going to her grave so unchanged that the "world of her youth had fallen into pieces and
rebuilt itself without her ever being conscious of the change" (348). Archer slowly learns that innocence is a "hard bright blindness" (348) denying growth and change, an "artificial product," a "creation of fictitious purity, so cunningly manufactured by a conspiracy of mothers and aunts and grandmothers and long-dead ancestresses. . ." (46). It prevented the development of the judgment and spontaneity necessary for the "passionate and tender comradeship" (44) that he had wanted his marriage to become.

However, although the women of New York are distorted as human beings by their manufactured innocence, it is Newland Archer's innocence that fully defines the dark meaning of innocence in New York. More educated and more thoughtful than the other men of his society, one of its superior products, he can be only partially educated by the Countess Olenska. In her drawing room "intimate, 'foreign,' subtly suggestive of old romantic scenes and sentiments" (71) he is "conscious of the curious way in which she reversed his values. . ." (104). He "sacrifices" (76) the Van der Luydens to her witty perception along with other totems and rituals of the tribe. Through Ellen, Archer comes to see that his days are "a nursery parody of life," while at the same time, "real people were living somewhere, and real things happening to them" (182). Still,
his ability to grow in accordance with his recognition is limited; his life remains, as Niall has said,\textsuperscript{13} largely a study of "wasted possibilities in private and public life" (206).

Ellen's arrival reverses Archer's values and disrupts his placid community because she represents the values of the older and more complex European civilization. Ellen is, as Ned Winsett points out, the "dark lady" (122) of the novel, with all that that traditionally implies. In her red dresses and black furs, surrounded by objets d'art and lush flowers, she is a force of vitality and sensuality, an alien in the necropolis. Sophisticated and experienced, she has the "mysterious authority, a sureness in the carriage of the head, the movements of the eyes which, without being in the least theatrical, struck [Archer] as highly trained and full of a conscious power. At the same time she was simpler in manner than most of the ladies present. . ." (61). The eyes of the New York ladies seem to Archer "curiously immature compared with hers. It frightened him to think what must have gone to the making of her eyes" (63). At the same time, unlike May, one of the "innocents in white muslin who has a surprising talent for intrigue and deception,"\textsuperscript{14} Ellen is "spontaneous and natural" (207), particularly in relation
to Granny Mingott, the Van der Luydens and their Duke, and Regina Beaufort; Ellen is free of the conventional unrealities and has looked at the "Gorgon," the face of reality (203). While Ellen suggests, on the one hand, the life of art that Wharton herself finally chose, she represents for Archer not only "real" life, but the very "flower of life" (347)—sexual experience and maturity.

But Archer, like Frome, has been weighted by Wharton with insuperable passivity and weakness; avoidance of sexuality emerges more clearly here than in the earlier book. At each crucial moment, Archer retreats from Ellen just as he might win her, and in each case, his sexual suspicions obscure his own flight from maturity. He assumes, for instance, that Ellen's relationship with Mr. Riviere was immoral and is repelled by the possibility. At Skuytercliff he uses Beaufort's arrival to question Ellen's morality again and to reject her because of Beaufort's attentions. In each case the standard of "factitious purity" that he applies allows him a retreat into passivity and innocence. His self-defeating attitude is most clearly revealed, however, when, after he is married to May, he demands that Ellen meet him at the Art Museum in the Park. She agrees, and he "stared after her in a turmoil of contradictory feelings. It seemed to him that he had been speaking not to the woman he loved but to another,
a woman he was indebted to for pleasures already wearied of" (308-309). Not only does his attitude measure the naiveté of his earlier impassioned statement that "women ought to be free -- as free as we are" (42), but more importantly, it suggests his contempt for Ellen's sexuality and his revulsion from sexual experience.

A scene from "The Shaughraun" with which Chapter 13 opens becomes, like the repeated ironic references to Faust, a kind of motif of this aspect of the relationship between Archer and Ellen. It is a sentimental and romantic scene in which lovers part, as Archer says, in "reticence" and "dumb sorrow" (155). Archer and Ellen identify with the scene's sentiment and reenact it almost self-consciously. Continually, they move at cross-purposes, each apparently unaware of the other's presence; at Newport, for instance, Archer remembers the scene as he stands looking out at the bay, waiting for Ellen, who is standing at the end of the pier, to turn towards him. Interestingly, the scene also approaches, in its emotional quality, a moment in Ethan Frome where Frome bends to kiss the hem of a strip of fabric that Mattie is sewing -- Frome's and Mattie's nearest approach to sexual contact. In both novels, as in the scene from the Shaughraun where Harry Montagu kisses the black ribbon that trails down his beloved's
back, the hero's passivity and masochism result in the lovers' final separation.

The culmination of Archer's destructive passivity is Ellen's ritualistic elimination from the tribe at the dinner party May has planned for her. Here, Ellen becomes, in a special sense, the scapegoat of the tribe: "It was the old New York way of taking life 'without effusion of blood'" (335). Archer sees his guests as a "band of dumb conspirators, and himself and the pale woman on his right as the center of their conspiracy" (335). He feels "like a prisoner in the center of an armed camp" and deduces the "inexorableness of his captors" from the way they discuss the Beauforts: "It's to show me, he thought, what would happen to me" (335). But here it is Ellen, not Archer, who is the scapegoat. With her foreignness and her experience Ellen has disrupted the unity of the group and, with her expulsion, its values will no longer be threatened: unity will be restored and will temporarily persist with greater harmony. Her expulsion has revealed the group's greatest values and the threat that her difference posed. Moreover, Archer's passivity is emphasized by his acquiescence in the ritual, an acquiescence predicted by his repeated willingness to "hang Ellen Olenska" (47 and 87) and by his recognition that she has been used by Lefferts and
by the group as a "lightning rod" (56) to deflect attention from their own weaknesses and transgressions.

Like another Mme. de Mauves, Ellen rejected her unfaithful husband after absorbing the best of the European influence. But, because of her failed marriage and her unhappy introduction to European sexual sophistication, she attempts to reject her European initiation and to find safety in her childhood home. Experience having failed her, she is susceptible to the standard of factitious purity and self-sacrifice that Archer quite disingenuously presents to her as he argues against her divorce. It is, therefore, one of the novel's major ironies that as Archer begins to recognize that he, like all of his fellow New Yorkers, is an "old maid," a virgin, "when it comes to being so much as brushed by the wing-tip of Reality" (86), Ellen simultaneously rejects reality and refuses painful choices. She gives up Archer and becomes a child again, with a child's idealism: "When I turn back into myself now," she says, "I'm like a child going into a room where there's always a light" (173). Ellen's retreat into the safety of childhood innocence is less the "creative solution" that Niall called it than an irony, an acceptance and an idealization of Archer's innocence and flight from the "wing-tip of Reality" (86). Ellen's lapse into childhood is her defeat, and is analogous to Mattie Silver's
decision to die, while Archer's passive acceptance of the decision is, again, similar to Frome's.

Moreover, in her portrayal of the Count Olenski, Wharton suggests another dimension of her ambivalence towards European experience. Olenski, who appears only indirectly in the novel, is, nevertheless, a hovering presence whose description implies some negative components of European experience, much as Mrs. Mingott's submergence in billowing flesh reveals the devouring aspect of New York. Olenski is physically misshapen and slightly effeminate, a "half-paralyzed white sneering fellow, rather fine head, but eyes with lots of lashes" (16). He is corrupt and decadent: "Well, I'll tell you the sort," Lefferts says, "When he wasn't with a woman, he was collecting china. Paying any price for both, I understand" (16). Although Olenski is repeatedly associated with the life of art, the distortions with which Wharton endows him reveal her ambivalence towards "Europe" and suggest, in particular, a certain repugnance to the abandonment of conventional sexual restraints. Olenski, like Mrs. Mingott, is the expression, in its extreme form, of the spirit of a culture.

Consequently, in Ellen's regressive solution, Wharton has both scapegoated her and expressed her own deep ambivalence towards Europe and the sexual initiation it represents. For Ellen, whatever Wharton's conscious
allegiance, the wages of sin are not life, but rather a diminishment, a life that includes art in all its forms while still excluding life itself. Ellen's life includes Archer's vision of the "theatres she must have been to, the pictures she must have looked at, the sober and splendid houses she must have frequented" (358), but also leaves her alone, rootless and deprived of the basic human relationships. As she is relegated in Archer's mind to a dim room, so in the novel she becomes remote and abstract, an object of art herself, as unreal as an "imaginary beloved in a book or a picture" (347). The life that Wharton ultimately accords Ellen implies that Ellen and Archer, as doubles, have each been allotted only half a life, again suggesting the difficulties Wharton perceived in integrating those contradictory aspects of life known as "Europe" and "America."

In the epilogue to the novel, the price of Archer's refusal is fully delineated; and, as Niall has said, the meaning of his choice is death. Archer has confused life and death, dream and reality. Ellen, who once represented reality, has been transformed into a dream: "when he thought of Ellen Olenska it was abstractly, serenely. . . she had become the composite vision of all that he had missed" (347). Ellen has become unreal and abstract, a work of art, while, at the
same time, his home on 39th Street, dominated by May's "hard bright blindness" and an "innocent family hypocrisy" (348), had become the scene "where most of the real things of his life had happened" (344). In the long years of duty with May, he has become fully a citizen of the dead city. Momentarily, in the Louvre, he is awakened by an "effulgent Titian" (357), but he retreats immediately to what he has become, "a mere gray speck of a man compared with the ruthless magnificent fellow he had dreamed of being..." (354). His final rejection of reality occurs as he sits on a bench near the Invalides, gazing up at the building where Ellen awaits him: "'It's more real to me here than if I went up,' he suddenly heard himself say; and the fear lest that last shadow of reality should lose its edge kept him rooted to his seat as the minutes succeeded each other" (361). Archer's reality is dream and memory; like Frome, he has been crippled, trapped by weakness and passivity in a continuing evasion of life.

However, Archer's entrapment does not result, as Ethan Frome's did, in endless and meaningless suffering; in the epilogue Archer is granted some compensation for his loss. Once Archer has sacrificed the "flower of life" (347) and subdued himself to his society, Wharton seems to relent, as the absence of the satirical tone that prevailed in the earlier sections
of the novel would suggest. In this final section, Archer achieves a tardy initiation into maturity, comparable to Charity Royall's at the end of *Summer*, in the form of insight into the meaning of his sacrifices. Although it is true that in Paris he has "had to deal all at once with the packed regrets and stifled memories of an inarticulate lifetime" (356), it is also true that Archer, at least momentarily, attains a larger vision, a perspective on his world and the life of duty he led with May.

He experiences a moment of illumination, one of those "moments when a man's imagination, so easily subdued to what it lives in, suddenly rises above its daily level and surveys the long windings of destiny. Archer hung there and wondered. . ." (351). Nor is Archer deluded as to the meaning of his sacrifices; accepting them as appropriate only to his own time, he sees that the world has changed, and that the modern world, unlike his own, is dominated by people "busy with reform and 'movement,' with fads, fetishes, and frivolities," where one's past was of no account "in the huge kaleidoscope where all the social atoms spun around on the same plane" (353). Still, he can honor his own past, and in allowing Archer to both honor and understand the life he chose, to recognize his sacrifices and their compensations, Wharton herself affirms that some value
lingered in the forms, and even in the innocence, of New York. However, gracious though Wharton is towards her old New York, she has still powerfully delineated the limitations of that time and that place. Finally, Archer and Ellen fail to achieve integration, that inner harmony that is a balance of innocence and initiation.

In scapegoating both Ellen and Archer, Wharton expressed the degree to which she could reconcile herself to New York, and revealed an inability, finally, to discern fulfillment in the expatriate life. For her generation of Americans, as for herself, Wharton could posit no happy solution.

However, the future of the new generation, the generation of Archer's son Dallas, hints at the reconciliation of Wharton's last novel, *The Buccaneers* (1938). Dallas Archer enjoys a freedom and an independence not available to his father. In a final irony that points once again to Newland Archer's futility, Dallas chooses to marry Fanny Beaufort, the bastard daughter of the notorious Fanny Ring and the Beaufort whose business failure had scandalized New York many years before.

After the death of her parents, Fanny Beaufort appeared in New York and "won its heart much as Madame Olenska had won it thirty years earlier" (352). This
time, however, New York responded differently: "instead of being distrustful and afraid of her, society took her joyfully for granted. She was pretty, amusing and accomplished: what more did anyone want? Nobody was narrow-minded enough to rake up against her the half-forgotten facts of her father's past and her own origin" (352). Through this marriage of Archer's son to another Europeanized American, Wharton suggests that the generation of Archer's children may be freer than their parents were to sin and live. Thus, in *The Age of Innocence* Wharton's tendency to victimize her characters is muted by the minor degree of fulfillment that her primary characters are allotted and, more significantly, by the resolution promised in the marriage of Dallas Archer to Fanny Beaufort.
CHAPTER V

THE BUCCANEERS: THE NEW AMERICAN WOMAN

Wharton's last novel, The Buccaneers¹ (1938), was published posthumously at the decision of Gaillard Lapsley, her longtime friend and literary executor. About 350 pages long, The Buccaneers was left unfinished at Wharton's death in 1937, although a brief outline reveals the projected outcome of the book. In this last novel, Wharton returned to the world of her childhood, the 1870's, for the first time since The Age of Innocence (1920); and, perhaps as a consequence of this return to the past, a spirit of serenity, which Blake Nevius and R. W. B. Lewis have noted, pervades the work.² In her seventies Wharton seems to have moved towards reconciliation with her personal past and towards a resolution of the conflicts that pervaded her earlier work.³

In her autobiographical memoir, A Backward Glance (1934), Wharton had suggested that after World War I she might stop writing altogether:

After A Son at the Front I intended to take a long holiday -- perhaps to cease from writing altogether. It was growing more and more evident that the world I had grown up in and been formed by had been destroyed in
1914, and I felt myself incapable of transmuting the raw material of the after-war world into a work of art. 4

Nevertheless, in her novels of the '20's, particularly The Mother's Recompense (1925), Twilight Sleep (1927), and The Children (1928), Wharton attempts to establish a relation with the post-war world, with the generations that might have been her children and her grandchildren. R. W. B. Lewis speaks of Wharton's struggle to come to terms with her past and with the new present in this way: "Her identity as a human being and a writer could only be forged, and reforged, by effecting ties in both directions." 5 In this spirit Wharton established relationships with many of the new younger writers, though she always, at the same time, stressed the many differences between their generation and hers, and her sense of alienation from the new literary generation. 6 In the novels written during this period Wharton deals primarily with problems of the middle-aged and with their attempts to find vicarious fulfillment in the successes of the younger generation.

The Mother's Recompense, Twilight Sleep, and The Children deal with the young people of the post-war period and with an older person, shut out of their world, lonely and aging, who seeks self-renewal through intimacy with the young. In The Mother's Recompense, Kate Clephane,
who had twenty years earlier abandoned her infant daughter and her pompous husband to seek a life of greater personal fulfillment abroad, returns to New York to find her daughter engaged to a young man with whom she herself had recently had a brief affair. Deciding against inflicting "sterile pain" by revealing the past, and refusing to make fresh concessions by marrying an old friend who offers her security, Kate again exiles herself to a lonely life of wandering in Europe, without hope of a continued relationship with her daughter, now the only person who could give her life greater meaning.

In *Twilight Sleep* Nona Manford is victimized by her self-deluded and irresponsible elders. She is a "bewildered little Iphigenia" whose melodramatic gun-shot wound clearly makes her a sacrifice to expiate the sins of her elders. In fact, her wounding saves her parents' marriage and extricates her father from an involvement with his daughter-in-law, who is also Nona's friend. In *The Children* Martin Boyne, a middle-aged bachelor, becomes a surrogate father to a band of seven neglected children, the victims of a series of irresponsible marriages and divorces, whose attempt to remain together is spear-headed by the eldest child, Judith Wheater. In attempting to help the children, Boyne develops an obsessive attraction to the 16-year-old, Judith, is
rejected when she fails to understand him and, in the end, not only fails to help the children attain their goal, but also sacrifices his fiancée, an older woman with whom he has recently been reunited. In these three novels of the '20's, there are certain recurrent motifs which have their fullest expression in *The Buccaneers*.

The intense attraction of the older generation for the younger is repeatedly expressed in these novels in terms of an incest motif. In *The Mother's Recompense* Kate Clephane and her daughter are in love with the same man; in *Twilight Sleep*, Dexter Manford, Nona's father, is infatuated with his daughter-in-law, his daughter's close friend; in *The Children* Martin Boyne is attracted to Judith Wheater, who regards him as a father; and in *The Buccaneers* the incest motif appears in an attenuated form: Laura Testvalley, governess and mother-figure to Nan St. George, is involved with the father of the man with whom Nan will elope.

This recurrent suggestion of incestuous feeling may reveal, as R. W. B. Lewis has suggested, that Wharton "had arrived at a deep harmony with her own life history and was able, unperturbed, to confront the whole truth about herself"—as the fragment "Beatrice Pal-mato" also indicates. However, the special way Wharton resolves her incestuous situations points to something more. Through their intense attractions to the young,
Wharton's older characters seek self-renewal, a second chance at fulfillment in their own lives. Failing that, since these relationships are more or less abruptly terminated, they then experience some measure of vicarious gratification through the fulfillment that the young achieve. Whether real or surrogate parents, these characters renounce their own chances for happiness in favor of their younger counterparts. In Wharton's novels of the '20's there is some lingering ambivalence about that sacrifice and its compensation; but the projected outcome of The Buccaneers (1938) describes a sacrifice that is willingly, unambivalently, made. Laura Testvalley, the middle-aged governess, is to find a vicarious, motherly compensation in seeing her charge, Nan St. George, marry Guy Thwarte, although she thereby relinquishes her own future with Guy's father. She is satisfied in "seeing love, deep and abiding love, triumph for the first time in her career" (358). Significantly, The Buccaneers is the only novel of Wharton's career in which love triumphs -- and Wharton did not live to write a draft of that projected happy ending.

But to say that love triumphs in The Buccaneers, and to some degree in the earlier novels mentioned, is not to say that Wharton's tendency to scapegoat her characters has disappeared from her fiction. Rather, the scapegoating impulse reappears in another form and within
the context of the inter-generational relationships. Wharton's older characters — Laura Testvalley, Kate Clephane, Martin Boyne — are those who represent respect for traditional forms and conventions; and they are also the characters who are consigned to lives of denial and emptiness. Occasionally, a young person like Nona Manford in *Twilight Sleep* will be the bearer of the old values and serve as the one person "in every family [who] had to remember now and then that such things as wickedness, suffering and death had not yet been banished from the earth." In every case Wharton expresses a familiar ambivalence: she esteems the values and the integrity of these characters, but, at the same time, deplores the futility of their self-sacrifice and renunciation. As she has throughout her career, Wharton again expresses her own sense of victimization through the defeat of those characters who share her own values and who are, generally, of her own generation.

However, in these later novels the balance between denial and gratification has shifted. Although she exacts sacrifices from Kate Clephane, Martin Boyne, and Laura Testvalley, Wharton also postulates a new generation in which a sensitivity to the past, to the best in the values and traditions of the past, springs unbidden and untaught; and these characters, like Anne Clephane of the "memorial manner," are allowed the hope of
fulfillment that is denied the parental generation. Repeatedly, Wharton expresses a faith in the new generation, a faith that seems desperate and unrealistic given the changing mores that characterized the post-World War I period. But however improbably, Wharton's own "lifetime of personal suffering" seemed to require this forced consolation. Thus, in her later writing, and especially in The Buccaneers, Wharton expressed faith in a younger generation that would recognize her own traditional values as enduring, as well as a maternal hope of deriving some gratification, even rejuvenation, in the triumphs of the new generation.

In The Buccaneers Wharton's faith in the new generation, her new optimism, and the possibility of vicarious gratification, are expressed in their clearest form. Here she has abandoned the attempt to deal with the post-war world and has returned to the 1870's, the time of her own girlhood. In returning to this period and in postulating a happy ending for Nan St. George, Wharton has written a story of what might have been, a story with some fairy-tale components. As she said about the era of her girlhood, "every year that passes makes the distant period of the 'seventies seem more like a fairy tale." Certainly a mood of great good humor, optimism and benevolence, characterizes Wharton's final examination of the American girl abroad.
The Buccaneers is a high-spirited tale of five young American women of the nouveaux riche who attempt to gain admission to the New York social world and are excluded by the old aristocracy because of their middle-class origins and their "loud" clothes and behavior. In their background and in their untutored charm they resemble Undine Spragg of The Custom of the Country (1913). Here, however, the invading young women are presented in a highly favorable light. As Edmund Wilson has said, Wharton has "reversed the values of The Custom of the Country: instead of playing off the culture and tradition of Europe against the vulgar Americans who are insensitive to them, she dramatizes the climbing young ladies as an air-clearing and revivifying force." Led by a redoubtable governess, Laura Testvalley, the five young women set out for a London season so triumphant that, among them, they marry a Duke, a Marquess, a Lord, and a rising young Englishman with an eye on a peerage. The marriages are successful, in varying degrees, except for the marriage of Nan St. George to the Duke of Tintagel, from which Nan will escape with the aid of her governess; after planning Nan's escape, Laura Testvalley will, according to Wharton's outline, go "back alone to old age and poverty" (359). Once the adventure is completed and the marriages effected, The Buccaneers focuses on Nan's initiation and the denoue-
ment of Laura's career to reveal the balance of denial and gratification allotted to the two generations.

The novel's theme of vicarious fulfillment is foreshadowed by the story of Jacky March, an elderly American friend of Laura Testvalley's. Thirty years before, she had been engaged to the Duke of Brightlingsea, whose sons now figure as the husbands of the new band of American invaders. Although Miss March was disappointed by the duke after her wedding dress had been ordered, she chose to remain in England alone; and, in later years, Miss March established herself as confidante to the nobility, as well as the "oracle of transatlantic pilgrims in quest of a social opening. These pilgrims had learned that Jacky March's narrow front door led straight into the London world, and a number had already slipped in through it" (99). Miss March quickly comes to the aid of the newest band of invaders, with whom she feels a strong affinity: "It was a novel kind of invasion, and Miss March was a-flutter with curiosity, and with an irrepressible sympathy... she felt herself mysteriously akin to them, eager to know more of their plans, and even to play a secret part in the adventure" (103). With her aid, the St. Georges and the Elmsworths rent the summer cottage at Runnymede, where Seadown, eldest son of the Duke of Brightlingsea, is persuaded into marriage by Virginia St. George.
Lord Seadown seemed, as Miss March often said to herself, and sometimes to her closest friends, like her own son. Thus, in marrying the son of her old lover to a young American, Jacky March has her gentle revenge, and vicarious satisfaction in the success of the new Americans as compensation for the fact that her own charm, "subtler and more discreet" (102-3) than the invaders', had failed her in the same quest.

Although the careers of Jacky March and Laura Testvalley are the background against which the adventure of the new generation is played out, Gaillard Lapsley, in his afterword to the novel, argues that Laura unexpectedly becomes the book's central figure: "when the time came for Nan to take possession the place was already occupied by Laura Testvalley" (367). In fact, as we will see, the focus of The Buccaneers is on Nan's initiation, on her refusal to accept personal defeat, and on her gradual development into the ultimate American woman. Nevertheless, Laura is a powerful figure and a striking embodiment of many of Wharton's positive values; she is the last and fullest expression of an ideal of woman's nature that had earlier expressions in Justine Brent in The Fruit of the Tree (1907) and in Ellen Olenska in The Age of Innocence (1920). Like these earlier characters, she is deprived of personal happiness and, like
them, she suggests aspects of Wharton's own life and experience.

In her Italian background — her family name was Testavaglia before the family fled Italy in the wake of revolution — Laura reflects Wharton's lifetime love for Italy. Wharton had not only spent much of her childhood in Italy, but also had, in later years, made an intensive study of Italian culture that is reflected in her first novel, *The Valley of Decision* (1902), in the volume *Italian Villas and Their Gardens* (1904), and in her study *Italian Backgrounds* (1905). But Laura is not simply a product of the old Italian culture; she is a complex mixture, a granddaughter of 19th century revolutionaries and a cousin of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. A permanent alien in the Anglo-American culture, an expatriate like Wharton herself, she has distance and perspective on the social world she is attached to, an ironic detachment that mitigates the governess's awe of dukes and their ladies. To her role as governess she brings a democratic fervor, a belief in something very like the "republic of the spirit" that Lawrence Selden preaches to Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth* (1905). In addition, Laura has a deep commitment to the world of art and beauty; repeatedly she recites "Endymion" and the poetry of Rossetti to her young pupil while, at the same time, counseling her not to "proclaim in public that you've
read it all. Some people are so stupid that they wouldn't exactly understand a young girl's caring for that kind of poetry" (165). The portrait of Laura suggests Wharton's ideal combination of the life of intellect and the life of art, a union of the public and private spheres.

As suits her variegated background, Laura herself is "a great-souled adventuress," as Wharton calls her, who lives in this world, but is not entirely of it, who furthers the worldly ambitions of some of her charges, while dedicating herself to Nan St. George's greater, more spiritual, adventure. Edmund Wilson beautifully describes Laura in this way:

As the light of Edith Wharton's art grows dim and at last goes out, she leaves us, to linger on our retina, the large dark eyes of the clever spinster, the serious and attentive governess, who trades in worldly values but manages to rebuff these values; who in following a destiny of solitude and discipline, contends for the rights of the heart; and who, child of a political movement played out, yet passes on something of its impetus to the emergence of the society of the future.18

Wharton's "clever spinster" is also the only sexually-liberated woman in her fiction. Apparently unaffected by repressive Anglo-American culture, Laura has had a brief affair with Lord Richard, a man ten years
younger than herself, whose sisters had been her pupils. Since the details of this affair are functionally unnecessary in the novel, Wharton seems to be making here a secondary point about Laura's character and, possibly, about sexual attitudes as well. Seeing Lord Richard again in America, Laura thinks, "The Lord Richard chapter was a closed one, and she had no wish to re-open it. She paid its cost in some brief fears and joys, and one night of agonizing tears; but perhaps her Italian blood had saved her from ever, then or after, regarding it as a moral issue" (75). Laura is the only woman in Wharton's fiction for whom sexual behaviour has not been a moral issue: and in this case Wharton clearly separates sex from love: "... did the word 'love' apply to such passing follies? ... If ever she were to know an abiding grief it must be caused by one that engaged the soul" (75). As Laura herself says, if she had been a man, "Dante Gabriel would not have been the only cross in the family" (41).

The quest for a love that engages is the one that Laura and Nan share throughout The Buccaneers. "The Blessed Damozel," which Laura and Nan quote repeatedly, thus expresses the imaginative center of the novel. Laura's often-concealed romantic soul is revealed in her passion for
the poems of her cousin Rossetti, so many of which concern
the dream of a young and ideal love. Laura recognizes
in Nan her own sense of the "beyondness of things" (137),
a spiritual yearning for the transcendent, and especially
for a transcendent love. To a great extent, this yearn­
ing is the bond that unites Laura and Nan.

The two women quickly develop a deep mother-
daughter relationship, while Nan's ineffectual and piti­
able mother slowly vanishes from her life. Early, Laura
makes the bond explicit: as she looks at her sleeping
charge, she thinks, "She might have been my own daugh­
ter" (90). Nan's wealthy American parents supply their
daughter with material goods, and Laura becomes Nan's
emotional and spiritual guide. After the marital con­
quests of the older St. George and Elmsworth girls,
Laura's impulse is to protect the younger and more ide­
alistic Nan from their worldly success and raise the
level of her aspirations beyond the material and social:
"If Miss Testvalley could have guessed the consequences
of her proposal to give the St. George girls a season
in England, she was not sure she would not have steered
Mrs. St. George back to Saratoga. Not that she had
lost her taste for battle and adventure; but she had
developed a tenderness for Nan St. George and an odd
desire to shelter her from the worldly glories her
governess's rash advice had thrust upon the family. Nan
was different, and Miss Testvalley could have wished a different future for her" (220). When the dull and dutiful Duke of Tintagel forces his suit on Nan, Laura attempts to put him off, to warn him that Nan is a wrong choice; too young, immature, and sensitive for the life he offers, Nan will, she says, "turn out to be a woman who didn't want to be shielded" (227) from life. But Laura's maternal apprehension does not prevent Nan, swayed by her romantic fantasies, from a marital mistake.

Nan St. George is one of the young women with "an untrained sense of the past" who appears in each of Wharton's later novels. Not beautiful, but sensitive and emotional, she is different from the placid and conventional beauties who are her friends. At sixteen, her life "was a series of waves of the blood, hot rushes of enthusiasm, icy chills of embarrassment and self-depreciation" (10), while at the same time her intelligence pierces the pretensions of her friends and family. A confirmed romantic, as ignorant as Isabel Archer of the grounds on which to base a marital choice, Nan makes a marriage in which the "idea of living in that magic castle by the sad western sea had secretly tinged her vision of the castle's owner" (249). Immersed in dreams of Arthur and Guinivere, "her first sight of the ruins of the ancient Tintagel ... played a large part in her wooing" (249).
Nan's initiation begins with her marriage. Briefly she believes that, having married into a world rich in beauty and history, her life will conform to the conventions of romance. Immediately, however, she finds that she is alone with her ideal of the ducal life: her honeymoon at the Cornish castle simply made "husband and wife more unintelligible" (249) to each other. Failing to establish the desired intimacy with her new husband, she sets out to become a Lady Bountiful, believing that service to her husband's tenants is the best service she can render to him as a wife. Nan's disillusionment culminates a few months after her marriage when her interference with sick tenants not only shocks and angers the conventional duke, but also results in her own miscarriage and long months of illness. Nan's dream collapses; "the irremediable had been done, and she knew that never, in her husband's eyes, would any evidence of repentance atone for that night's disaster" (259). The first stage of Nan's initiation ends with her illness when she relinquishes her storybook vision of life.

Recovering, Nan finds that "a new Annabel -- a third Annabel -- had emerged from the ordeal" (259). This Annabel, bereft of her illusions about Duchesses, bereft as well of the old Nan St. George, "continued to grope for herself, and to find no one.... There were moments when the vain hunt for her real self became so
perplexing and so disheartening that she was glad to escape from it into the mechanical duties of her new life" (241). Awakening to reality, Nan finds herself, like many another Wharton protagonist, trapped in a dull marriage and a highly demanding social role, as enslaved as her sister Virginia and her friend Conchita had also mysteriously become through marriage. Reviewing her history, asking herself "who is Annabel Tintagel" (240), Nan discovers that she had lost her fragile sense of self when she lost Laura: "the real break with the vanished Annabel had come, the new Annabel sometimes thought, when Miss Testvalley, her task at the St. George's ended, had vanished . . ." (262). Not surprisingly, it will not be until the return of Laura that Nan's identity is fully reestablished.

Before Laura's return, during her third transformation, Nan learns to play the role of Duchess. To the Dowager Duchess she becomes "my perfect daughter-in-law" (244); and, in keeping with her role, her note to Guy Thwarte reveals the "writing of a school-girl. . . and the language of dictation" (274). Although Nan's life is dominated by forms she knows to be empty, she nevertheless has learned to value what is best in the traditions of the life that she has chosen. To her "American" spontaneity she adds an inner restraint, a new sense of the value of discipline: as she breaks
off an angry conversation to descend the stairs and welcome her guests promptly, she feels that "the business of living was perhaps conducted more wisely at Longlands. . . . A year ago Annabel would have laughed at these rules and observances: now, though they chafed her no less, she was beginning to see the use of having one's whims and one's rages submitted to some kind of control" (296). This experience is a painful initiation for Nan, an initiation not into greater freedom or fulfillment, but into the knowledge, acquired by Charity Royall in Summer, Newland Archer in The Age of Innocence, and other of Wharton's protagonists, that "life is not a matter of abstract principles, but a succession of pitiful compromises with fate, of concessions to old tradition, old beliefs, old charities and old frailties."¹⁹

Nan, however, is not left in the state of grim awakening that is generally all that Wharton allows her characters. Slowly, Nan begins to give evidence of an independent intelligence that mocks the Duke's belief (245) in Nan's youthful pliability. Her sympathetic response to Conchita's romantic and financial plight is the first evidence of her capacity for independent thought. She supports Conchita's extra-marital adventure in a way that suggests she is considering the same course of action herself, and she determines to extract
from her husband the money her old friend requires. Nan also, and despite her husband's gift of the necessary five hundred pounds, continues to withhold herself sexually and thereby violates the bargain the Duke had offered her. The extent of Nan's growing unconventionality is revealed in the conversation between her mother-in-law, the Dowager Duchess, and her husband in which the Dowager contrasts her own married behavior with Nan's and, rather sadly, recognizes the cost of her own conformity. Moreover, Nan begins to express her dissatisfaction with her married lot freely, to everyone, a behaviour that is shocking in a Duchess, and a radically new behaviour for a Wharton protagonist. Ultimately, Nan emerges as a new creature in Wharton's fiction, a young woman who will not accept defeat. While Laura constitutes a reaffirmation of the old dynamic of sacrifice, Nan is the new American woman, who will accept nothing less than personal fulfillment. Soon Nan St. George is reunited with Guy Thwarte, a young Englishman with whom she had early established a communion of spirit based on their shared love for English tradition and for Honourslove, Guy's ancestral home. In him Nan finds, as Wharton had found in Morton Fullerton, "a friend -- a friend who understood not only all she said, but everything she could not say" (350). Although The Buccaneers breaks off shortly after Nan and Guy have
resumed their intimacy, with the advocacy of Laura Testvalley, it is clear that their marriage is the ultimate union and an expression of the "beyondness" which both Nan and her governess had sought.

Because Nan's elopement with Guy results in a scandal "which is to ring through England for years" (358), Guy's father, outraged at Laura Testvalley's abetting the young couple, breaks off his relationship with the governess. Thus the happiness of the older generation, of Nan's surrogate mother, is relinquished in favor of the young. Here, although Wharton's tendency to scapegoat her older characters is still apparent, the denial of Laura's hopes is more than compensated by the degree of fulfillment that Nan will, presumably, enjoy. Moreover, in the sacrifices of the older generation, Wharton expresses none of the anger and conflict that characterizes her earlier work; instead, The Buccaneers reveals a calm parental resignation of elderly hopes in favor of the young.

The epilogue of The Age of Innocence hints that the generation of Newland Archer's son will resolve the conflicts that paralyzed its elders; in The Buccaneers, the focus is on the fate of the younger generation, while the self-sacrificial role of the elders forms the background of their conquests. For the first time in Wharton's fiction, an American heroine moves beyond the usual limits
that Wharton imposes on her characters towards the promise of mature fruition. Incorporating the best of Europe and America, Annabel Tintagel is Wharton's somewhat less complex counterpart to James's Maggie Verver. In Annabel's proposed marriage to Guy Thwarte, the best of Europe and America will be united—and a Wharton protagonist will, for the first time, find herself appropriately mated. Moreover, Wharton has finally envisioned, if not developed in her narrative, a triumphant resolution for an American protagonist.

From the beginning of Wharton's writing career until its close, the scapegoat motif is prominent in her fiction; and it appears in relation to a quest for initiation into maturity and fulfillment. The relation between the theme of initiation and the scapegoating process is complex, because of Wharton's intensely ambivalent attitudes towards initiation, and especially,
sexual initiation. Therefore, at different times and in varying degrees, both those characters who are initiated into sexual maturity and those who are incapable of such maturation are scapegoated. Moreover, Wharton's tendency to scapegoat her characters evolved during her writing career, sometimes in relation to the circumstances of her personal life and, certainly, in relation to varying novelistic materials.

In her earlier works, and in her vernacular novels particularly, the scapegoat motif appears in its clearest form. In Ethan Frome, Frome and Mattie are characters totally incapable of growth and initiation; evidently in frustration at the limiting circumstances of her own life, Wharton scapegoats these characters in a way that results in a total denial of freedom and fulfillment. In Summer, written six years later and after Wharton gained her own freedom, her protagonist, Charity Royall, who is capable of full sexual initiation without constraint, is scapegoated because of her pagan sensuality. Similarly, in The Reef and in The Age of Innocence, Wharton's ambivalence towards experience is pervasive. In the first novel, Sophy, the initiate, is the victim while Anna, who is incapable of grasping her opportunity for fulfillment, also suffers. And, in The Age of Innocence, Newland Archer suffers for his incapacity to mature, while Ellen Olenska, who
has experienced initiation, is also thwarted. However, in the novels written after *Ethan Frome*, the scapegoating, the denial of gratification, is never again complete; in every case the characters are allotted compensations for their losses.

In all of her novels Wharton seems to be seeking a special harmony between innocence and experience—through a character who embodies both the forms and conventions she values, and yet who has not sacrificed the capacity for growth into full sexual and emotional maturity. In her last work, *The Buccaneers*, she apparently overcame her own ambivalence sufficiently to create, in Annabel Tintagel, the new American woman, a woman who values the heritage of the Old World and yet demands personal fulfillment as her right. In all of Wharton's fiction, Annabel Tintagel is the only woman who harmonizes Wharton's conflicting values.

Wharton's apparent psychological need to create scapegoats has been distinguished implicitly here from a philosophical pessimism that takes for granted that most people suffer a lot. Wharton was certainly a pessimist. However, the author's tendency to connive in the destruction of her characters, emphasized in the discussion of the novels, results in somewhat contrived plots and reveals that Wharton was not satisfied merely to recount the
disasters that are normally a part of life. Wharton's victims are characters confronted with a particular emotional and sexual dilemma, with a specific occasion for choosing between personal fulfillment and self-abnegation; rarely, if ever, does the scope of her work include the range of problems that a more generalized pessimism would survey. Wharton's special focus suggests an intense and continued concern with the problem of individual freedom in specific relation to an intimate romantic or marital situation. Repeatedly, Wharton told and retold the story of a life crisis similar to her own. Moreover, Wharton's need to create scapegoats affects only certain of her characters.

Wharton's possible identification with some of her characters has been suggested frequently here; and that identification indicates at least one reason why her victims are invariably sensitive and attractive characters, rather than obtuse figures who have enjoyed the acts of sin. It is, she seems to say, the superior individuals, like herself, whom the Eumenides choose to pursue. If Wharton had chosen the opposite sort of character--the sinful or merely obtuse--then her novels would have become morality plays in which the punishment would fit the crime and justice would be served. It is, however, the very essence of the scapegoating process that the punishment is not related to the crime, but rather to the psychological
needs of the one who metes out punishment—in this case the author. Scapegoating occurs when unacceptable feelings or behaviors produce guilt that is not acknowledged, when that guilt is projected onto another, and then that other is punished in lieu of the self. This, in oversimplified form, is what seems to occur in Wharton's novels.

Inevitably, Wharton's creation of scapegoats is related to her sociological analysis or, at the least, to her response to the American society that affected her during the early years of her life. Although Wharton's social values are too complex to be discussed in detail here, it is worth noting briefly how society functions in her novels. In general, as the discussion of the novels makes clear, society is portrayed as an oppressive and destructive institution. From The House of Mirth (1905) on, Wharton frequently dramatizes her characters as victims of society. However, it has been a partial purpose of this dissertation to indicate that "society" is often employed by the author as an exaggerated source of repressive power; when society, as such, is lacking, then a character, like Zeena Frome in Ethan Frome or Mr. Royall in Summer, assumes its role. I have intended to suggest throughout my discussion of the novels that the power of society, like that of Zeena and Mr. Royall, is, in part, an essential of the scapegoating process, a necessary aspect of Wharton's creation of victims. In this connection
it is interesting to note that although Wharton believed that she had been harmed by the society of her birth, that society did not in fact succeed in trapping her. That she believed her escape was narrow, however, is conveyed by non-fictional documents, as well as by her novels.

The forces that Wharton herself combatted and then proceeded to delineate in her fiction were not simply societal ones. They seem to have been the sort of internalized constraints that prevent the development of an individual into a full and fruitful maturity. The burden of *The Age of Innocence*, for example, is not that society trapped Newland Archer and prevented his elopement with Ellen Olenska, but rather that, as an American, certain limits had been imposed on his growth. He is sufficiently weakened so that he can value the flower of life only abstractly and intellectually; moreover, like Ethan Frome, he succumbs to his incapacity. It is that incapacity that Wharton attacks repeatedly in her fiction without, I believe, fully defining or clarifying its source. Perhaps, if Wharton's own struggle for personal and professional liberation had been less prolonged and intense, she might have demonstrated, in her fiction, more compassion for those protagonists who succumbed.

However, as I have tried to show here, Wharton's tendency to victimize her characters becomes more moderate
as her career evolves. Increasingly, Wharton's protagonists exercise greater freedom of choice, are less purely victims: Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth* (1905), for example, is presented as a victim of external forces to a much greater extent than is Laura Testvalley in *The Buccaneers* (1938). Although the dynamic of self-sacrifice is still apparent in the characters of the later novels, the forces that comprise it are more fully acknowledged as a part of the self. Evidently, a continuing process of integration finally allows Annabel Tintagel freedom from that repressive dynamic.

The evolution that occurs in Wharton's scapegoating of her protagonists testifies to a developing philosophy of experience that continued throughout her long career. And the concept of scapegoating, as I have used it throughout this dissertation, seemed a useful metaphor for certain aspects of Wharton's attitudes towards experience, particularly experience of a romantic and sexual nature. Finally, this analysis of scapegoating in Wharton's fiction points toward a shifting relation between desire and reticence, between the search for personal fulfillment and a reluctance to embrace experience. The intention of this study has been to describe some components of that shifting balance as they pertain to Wharton's developing philosophy of experience.
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6Newmann, 37-40. In Newmann's terminology, Charity could be considered the "shadow . . . which is the other side . . . the expression of our own imperfection and earthiness, the negative which is incompatible with absolute values."

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5Lewis, 465.

6Lewis, 464-465.

7Edith Wharton, A Mother's Recompense (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1925), 266.


9Lewis, 524.

10Wharton, Twilight Sleep, 48.

11Nevius, 217. Nevius says here that each of the late novels "questions the wisdom of altruism and self-sacrifice."

12Wharton, The Mother's Recompense, 76.

13Nevius, 241.

14Lewis, 426.

15Lewis, 524.

16Wilson, 30.

17Edith Wharton, The House of Mirth (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), 68.

18Wilson, 31.

19Wharton, The Fruit of the Tree, 624.
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