The limits of charity: motherhood, feminine roles, and autobiography in Edith Wharton's Summer

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The limits of Charity: Motherhood, feminine roles, and autobiography in Edith Wharton's Summer

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: English (Literature)

Major Professor: Brenda O. Daly

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
1998
Graduate College
Iowa State University

This is to certify that the Master’s thesis of

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PREFACE

When I began preparing for my thesis, I was not sure exactly what I wanted to focus on. I knew that I enjoyed the writing of Edith Wharton and I recognized that it was rich with social commentary. There was so much material to choose from that I found myself confounded as to which text to approach for such a lengthy and important project. Initially I chose *The House of Mirth* because I was familiar with it and because I had such an aching sympathy for the plight of Lily Bart. What I discovered, much to my dismay, is that so much had already been written on that particular masterpiece that there was little I could add to the discussion.

After months of examining and pondering over various short stories and novels, I became more and more aware of how troubled Wharton’s relationship had been with her mother, and how extensively maternal characters were examined and developed throughout her fiction. As I read further still, I recognized that Wharton was distressed not only by the actions of her own mother, or mothers in general, but by how society restricted and manipulated women through demanding that they fill constricting and often unnatural roles. Though several texts seemed appropriate to expand this realization, I eventually settled upon the fairly well-known, but not overly addressed novel *Summer.* The more I read about it, the more depth I saw in
the character of Charity Royal, and her plight and how Wharton was speaking through her in an outraged voice. There was no doubt that a serious injustice had been done to Wharton, and many of the women of her time, and she was determined to tell that story.

As I prepared to write this text, I had the unpleasant task of weeding out any information that was not relevant to my project, no matter how interesting it may have been. I had to leave out a great deal of biographical information that spoke so eloquently of Wharton's life as well as the comments of those critics who obviously respect Wharton's writing but had little to say related to my topic. The resulting text, however, contains a broad exploration of Wharton's experiences and thoughts about her own mother followed by brief discussions of various mother-figures in some of Wharton's more significant works. All of this is a precursor to the focus of my argument: Charity Royal illustrates how the harmful effects of an overly restrictive society can crush even the most fearless of spirits. I have aspired to represent Summer as a striking social commentary, and show how the strength of Charity's spirit should be admired, while the injustices performed against her should inspire outrage.

After such extensive exploration of Wharton's life and work, I cannot help but finish this project with a great sense of satisfaction in having found so much value in just one of her many novels. Though the United States of
the 1990s may be vastly different than turn-of-the-century New England, there is still much to be learned from Charity Royall and even more to be wary of with regard to societal regulation of behavior.

Eric Kerkove

May, 1998
INTRODUCTION

In *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, Sharon Hays discusses the shift in motherhood that occurs in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as being marked by a dramatic shift in the perception of children. Whereas earlier they were considered to be born sinful and must be diligently raised to be good, Europe, and eventually America, changed their opinion of children to reflect the idea that babies are born pure and innocent. It is those qualities that society determined needed to be maintained for any child to grow up as a respectable member of society (29). This fundamental change in the Western belief system eventually lead to the burden of maintaining a moral and upright society being placed on the shoulders of mothers. Any woman who had a child out of wedlock, was divorced, or was otherwise accused of having loose morals could not gain the respect deemed worthy only of the most “morally” fit of mothers. These often unreasonable standards resulted in the role of motherhood having the ability to save or destroy any woman who hoped to hold a respectable position in society.

While Wharton was growing up, a “good” mother, as Hays defines it, was a middle or upper-class woman who expressed “pervasive sentimentality mixed with purity, piety, and patriotism” (29). A good mother made sure that
her children were protected from the corrupting influences of the outside world while still maintaining herself as morally superior figure to be admired and imitated. The respect a woman was once able to attain by birthing a large number of healthy children shifted to those who were able to take a small number of children and raise them to be respectable (30). Any moral, or other, shortcomings that a child might express were immediately considered the result of poor mothering, and thus women were forced to restrict their expressions and behaviors in order to avoid the wrath of a judgmental society. Eventually a woman needed to be almost a saint to be considered a good mother, and thus a patriarchal society further tightened its restrictive hold on women.

Wharton's novels provide a rich and complex array of maternal figures across the whole of her writing career. Although not the central figure of every novel or short story, the mother is almost always present in one form or another. Some of these figures represent nurturing protective forces that surround the events unfolding on the page, while others are illustrative of oppressive and controlling forces. It is almost as if Wharton was uncertain as to what it meant to be a "good" mother and therefore devoted a small, perhaps even unconscious, part of most of her writing to this mysterious figure. Wharton's earlier novels suggest a desire to separate the positive and negative aspects of motherhood into opposite poles. This good
mother/bad mother approach did not satisfy her, however, so that as her novels progress they contain more well rounded mothers who are much more complex and difficult to categorize. Given Wharton's relationship with her own mother and the circumstances under which she was raised, it is not surprising that the role of motherhood should be such an enigma to the author.

Day-to-day care of Wharton as a child was the full time job of Doyley, the author's loving and cherished nursemaid. Though she was perhaps what would be considered the primary care-giver during Wharton's childhood, Doyley was entirely subject to the whims and declarations of Wharton's birthmother. As a result, Doyley, though she was certainly a significant maternal figure in Wharton's life, did not wield the maternal power that her mother did. As Gloria C. Erlich notes, "Mothering is more than a comfort, it is power and social efficacy, attributes belonging to the biological mother--to the mistress of the house and wife of the father" (25). Despite this, Doyley helped Wharton to understand what it was to be loved and nurtured in a motherly way, but she did not have the same impact of the true mother, Lucretia, whose power and control were absolute.

Lucretia Rhinlander Jones was a matron of high society who was always just on the edge of losing her claim to distinction and thus fought diligently to prevent herself from losing any status. Although both the
Rhinlanders and the Joneses were wealthy by society's standards, they had nowhere near the amazing wealth of the true upper-crust. As a result, Lucretia directed much of her attention towards making sure that she and her family were held in the highest esteem that their money could provide. Her appearance and reputation were her life and if she was not the celebrity she would have liked to be, she certainly put on an air that she was. On one social occasion when a gentleman asked her which Mrs. Jones she happened to be, Lucretia is reported to have replied, "I am the Mrs. Jones" (Lewis 12), demonstrating exactly what her reputation meant to her.

Though exactly to what extent Lucretia attained societal notoriety is questionable, it is true that she was considered to be quite beautiful and one of the best dressed of her set. If her intention was to always be associated with elegance and charm, she was successful to the extent that Wharton biographer Louis Auchincloss claims that she "seems to be remembered chiefly for her style. She dressed and spoke well; she obviously lived up to the standards of her world" (28). Even her daughter Edith, the youngest after her two much older brothers, was quite impressed as a child by her mother's beauty and even envied it to some extent. In her autobiography A Backward Glance, Wharton recalls an occasion of her childhood when her aunt asked her what she would like to be when she grew up. "The best-dressed woman in New York," the little girl replied. After a somewhat shocked response in
which her aunt voiced her concern that the child surely did not mean what
she had said, young Edith continued, "But Auntie, you know Mamma is" (20).

Wharton's acknowledgment of, and respect for, her mother's beauty
did not wane as she matured into an adult, but the writer found little else to
praise about the woman whom she once hoped to emulate. Most references
to Lucretia in Wharton's writing that are intended to present her in a positive
light are restricted to either how well-dressed the woman was or, ironically,
how Wharton had been saved from becoming degraded by what her mother
considered to be potentially self-destructive behavior. For example, Wharton
describes her mother's ironic smile as the thing that "guarded [her] against
slovenliness" (BG 49). Though to some extent grateful for her mother's
guidance, it is quite evident that Wharton harbored more than a few resentful
feelings for Lucretia Jones. Some biographers portray Wharton's mother as
a restrictive and oppressive monster while others are more forgiving, as Edith
herself was in A Backward Glance, but either way it is evident that Mrs.
Jones is remembered more as a hindrance to her daughter's creativity and
desire for self-expression than the supportive parent that Wharton seemed to
long for.

Wharton developed into a voracious reader very early on in her
childhood, making the fullest use of her father's library to feed her insatiable
hunger. Her interests were so vast and her appetite for books so great, that
her parents became somewhat concerned. Though her father had allowed her to have full run of the family library, Lucretia put considerable restraints in the way of her daughter's previously unimpeded literary access. Wharton recalls this unfortunate event as follows:

> Being an indolent woman, she finally turned the difficulty by reviving a rule of her own school room days, and decreeing that I should never read a novel without asking her permission. [In compliance with the new rule] I submitted to her every work of fiction which attracted my fancy. In order to save further trouble she almost always refused to let me read it. (BG 65)

Though Wharton recalls only vaguely pleasant memories of her father in her autobiography, she was not able to turn to him for relief from her mother's literary tyranny. Once a considerable reader himself, especially of poetry, Wharton's father was subject to the will of Lucretia as much as anyone else in the Jones household. From Wharton's point of view, her father very well could have continued to be a significant reader and perhaps might have supported her in her own literary excursions had her "mother's matter-of-factness" not "shriveled up any such buds of fancy" in the man (BG 39). This belief, in combination with his untimely death, martyred her father in Wharton's mind. Despite this, however, Wharton is sure to mention that her mother may have in fact prevented her from being weak-minded from "too-easy studies" (66) and that she must have meant well considering Lucretia's opinion that "it would be simpler if people one might be exposed to
meeting would refrain from meddling with literature" (68). Nonetheless, it is fairly clear that Wharton viewed her mother as the restrictive force in her life and her father as the more lovingly indulgent one. Shari Benstock states that "Lucretia ruled that her children should be polite; George Frederic [Jones], that they be kind" (23).

As was mentioned earlier, some biographers portray Lucretia as a much more villainous individual than does Wharton in her own writing. In the introduction to A Backward Glance, Wharton explains that time acts as a balm on old wounds and that the writing of her life story is not intended to denounce anyone or take advantage of the opportunity to strike back at those who may have hurt her throughout her life. This attitude would explain why Wharton was not more harsh towards her mother even though she appears to have harbored lingering resentment. For example, in "Life and I," a never published manuscript of Wharton's that was the precursor to A Backward Glance, portrays Lucretia in a much less forgiving light. Because the resentment that Wharton felt towards her mother, even well into her old age, is so openly expressed in "Life and I," it is not surprising that biographers turn to this manuscript rather than to Wharton's published autobiography. Eleanor Dwight, for example, describes Lucretia as "the insensitive enemy of the reading and solitude that nourished [Edith's imagination]" (23) and that "Edith grew up estranged, mystified, and resentful that her mother could not
understand her" (24). Dwight seems to suggest that Wharton's free spirit was repressed for no better reason than that her mother did not feel that such desires were "proper" for a young lady. Of course it would only seem to follow that Wharton would take offense at this restriction of what she considered a basic right.

Lucretia's insensitivity is almost legendary to Wharton's biographers as they relate time and time again examples of young Edith being snubbed for making what the modern reader considers to be reasonable requests and asking understandable questions. Louis Auchincloss relates how Wharton took to writing on brown wrapping paper because Lucretia was too critical of her daughter's writing to allow her any good paper without, at the same time, making excessive negative commentary (32). Many writers are quick to point out Wharton's experience on the day before her wedding when she pleaded with her mother to explain what would be expected of her in the bridal chamber because she was sincerely afraid of what would happen to her. Lucretia was of course embarrassed and outraged by what she considered to be an disgraceful question with an obvious answer and criticized her daughter for being so base and rude as to ask such a question. "You've seen enough pictures and statues in your life," her mother harshly replied, "Haven't you noticed that men are made differently from women?" Of course this explanation was not sufficient to quail Wharton's genuine fear about
what was to be expected of her and yet she could not understand why her mother criticized her for not knowing what she was forbidden to ask about (Bryson 41).

If it was not bad enough that Lucretia was a harsh mother to her daughter, it appears that she may have been much less so to her sons. Both boys had grown almost into men by the time Wharton was born and as such had received all of the love and support of a new mother that Edith's late birth may have caused her to miss. There is a sense in her writing that Wharton may have felt somewhat unwanted by her mother and that she was considered to be more of a burden to her than a treasure. Perhaps some of Wharton's resentment stems from the fact that she felt that her mother treated her as a stranger thrust upon her with the charge of bringing her up in a "respectable" manner, rather than as a part of herself who deserved love as well as guidance. Shari Benstock suggests that "Edith never forgave Lucretia for failing to give her the love and affection she showered on her sons" (23) which brings into light an issue entirely separate from intellectual repression. Though it would not be fair to speculate exactly how much love Lucretia felt for certain children, it is important to recognize that when she died, she left all material assets to her two sons and allotted her daughter only a third of the monetary savings as her entire legacy. If Wharton was concerned that her mother loved her brothers more than her, her fears were
realized by this single act. Even in death Lucretia had made a point of showing her daughter that she was not, and never had been, good enough for her.

Fortunately for her readers, Wharton did not give entirely into the demands of a woman who "perceived [her] principal responsibility as maintaining the social position of the family by entertaining, making social calls, appearing at cultural and charitable events, and being generally ornamental" (Erlich 3). Though she wanted to emulate her mother's stylish ways and good manners, and appeared to have done so successfully, Wharton knew where to draw the line and be an individual. No amount of restrictive rules or smothering regulations could break the spirit of a young woman who was destined to follow her calling, whether or not it was a calling that was considered suitable for a young woman. Considering how successful Wharton was in various social circles, it can be assumed that her mother's prudishness was unnecessary in establishing her daughter a respectable place in society. The New York of the early twentieth century was different enough from that of Lucretia's time to allow a budding woman author to be accepted and if the occasion arose when it was not, there was always Europe in which to take refuge.

Of course it is important to remember that the world of Lucretia Jones was also much different from the world of today and that both the era she
lived in and the role she played in society to a great extent dictated how she acted as a mother. After having successfully raised her two boys to adulthood, it is not surprising that Lucretia may not have been pleased with the charge of raising yet another child, especially considering that so much more was expected of a young lady than of a young man with regards to what was considered appropriate behavior. Although the strictness through which Lucretia raised Wharton seems unfair, Kathryn Allen Rabuzzi explains the conflict a mother must deal with when deciding how lenient to be when raising a child:

As culture bringer, a mother treads a very fine line. If, on the one hand, she fails to make any plans whatsoever for a child, simply letting it grow as the child itself chooses, she is guilty of withholding her own wisdom. On the other hand, if a mother decides what is best for her child even against its own wishes, she deprives it of a chance to live its own life. At this point a woman's own self-image may intervene negatively. A mother who totally arranges her child's life risks eclipsing its separate selfhood. Conversely, a mother who uses her child to live out her own life for her vicariously is guilty of sacrificing her individual selfhood to his. In doing so she essentially effaces her own separate being. (69)

Of course both Edith and Lucretia were strong individuals, neither willing to allow herself to be dominated by the other, and the conflict resulted. Nevertheless, Wharton must have realized to some extent how difficult it was to raise a child in the nineteenth century and that being a mother involved far more than saying yes or no to the various requests that a child often makes.
Though she may have resented her mother for many things in many ways, Wharton herself was not proud of her defiance. She was not able to accept the fact that she was a disappointment to her mother quite so easily as her strong demeanor may have suggested. When Wharton was a young child, her mother instructed her not to eat some apricots that were left out on the table. For instance when Lucretia had left to go shopping, young Edith quickly snatched up and ate three of them when no one was watching. As soon as her mother returned she ran up to her and confessed her transgression to which her mother responded, "I did not expect it of you."

Although this would not seem so significant an event, almost seventy years later while Wharton lay dying she cried out in response to this memory, "Oh, the shame of it! I feel it still" (Benstock 24). Certainly these were not the words of a woman who had ever come to grips with her mother, or with what it meant to fill the maternal role. And with that disturbing image in mind, it is time for an examination of Wharton's fiction.

* * *

Although Wharton's own childhood provided her with a great interest in what the role of a mother is, and possibly what it should be, it did not provide her with many examples to follow. Certainly a childhood spent under the critical eye of Lucretia Jones would provide a writer with plenty of
material with which to create a similar figure, but Wharton wanted to go beyond her own childhood experiences and explore the depths of motherhood as they can be seen under different circumstances. The restrictiveness of limiting herself to a single maternal model was too much for Wharton and would have left her writing much less interesting and, to a great extent, much more limited. In her fiction, Wharton was free to take whatever measures she felt she needed to make the text work, a freedom her morals prevented her from taking when she wrote her autobiography. Susan Goodman explains that when writing of her mother in *A Backward Glance*, "Wharton tries to be scrupulously fair, yet she cannot maintain the controlled authorial distance of her novel" (127). The key word in this case is "control," something that Wharton discovered through her writing and was never willing to give up.

As distanced as Wharton was able to make herself, however, Goodman continues by saying that "since the fiction and the autobiography grow in all likelihood from the same source, each provides a useful context for examining the other" (127). This is true not only in the sense that Wharton was continuing to explore her own mother through her writing in an attempt to come to grips with her childhood, but also to investigate how she herself might be as a mother. Because she had no children of her own, it is not surprising that Wharton would seek to understand her own maternal
feelings that she seemed to have, but which undoubtedly had little
opportunity to express themselves, except possibly through her care for her
many cherished dogs. Of course coddling a Pekinese is not the same as
facing the difficulties of raising a child and Wharton was an intelligent
enough woman to recognize that there was so much involved in motherhood
that even through a lifetime of writing she was unable to understand it to her
satisfaction. As critical of her own mother as Wharton was, she wanted to
understand what feelings drive mothers to make the decisions they do and
perhaps to learn to sympathize under certain circumstances with some
difficult decisions while still finding justifiable rationale to condemn others.

An early, and fairly obvious attempt of Wharton's to explore the
influential role of a mother is her novel *Sanctuary* (1903). It is the story of a
Kate Orme, who discovers that the man to whom she is engaged has made a
morally corrupt decision which eventually leads to the suicide of a young
mother and her child. If the man confesses his crimes to the police, he will
likely lose his position in society, a great deal of money, and even spend time
in prison. Her fiancé's mother is more concerned with how her son will
appear to the outside world should he confess his crimes than in making sure
that he does the right thing and, as a result, is no help to Kate who does in
fact turn to her for guidance at one point. Unable to convince him to repent
and confess his transgression on her own, Kate decides it would be better to
break off her engagement than to spend a life with a man of questionable character. In a moment of inspiration, however, Kate realizes that her ex-fiancé will no doubt marry someone else and have children who will grow up without scruples. As a result, Kate marries her fiancé in hopes of saving his potential children from moral deprivation. As soon as this decision is made, the novel skips a little more than twenty years after which Kate’s husband is dead and her one child, a son, has established himself as a promising, but still fledgling, architect. As a fledgling architect, her son finds himself in a situation where he too must make a decision akin to his father’s and Kate must decide whether to interfere or to stand back and hope that all of her teachings will lead her son to make the right choice. In the end the son makes the morally superior choice and returns to his mother, praising her for all that she has done for him and describing her as a moral sanctuary in which he may take refuge. The final page of the novel ends with the son’s confession that:

"I'm an abysmally weak fool, you know," he ended; "I'm not worth the fight you've put up for me. But I want you to know that it's your doing—that if you had let go an instant, I should have gone under—and that if I'd gone under I should never have come up again alive." (183)

As one of her earliest attempts at lengthy fiction, Sanctuary itself is fairly predictable and not very well written. As a result it has not received a great deal of critical attention over the 90 years since it was published. What
it does illustrate, however, is Wharton's attempt at creating an ideal mother whose presence shapes the moral character of her children for the better but who is still able to maintain enough distance to trust her children to make their own decisions when the time comes. Kate Orme of *Sanctuary* constantly frets over her son's welfare and continues to offer him her companionship and advice should he need it, but never imposes anything upon him. When he becomes engaged to a woman about whom Kate has conflicting feelings, she still does not intervene, but instead takes it upon herself to find out all that she can about the young woman because it is her duty. It is this undying devotion to her child and yet complete unwillingness to control him that makes Kate an ideal mother by Wharton's standards.

Motherhood in this novel equals salvation. Not only does Kate manage to save her own son from corruption, but she saves herself after finding herself in a situation where she was raised by a father of questionable moral character and engaged to a man of definitely poor moral character. Lev Raphael argues that Kate has fled from the shame and dirtiness of her past and into the "spirituality" of motherhood that was discussed earlier (38). Certainly this would seem the case as Kate becomes an almost holy figure, not only providing sanctuary from a corrupt world but actually embodying the sanctuary itself.
Oddly enough, however, exactly how Kate acquired the skills to be such a wonderful mother is unknown. Kate's own mother is never mentioned in the novel, a particularly glaring omission considering the importance placed on Kate's finance's mother and of course her own role as one. If Kate Orme was Wharton's attempt to visualize herself as the perfect mother, perhaps she was not ready to address her own mother's failure to act as a good example and source of guidance. In this way, Sanctuary is Wharton's exploration of a possible maternal instinct that drives good women to be good mothers as well. Sara Ruddick makes a distinction between a woman's role as a mother and as an individual. For Ruddick, a mother's work consists of "three demands—for preservation, growth, and social acceptability" (17). Although a mother may strive to achieve these goals, she exists outside of those goals as well. In other words, although a mother is necessarily a woman, she need not be defined by that title. For Wharton to contend that motherhood can only be learned from an individual's own mother would be to admit that she herself would be doomed to be a failure as one. The concept of a maternal instinct, however, would allow her the satisfaction of knowing that the ability to be a good mother comes from the inside and that she herself had the ability to achieve that goal despite her own past.

Evidently Wharton herself did not think very highly of this novel, even while she wrote it. She referred to it as "Sank" during its production, and
about no other novel does she have less to say during and after composition (Lewis 123). Perhaps the painfully obviousness of the attempt at exploring motherhood was apparent to her and thus was not satisfying. Wharton must have realized that no mother could be as complete and unflawed as Kate Orme and still maintain the qualities necessary to be a satisfied and independent human being. Though motherhood could be explored through her writing, Wharton recognized that it would have to be tempered with more plausible situations and well-rounded characters. *Sanctuary* may not have been the answer she was looking for, but it was certainly an important step on her journey of maternal exploration and discovery.

Surprisingly, it was only a few years later in 1905 when Wharton published her masterpiece *The House of Mirth*. This work is the stunningly complex tale of a woman who is manipulated and eventually rejected by the society that created her. Lily Bart, born into a wealthy high society family, discovers late in her childhood that her father has lost their fortune and left the family in somewhat dire straits. Shortly after these events the father dies, leaving Lily with her mother, a figure who will be discussed in more depth later. After her mother's eventual death, Lily lives with her aunt and continues to attempt to find a man to marry who will satisfy her many particular needs, failing to do so until she is 29 years old, where the novel begins. Throughout the novel Lily searches for fulfillment which she
supposes she will find by marrying a wealthy man who can maintain the lifestyle to which she has become accustomed. Through various experiences she comes to realize that money is not enough to make her happy but by the time she has discovered this, she has made too many social errors and has already been rejected by her aunt who leaves her in a situation in which she is unprepared to support herself. Before the less-wealthy, but true love of her life, Lawrence Seldon can rescue her from her circumstances, Lily has died of an overdose of sleeping medication and the novel closes with her tragically missing the happiness she had so long denied herself.

The primary maternal character in this novel is of course Lily's mother, Mrs. Bart. Though her role in the text is brief and somewhat limited, she has a definite impact on her daughter's life and may, to some extent, even be responsible for her eventual demise. While still financially secure, Mrs. Bart was a true society woman. She knew how to throw the best parties, how to dress, and how to be remembered at each social gathering. Her greatest fear, however, was of living a life that would be considered "dingy." For Mrs. Bart, anything less than the best would be considered inferior and when her husband lost his fortune and shortly thereafter died, she was forced to accept nothing but the charity of her family. While living off relatives, Mrs. Bart resigned herself unhappily to her fate but recognized that Lily's beauty was a ticket back into her lost lifestyle. Though she of course died before she could
ever see the results of her "training," she had thoroughly instilled in Lily a fear of the dingy leading her to spend the rest of her youth attempting to avoid it.

It is made fairly clear in the text that Mrs. Bart is not a loving woman, but rather one who is loyal to what she feels is her duty. She does not leave her husband as he lies on his deathbed, nor does she leave her daughter behind while she goes off in pursuit of her own escape from financial dependency. However, she is not caring to either member of her family and is actually quite resentful of them both. She is bitter towards her husband for leaving them in such a situation, and she is jealous of her daughter for having such beauty but not knowing how to make use of it.

This figure, perhaps more so than any other in all of Wharton's writing, is a reflection of Lucretia Jones. Dwight Eleanor states that Wharton's mother "seemed aware only of the demands on a socially prominent woman. She dressed and entertained well, and, like Lily Bart's mother, she cared very much about society and 'appearances'" (22). Even more than that, Mrs. Bart is a reflection of Lucretia in that she seems to crush her husband's spirit and continues to place more value on her daughter's appearance than on her daughter's love. By the end of her life, Mrs. Bart has crafted Lily into little more than a tool of society; nevertheless Lily's own intellect and emotions eventually undo Mrs. Bart's work and lead Lily to her unfortunate demise. It
is entirely possible that if Mrs. Bart had lived to see her daughter turn 29, that she may have given up on her for not following her teachings, much as Lucretia somewhat emotionally abandoned her own daughter when she insisted on pursuing endeavors that were not "appropriate" for her. One thing is certain however: when Wharton created mothers in her writing, thoughts of Lucretia were seldom far behind. Wharton was clearly demonstrating that it was not enough for a mother to craft her children into socially acceptable figures if she did not also provide them with essential emotional support.

In *Ethan Frome* (1911), the central maternal figure of Ethan's past is his own mother. Though his childhood is not reflected on, it is suggested that while Ethan's father was alive, the family unit was complete and that tension was at a minimum. The Frome tradition was that each son married and lived in the same house, worked in the same lumber mill, and was buried in the same family plot. Ethan, however, had bigger dreams and even went off to school to learn about science—something he was not exposed to at home. When his father died, however, he was forced to leave his education behind so that he could work at the mill and care for his mother. In this way, Ethan's primary maternal figure came to symbolize a barrier to his dreams and a tie to a monotonous circle of life and death that all led back to the same ramshackle cabin and family cemetery.
Wharton's novella is the story of a desperately poor man who falls in love with his harsh and controlling wife's cousin Mattie. Throughout the text, Ethan struggles to come to grips with his feelings for Mattie knowing that he has a responsibility to his heritage and to his wife to stay where he is and to do what is honorable. Once it is made clear, however, that Mattie harbors similar feelings towards Ethan, his wife Zeena sees to it that Mattie is sent away. Ethan knows that Mattie will not survive on her own without strength, skills, or money but is unable to find an alternative solution. In a moment of desperate passion the two lovers decide to die together and end their pain by steering their sled into a tree that lies at the bottom of a great hill. At the last moment, Ethan swerves the sled suddenly and the resulting accident leaves Mattie an invalid and Ethan partially crippled. In the end, Zeena overcomes her jealousy of Mattie and spends the rest of her life taking care of her husband and cousin while Ethan is able to provide just enough money to keep them destitute and miserable in each other's company.

During the course of the novel, however, Zeena plays the role of mother to her husband, and to an extent, her cousin Mattie. There is no longer any physical affection between Ethan and his wife; in fact, Zeena is prone to all kinds of unknown ailments that allow her to exact money and attention from her often preoccupied husband. Ruthless in her control of the household, Zeena is never afraid to feign a sick headache if anyone dares
disagree with her. She is manipulative of her husband's will and eventually insists on Mattie being sent away under such circumstances that Ethan is helpless to prevent and still maintain the little bit of dignity and respect he has salvaged during his life. Zeena is almost a caricature of villainy with her pale sickly body and dark watchful eyes. No sympathy is generated for Zeena's plight except possibly when her favorite pickle dish is broken, but even then she quickly turns her wrath against the other two members of the household and the brief glimpse of her vulnerability is soon forgotten.

In the end, however, Zeena proves that though she may have been a bad person at times, she had her own motivations just as Ethan had his. Her ability to mother the other two is expressed through her dedication to caring for them even after it was apparent to her that they were both going to abandon her through death rather than tolerate her presence. Certainly the maternal figures in this novel symbolize restrictiveness and eventually act as barriers to all manner of hopes and dreams. Though the events in the text do not parallel Wharton's in a direct sense, their sentiment certainly does: hiding and restricting feelings for the sake of appearances ends only in false, and often broken, relationships. The end result of the novel also demonstrates that a controlling and overbearing maternal figure brings misery with her, and that even if she is dedicated to her family, her dedication does little more than perpetuate that misery.
A final text to consider when reviewing maternal figures in Wharton's books is the 1925 novel *The Mother's Recompense*. Written considerably later in Wharton's career, this text is a much more thorough and personal exploration of motherhood than she had previously attempted. Set both in early twentieth-century New York and Paris, it is the story of Kate Clephane who left her husband and very young daughter to be with another male acquaintance. After nearly twenty years have passed, Kate receives a telegraph informing her that her mother-in-law has passed away and, since her husband had died even before that, her daughter would like her to return from Paris to New York to be with her. Upon her return, Kate still feels the haunting reminders of her husband and in-laws left in the house but is able to overcome them as she forms a loving bond with her daughter. Giving her daughter the freedoms her mother-in-law would not allow, Kate feels that she is being a good mother after so many years of absence. The crux of the novel is quickly revealed as Kate's ex-lover Chris Fenno becomes engaged to her daughter. The better part of the text is spent with Kate attempting to prevent the wedding without ever disclosing to her daughter the truth about her past. In the end, knowing that she cannot live near her daughter's new husband, Kate returns to Paris with her secret rather than hurting her daughter with the awful truth.
This novel presents both a Lucretia-like figure, as well as an anti-Lucretia. The character of Old Mrs. Clephane represents Lucretia in the sense that she is a restrictive matron of the household that will not stand for any behavior that isn't proper. She would not allow Kate's daughter, Anne, to paint because she did not consider it lady-like. Old Mrs. Clephane's refusal to allow her grand-daughter to express herself is akin to Lucretia's disapproval of Wharton's writing though to an even greater extent. When Kate comes into the story, she acts as a liberator to Anne, giving her freedom of the household as well as encouraging her to follow her dream of building a studio and spending her days painting. It is not unlikely that a young Wharton may have often wondered what it would be like if some lost relative from across the sea would come and nurture her passion for reading and writing, rather than restricting it.

What is interesting to note about this novel is that, unlike in Sanctuary, Wharton does not represent the mother as a flawless savior, but rather as a loving but essentially flawed human being. Kate Clephane does not want to control her daughter, and yet she feels obligated to protect her from what she feels is a dreadful mistake. At this point, as Susan Goodman notes, after Kate finds so much love for Anne, "Motherhood is no longer a pleasant daydream, an illusion. It is a needle in the heart. At the same time, it gives life a new dimension of dignity" (F&R 114). In this way, the mother is a much
more complex figure than she was ever previously constructed to be.

Closing in on the last decade of her life, Wharton was better coming to grips with her mother and understood that there is more to being a mother than being indulgent of a child's wishes. Wharton understood that it was difficult, if not impossible, for a mother to watch her child make what she feels is a mistake and simply sit idly by and do nothing. In this way, the Lucretia and anti-Lucretia come together into a single entity that represents a truer example of motherhood.

Though there are dozens of other maternal figures throughout Wharton's writing, those discussed above give a reasonable overview of some of the major representations of the maternal role that Wharton explored over the course of her writing career. What is most important to remember after such a discussion is that Wharton was fascinated not only with how a good mother acted, but also what circumstances and qualities combined to make a mother exceptional in the first place.
CHAPTER ONE: THE LIMITS OF CHARITY: MOTHERHOOD, FEMININE ROLES, AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN EDITH WHARTON'S SUMMER

It is a simple enough task to point out motherly characters in a text, and although comparing them to Lucretia Jones allows for a greater insight into the mind of the author, this does not constitute a complete discussion of motherhood. What this paper attempts to do with Summer is different from what it has done with Sanctuary, Ethan Frome, and The Mother's Recompense. Rather than discussing how Summer reflects Wharton's relationship with her own mother, it will discuss how Wharton constructed Charity as both a mother and a woman. Historical and cultural factors figure strongly into Charity's character and situation and Wharton is quite eager to explore them. Closer examination reveals that Summer is a complex critique of the American prejudices and conceptions of feminine and maternal roles that Wharton chose to leave behind when she returned to her second home in Europe. By examination of popular cultural perceptions of Wharton's time, exploration of Charity's actions both as an independent woman and a mother, as well as of the personal ties that Wharton may have had to the novel, greater appreciation of Summer as cultural criticism can be articulated.

In 1917 Wharton brought together the pieces of a story she had previously released in serial format and published it as the novel Summer.
Considered by herself to be the "hot" version of *Ethan Frome*, Wharton again set the stage in a small and secluded New England town\(^1\). Located at the base of a large Mountain, North Dormer is the home of Charity Royall, the unofficially adopted daughter of Lawyer Royall, the most prominent figure in a village that stretches about the length of only two city blocks. Charity's life parallels Ethan's in that she finds herself struck by a forbidden love, however this time it is summer and the heat and freedom of both the season and her youth prevent her from holding back as her male counterpart had done.

The story begins with Charity exiting the red house where she lives with Lawyer Royall and traveling to her boring and unsatisfying job at the public library. As her first words in the novel suggest, Charity is a free sprit who does not care much for the restrictive and gossipy environment of North Dormer. Declaring, "How I hate everything!" (2), Charity is unknowingly about to take her first step into a new reality of which she had previously been unaware.

The events of the story unfold with the youthful Charity meeting Lucius Harney, the cousin of the elderly Mrs. Hatchard, at the library. Charity is struck by the fact that her beauty has had an effect on him. Although she originally feels slighted by Harney whom she believes has informed his cousin that she has been negligent in her duties, Charity comes to find him

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\(^1\) Wharton was actually living in Paris when she wrote both *Summer* and *Ethan Frome*. 
an agreeable companion as the two begin spending a great deal of time with one another. Although Charity recognizes that a man like Harney could never grow to love her, in nearby Nettleton she experiences her first passionate kiss with him where her perception of him changes dramatically. Much to the disapproval of Lawyer Royall, whose marriage proposals Charity has refused several times, the two young people become passionate secret lovers.

Eventually it is made clear that Harney is actually engaged to a woman whom Charity understands is the sort of person society demands that he marry. Unfortunately by the time she has made this discovery, she is already pregnant, but her pride will not allow her to tell Harney because she will not accept his love unless it is given willingly. In an act of desperation, and in an attempt to find her mother, Charity returns to the Mountain from which she was rescued as a child in hopes of finding a place where she belongs. The Mountain turns out to be a horrible place full of poverty and death. Here Charity finds truth, but very little comfort. As she attempts to make the treacherous journey back down the Mountain she is found by Lawyer Royall who takes her to Nettleton, which by now has come to represent the entire world outside of North Dormer. Royall marries Charity so that she might retain her good name, and Charity accepts it because she is in shock and feels utterly without refuge. Charity writes Harney to inform
him that she has married Royall but still refuses to tell him about her pregnancy. The novel closes with Charity once again entering the red house with Lawyer Royall, resigning to her fate.

Although the initial response to *Summer* was somewhat negative, most critics of Wharton's day agreed that it was a poor story but that Wharton's good name and talent had made it a respectable novel. It is unfortunate that so few people were able to appreciate the story of Charity Royall, but many felt that the events of the novel were not justified, and in fact were created just for the self-satisfaction of creating them. Francis Hackett reported in the New Republic in 1917 that "what one dislikes in *Summer* is the undoubted purpose of the author to dish the heroine for the sake of the sensation of dishing her" (Tuttleton 250). This same sentiment was expressed by several critics who failed to consider any further purpose to the events of the novel and simply dismissed them as frivolous. Yet there were still those who felt that the novel had great value on its own and that it was yet another masterpiece by a very talented author. Although they too were somewhat vague about what exactly it was that made the novel great, they expressed appreciation for the detail and vividness of the settings as well as the complexity of Charity’s character. In the end, however, *Summer* is a novel that went fairly unappreciated and unexplored until more recent years.
Perhaps one of the most influential figures of Wharton's life, and possibly even her time, was Sigmund Freud. His ideas about the workings of the human mind were so radically different from the many that came before him that the whole world stood up and paid attention. So all-encompassing did his theories seem, that people applied them to nearly every aspect of human existence imaginable. It is no surprise then that Wharton, who is known to have read and discussed Freud's writing a great deal, attempted to explore the possibilities of psychoanalysis in her writing.

Although it is dangerous to suggest that *Summer*, or any of Wharton's works for that matter, is constructed entirely around a Freudian framework, it is evident that his writing influenced how Wharton shaped many of her characters. Freud's ideas most likely appealed to Wharton because they dealt so extensively with the impact of sexuality on human development and the subconscious tension generated by it in prudish and restrictive societies. Even though Wharton was a strong advocate of high morals and "civilized" behavior, she felt that American society was entirely too restrictive of sexual expression, especially as it related to women. As a result, Freud's thinking acted as evidence for Wharton's belief that society's sexual guidelines were harmful to many of those who lived within them. After having been raised in
such a sexually repressed society herself, Wharton was especially aware of how such restrictions were unfair to women who were charged with the duty of being much more morally upright than men they associated with. Although Wharton may not have known what was to be expected of her on her wedding night, there is little doubt that her husband Teddy did, and it was just such discrepancies that led Wharton to examine closely the writings of Sigmund Freud whose way of thinking seemed to offer an explanation for the hurtful affects that sexual repression placed on women.

Although examination of the incest theme of *Summer* reveals that it is certainly a reflection of Freudian influence on Wharton's writing, it does not, in this case, act as a criticism of society but rather as a possible reflection of personal issues that Wharton may have harbored. What is relevant, however, is how the eventually damaging relationship that Charity developed with Lucius is reflective of a Freudian model that Wharton is known to have been familiar with and undoubtedly considered when writing *Summer*. Kathy Grafton discusses the idea that the entire relationship between Charity and Harney illustrates the theories that Freud presents in his essay "The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life," (350-1). In this essay, Freud

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2 Wharton seemed fascinated by the implications of incestuous relationships and wrote about them often in various novels and short stories. It has even been suggested that she may have harbored incestuous feelings towards her own father.
discusses a man's fundamental need to degrade the object of his affection and a woman's need to make her own desires forbidden.

According to Grafton, Lucius Harney does not make a sexual commitment to Charity until after she has been degraded in his eyes. After Lawyer Royall denounces his adopted daughter when exiting the boat in Nettleton by shouting, "You whore—you damn—bare-headed whore you!" (Summer 100) in front of everyone, Harney feels free to recognize Charity as a sexual object because he no longer sees her as an equal, worthy of his full respect (Grafton 353). The justification upon which Freud bases this idea relates back to Oedipal themes that are central to many of his theories. Because a man views all potential mates in relation to his mother, he cannot initiate sexual relations with her until he degrades her, thus making her less like his sacred mother for whom he must deny his sexual feelings. In its own way, Freud claims that respect hampers sexuality and so it must be degraded for that sexuality to be fully expressed. Because Harney is a "gentleman," he does not take it upon himself to degrade Charity personally, and would rather repress his sexual desires than do so, but he cannot help but be affected when she is degraded right before his eyes.

For Charity, Harney has been a forbidden object all along though he progresses even farther in that direction as the novel advances. From her very first sighting of him walking down North Dormer's single street, she was
drawn to him. Knowing that the new young man was from far away immediately made him exotic which was enough to attract her attention, but once she learns that he comes from the big city, which represents the entire world that North Dormer seems to be hiding from, she is drawn to him in a very insistent way. As Charity's relationship with this irresistible stranger progresses, it becomes apparent to her that it is frowned upon by both Lawyer Royall and possibly her community. The most striking example of Charity's need to make the object of her sexual desire forbidden is the abandoned house that becomes their hideout. Grafton notes that it is not until the two lovers establish the house as their place of meeting to hide from prying eyes, that Charity truly accepts Harney as a sexual object (360).

Because the house acts as place in which their desires can be hidden from the rest of the world, it enhances the sense of forbidden-ness of those desires.

Just as Harney allowed his feelings of sexual desire to manifest themselves after Charity's public denouncement, so does Charity allow hers to be expressed so long as their lovemaking is a thing to hide from the rest of the world. The tendency of men and woman to respond to each other in these Freudian terms is a poor reflection on the way society is constructed, and Wharton makes note of that by establishing that the two lovers of her novel are doomed to failure from the beginning. It only seems logical that
relationships that are based on degradation and forbidden love would not be as satisfying and complete as they should be, and yet that is what society in Wharton's time drove people to do because they were not allowed to express their feelings in a healthy way. If Lucius Harney was not required to marry a "respectable" woman like Annabel Balch and if Charity would not be chastised and snubbed by her society for expressing sexual desire for a man, then the two might very well have been able to establish a loving relationship that, entirely successful or not, would have ended better than the tragic way it concludes in Wharton's novel. Because their sexuality was so restricted by society, the two lovers were forced to wait for circumstances that corrupted the tender honesty of their relationship before they could express their desire for one another. Of course, by then it was not possible for them to establish anything honorable or lasting because the foundation of their emotional attachment had to be sacrificed before they could establish a sexual one.

What is most striking about the tendency for members of Wharton's society to behave according to this Freudian model is how much more restricted female sexuality is than male. Although the relationship between Charity and Harney ends in a great loss to both characters, it is apparent that one individual definitely received more than her share of the anguish. Harney simply leaves the mess he has made behind him and marries the woman to whom he was already engaged; he has little to tie him to the past
other than a few possible doubts, a little guilt, and memories of a lot of good sex. Charity, on the other hand, is left poor, pregnant, and skill-less, and her choices for the future are restricted to either a life of prostitution or marriage to an old man she does not even care for and who has filled the role of her father all her life. The discrepancies between the two choices are obvious and it can be safely assumed that Wharton intended this to be so.

For a woman to make the object of her sexual desire forbidden does not in any way reflect negatively upon that object. For a man to degrade his own sexual target, however, is obviously a negative and harmful act. In *Summer* Wharton makes a point of demonstrating just how damaging the central romance was to Charity, and how little effect it had upon Harney. The Charity/Harney relationship is a reflection of how Wharton views the sexual consequences with which society burdens women, but not men. Not only must Charity bear the burden of pregnancy while Harney simply runs away, but she must also find a way to conceal from society the evidence that she ever expressed her sexual desire. While Harney is allowed to progress through life as a successful architect and devoted husband as he planned, Charity is left with desperately few choices, none of which reflect any of her future aspirations and dreams.

Of course the fact that Charity accepts the burden of the failed relationship does not mean that she did not harbor the desire to escape her
fate. Though she quickly dismisses thoughts of aborting her pregnancy or giving the child up for adoption as she contemplates her circumstances, she is still not satisfied with the hand she has been dealt. Because Charity resigns herself to her fate rather than rebelling against it, Wendy Gimbel suggests that *Summer* "tells the story of the failure of [the] feminine ego to assert itself" (99). What Gimbel does not consider in her argument, however, is that Charity was guided by something that the novel portrays as stronger than the "feminine ego." That drive, as will be discussed in more detail later, is Charity's devotion to her unborn child and her dedication to being the best mother that circumstances will allow.

II

The notion of good breeding was astonishingly prevalent in the upper class society of which Wharton was a part. This idea was so prevalent in some circles that it was considered only a fact of nature that some human beings were born superior to others, and that it was only those people who were capable of living a cultured and moral existence among which wealth, power, and even respect, should be dispensed. This way of thinking resulted in expressions of praise such as "He's the result of good breeding," and derogatory remarks such as "That's what happens when you don't stick with your own kind." The very idea that moral corruption, sexual deviation, and
insanity is genetically tied to those of lower social standing seems absurd by today's standards, but during Wharton's lifetime it was a prevalent mode of thought that was used to justify astonishing social prejudice.

This obviously flawed way of thinking was based on ideas suggested by the "science" of eugenics, which Dale Bauer defines as the study of how heredity is the source of moral corruption and deviation. Though in its purest form eugenics is not related to class, Bauer goes on to say that it was quickly adopted as a means of justifying class distinctions and segregation. Of course because Wharton was painfully aware from her own experiences that upper class society had its share of "insanity, incest, and moral bankruptcy," she finally rejected the assurances that eugenics attempted to provide, that good breeding would result in a superior society (Bauer 29-32).

Charity Royall can be viewed as a case study in eugenics as she was transplanted from an appalling level of poverty into a home that, although not wealthy, was clean, secure, and provided the opportunity for education and moral refinement. If the beliefs suggested by eugenics were true, then all of the people of the Mountain, with their criminal mind-sets and incestuous relations with each other, would produce an individual of like mind and temperament as offspring. Because eugenics claims that these behaviors are inherently genetic, then the offspring of the morally corrupt could not be changed by a new environment.
The fact that Wharton does not believe that moral corruption and 
underdeveloped humanity is inherited, does not of mean that she does not 
believe that these contradictions exist in the world. The people of the 
Mountain are portrayed as petty, unclean, abusive, and alcoholic in 
Wharton's novel. They are drunk and unruly as the Reverend Miles attempts 
to say a prayer over the corpse of one of their own, shouting profanities and 
being generally verbally and physically abusive to each other even on such a 
mournful occasion. They are referred to time and time again in terms of 
animals such when their heads "started out of the shadow like the heads of 
octurnal animals" (165), when the woman who might be Charity's sister is 
referred to as "a fierce and bewildered creature" (173), and when the corpse 
of Charity's mother is described as being "like a dead dog in a ditch" (167). 
Wharton also describes the people as a "herd" (174) as they move away 
after the funeral, suggesting that they are not only animals, but animals that 
are fiercely loyal to the only group that will accept them. Despite all of this, 
however, Charity's behavior does not in any way resemble that of the 
Mountain people. She is quietly composed as she tends to her mother's 
disturbingly present corpse and does not respond even to the spiteful remark 
of the "fierce and bewildered creature" that demands to know what right she 
has to be at the funeral. As will be discussed later, Charity also rejects the
idea of following in her mother's footsteps as she instead chooses to resign herself to a fate that she fears and abhors for the sake of her unborn child.

It is almost painfully evident that Wharton does not believe in the beliefs prompted by eugenics when she portrays Charity as a fiercely independent but ultimately thoughtful and selfless individual. Even though Charity came from the Mountain, and even though she denied herself the education considered so essential to develop a "proper" young lady, Charity proves to be above even the petty jealousy and gossip of the people of North Dormer who consider themselves so superior to those on the Mountain. The people of the Mountain are portrayed as victims of their circumstances—individuals warped by extreme poverty and isolation. Once removed from that environment, an individual can be every bit as acceptable as the people of North Dormer and, in fact, a little better. It is important to note that Wharton did not choose to place Charity in a position of complete wealth and culture, because then Charity's transcendence might be considered a result of the ability of those of truly good breeding to be able to influence even the most debased of humanity. By taking Charity from an entirely adverse environment and placing her into one that is less so, but still not perfect, Wharton demonstrates that her protagonist's ability to rise above those who consider themselves above her can only be attributed to the goodness that is inside her, despite her genetic heritage.
Bauer considers *Summer* to be "a critique of hereditary family studies and their assumptions about sexuality, especially that mothers are more responsible than fathers in generating bad offspring" (29). Bauer's argument is certainly supported by the text considering that Charity's mother was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice a mother can, by giving her child away, while knowing that she would never see her again. Charity's mother recognized that her impoverished environment would not allow her daughter to grow up as she should and in this way Wharton shifts the blame of moral corruption from genetics to the environment. The fact that Charity is raised by a man of somewhat questionable moral character, with no truly strong or devoted mother figure to turn to, suggests that "the impossibility of identifying the 'good mother' in the novel" illustrates Wharton's criticism of the "cultural scapegoating of 'bad mothers' whose laxity and degenerate behavior were all considered signs of greater dysgenic decline" (Bauer 30).

One final point that enhances the novel's debunking of Eugenic-based thought is charity's ability to transcend her heritage despite her belief that she is a victim of it. As the novel progresses, Charity moves from a state of ignorance about the Mountain people, to one of brief pride regarding it, and finally to a sense of shame as Lawyer Royall relates the tale of her conception and subsequent rescue. Near the end of the novel, Charity is convinced that she belongs with "her" people and that she never should have
left because she does not feel that she belongs among the people of North Dormer. After her mother's funeral, however, she can no longer deny that, even though she may not feel that she is a part of North Dormer, she has already moved beyond the world of the Mountain people and cannot continue to be herself if she stays under such conditions. What this suggests is that even though Charity was taken from the Mountain where corruption was bred, raised in a petty society that failed to nurture her individuality, and eventually led her to believe that she actually was the morally debased individual that eugenics would claim, she still manages to rise above her circumstances to complete the novel as a tragic heroine. Wharton could hardly have disproved Eugenic thought any more thoroughly than she did through the triumph of Charity Royall over circumstance. Ironically, what gives Charity the strength to persevere through the turmoil at the end of the novel is her devotion to her unborn child, despite the fact that, as Bauer notes, eugenics places "the burden of good breeding" upon "what was called 'maternal culpability'" (30).

III

Since the time has come to examine the character of Charity Royall in greater depth, some discussion of her personality is due. Although her name, Charity, is suggested by the novel as being Lawyer Royall's constant
reminder to Charity that she is the result of his kindness, the name was not merely a product of Wharton's imagination. Shari Benstock mentions in her biography of Wharton that there actually was a real person named Charity Royall. Wharton read the name in a newspaper account of a black girl who was descended from a slave formerly owned by the southern branch of the Royall family. Despite the fact that the girl was in the newspaper for having committed a crime, Wharton was taken by her "fine" name and decided to use it in her writing (327). It is no coincidence then that Wharton's Charity is so defiant of society and its preoccupation with putting people in their place. Although it is doubtful that Wharton was attempting to model her own Charity after the original, it is worth noting that both girls were looked down upon by society and their heritage considered by many to be sub-human is worth noting.

Although it is quite evident from previous discussion that Charity has gone far beyond the presumed animalistic disposition of her Mountain family, she still retains a close tie with nature. Like few other characters in Wharton's writing, Charity perceives herself as a part of nature and depends on it to feel complete. Unlike the people of North Dormer, nature is always available and never criticizes her for being independent and desiring to be free from the constraints constantly being placed upon her. Margaret McDowell notes that Charity "never contends against nature as a hostile
force...but identifies with it as a source of moral and spiritual strength, rather than people" (69). From this insight it seems that Wharton is exploring the paradoxical nature of Charity's predicament in life. Society would have her leave her attachment to nature behind so that she might refine herself as a lady and conform more closely to social standards, yet at the same time it is that attachment to nature that allows her to maintain her social roles without collapsing under the weight they place upon her. Because of this, the North Dormer Library comes to represent much of what Charity hates about North Dormer because Mrs. Hatchard's disapproval of her leaving early signifies the efforts of the town to keep her caged up and "respectable." Charity thrives when she is among the sunshine and wildflowers at the Mountain's base, but is miserable in the dank confining library with only the bronze carving of Honorus Hatchard to look down upon her. After Charity accepts Lucius Harney as her lover, the library is mentioned very little because Charity feels that, through her relationship with Harney, she has found an escape from the confines that it symbolizes. Because the library is so tomb-like, it represents the way in which things in North Dormer are more likely to decay than to change. It is certainly no coincidence that the two lovers never set foot in the library together once their relationship is established. Late in the novel, however, in an ironic twist, Charity hides the bicycle that she rented to make her visits to Harney in their "love nest," thereby making what
was once a prison for her soul into a hiding place for her most cherished secret.

The combination of characteristics that comprises the character of Charity Royall makes her a powerful and unique heroine. She was born into a rough and bestial people from a mysterious mountain and yet raised with the conscience of a strict moral code. She takes strength and solace in nature, and yet she is able handle herself in the frightening city of Nettleton with its forbidding structures of brick and glass. She does not allow herself to be hurt by the ugly criticisms of others and yet is aware of the importance of keeping them at bay. Claiming to have never known fear, the young and vivid Charity Royall faces without flinching a world that seems bent on destroying her will at every turn. As a woman, and as the eventual mother that she becomes, Charity is Wharton's voice against social inequities towards women and her example of just what an injustice the cruel demands of society can be to anyone who dares to be their own person in the face of opposition.

Kathleen Pfeiffer describes Charity as "the new American heroine" (143) when she claims that Wharton is using her as an expression of her own changed attitudes towards womanhood. Certainly Wharton's views, as they were related to women's roles in society, were constantly evolving as she passed through a restrictive childhood and into a smothering and
dysfunctional marriage, and there is no doubt that she felt obligated to express as much in her writing. The notions that "respectable women were supposed to be as ignorant of sex as they were of business and politics" and that "sexual desire [is] the exclusive province of men and lower class women" (Thurer 213) did not sit well with the intelligent and thoughtful Wharton despite her initial efforts to live by them. By 1917 the now established author was living in France, and from this distance she was able to look back on the American life she left behind and see it more distinctly. It was through this clarity of vision that Charity Royall was born. In her own way, the independent and headstrong figure of Charity is the antagonist of much of what Wharton was critical of in American society. Charity does not allow herself to be dominated by male figures, whether out of love or daughterly obligation. She instead focuses her energies on living her own life for her own sake rather than for the sake of any family member or friend. Wharton is working her way along the less traveled path as she conceives Charity as a woman with the ability to exist as an individual without being defined by the people around her or by fulfilling stereotypical roles. Charity stands alone as a woman in her own right, a striking figure in the cramped and suffocating confines of North Dormer.

Throughout the novel Charity stands strong while the will of society batters her. When that will finally becomes too powerful for her to simply
defy, she does not bend to it, but rather seeks, in her trek to the Mountain, a new society and a mother that will accept her for who she is. This decision is not one made out of fear of reprisal, but out of determination not to sacrifice herself to the whim of any person, or even an entire culture. Upon her arrival at the home of her recently departed mother, Charity is faced for the first time in her memory with pure and complete poverty. Never has she realized that human beings could exist in such an environment and the potential animality of the human condition reveals itself to her without warning. Despite this, however, she is not afraid and insists upon staying even after the urgings of the preacher to leave. She accepts the Mountain people as her people and will not deny them any more than she would deny herself. Unfortunately, Charity discovers that though these people may represent her somewhat mysterious past, they do not represent the kind of future that she hopes to attain. Once she realizes that she does not belong among even her own people, she leaves them, intent upon finding someplace in the world where she fits in without having to make any fundamental changes in herself. Not even for her own people is Charity willing to sacrifice who she is and continues to fight for her own right to be the individual she has worked to become.

Pfeiffer later goes on to describe the novel as "reverberating with strong feminist anger. Set up as independent, rebellious and strong, Charity
Royall falls prey to the Myth of American Success but is denied the tools to achieve that success" (152). It is exactly this "set up" that Wharton uses to illustrate how trapped the American woman was and how impotent she often was to do anything about it. Even the fearless Charity Royall can do nothing to protect her baby from society's critical eye and hurtful approach if she continues to live for herself. In the end, she is even willing to submit herself to a life of prostitution rather than to a loveless marriage with a man she finds despicable, if that should be her only other choice. What she comes to realize, however, is that the will of another must eventually take precedence over her own. Because society's influence finally managed to place her in a situation where her own well-being was not the only one to be considered, Charity sacrifices her identity in her first entirely selfless act and thus she ceases to be a model of feminine independence as she falls into place, trapped within the confines of North Dormer. As Pfeiffer points out, the beginning of Charity's marriage is also the end of her story (151).

The fatal error that Charity makes that leads her to an eventually unavoidable fate with Lawyer Royall is that, for a short time, she gives in to the will of another in order to consider herself as whole. Carol Wershoven notes that "Harney, not Royall, represents the dangerous paternal power opposed to Charity; he fathers her child, thus making her a prisoner of her body" (119). Of course Charity does not have her virginity stolen from her
through rape or extortion, but goes willingly into the arms of Lucius Harney when he finally opens them to her. But by allowing him to define her, she has given up part of her freedom, and it is during that brief moment that her fate is sealed and her own will is no longer enough to shield her against the consequences of her actions. When Wendy Gimbel speaks on this subject she notes that "the male lures the young woman with the promise that she can be re-created in partnership" and that eventually "the woman is left to find her way alone, to carry the project through by herself" (113). It is almost as if society, incensed by Charity's defiance of it, has waited for her to make a mistake and eagerly leaps upon her when she eventually makes one. Wharton leaves no doubt that the quiet New England town in which her heroine was raised will not hesitate to devour her the minute she lets her guard down unless she submits to its demands immediately and completely.

Because Charity's reaction to Harney seems so natural, the eventual misfortune that arises is Wharton's way of showing that even good and natural things have bad consequences when they are corrupted by societal regulations and boundaries. Since there is nothing wrong with a young woman being attracted to a young man and falling "in love," it is that much more abhorrent that those simple feelings should result in the entire structure of her life collapsing. Wharton recognizes that there is no middle ground for women in her society and that they must either choose to be rejected, as
Charity originally is willing to be, or submit to the rules of society which inevitably results in a loss of free will and a crushed spirit. Because society defines the relationships between men and women so strictly, Charity cannot escape the consequences of her actions when she gives up her independence, even for just a brief moment, and thus the summer of her life comes to a close.

IV

Despite this somewhat dismal vision of Charity's future, Wharton is sure to leave her heroine with at least one solace, and that of course is her child. Though women may be manipulated and even ruined by society, not even those man-made rules can ever dissolve the power of motherhood. Of course what it means to be a mother is a complex subject, and it is not enough to say that a mother is an important figure without explaining exactly what is meant by the terms mother and motherhood and what it is that makes such a role so important.

Shari Thurer explains that "the so-called maternal instinct is a political hot potato" because it is derived from a Darwinian-based thinking that would, when taken to its extreme, suggest that women are nothing more than baby-making machines, genetically constructed to create and raise children (211). The damage that this sort of thinking might incur is obvious and as such it is
important to avoid such possible insinuations. Thurer does go on to explain that most people use the term "maternal instinct" rather loosely in an attempt to describe "those inner promptings which induce women to care for their children" (211). If "promptings" is a more accurate term than "instincts," then it would seem only fitting that they would be labeled as such. Thus, for the sake of this discussion, any mention of the apparently natural drive of a woman to be protective of and/or responsible for her children will be referred to as "maternal promptings" as might be suggested by Thurer's argument.

Marianne Hirsch argues in her book The Mother Daughter Plot that psychoanalysis has been the defining element in maternal discourse for so long that critics fail to relate to mother figures directly, but rather do so through the eyes of the developing child. The result of this thinking is that the mother perpetually remains an object responsible for certain functions in child-rearing and as such is not allowed an identity of her own (167). In order to avoid the pitfall that Hirsch describes, this paper will focus on the mother figure as she exists independently of her child. In other words, when discussing motherhood in Summer, it is the actions and abilities of the mother as they relate to her own situation in life that are most relevant, and though they may affect her child, they are not dependent upon it. As a result, a woman need not actually have raised her child to be a mother, nor need she even need to have given birth. A mother, as defined by this paper, is any
woman who has either given birth, or acted in direct response to the maternal promptings mentioned above. Of course, as was mentioned earlier by Ruddick, for a woman to actually fulfill her role as mother, she must attempt to achieve the three main criteria.

Because Wharton uses Charity as a criticism of societal restrictions and labels, it is appropriate to support Thurer’s and Hirsch’s arguments when discussing her writing by portraying mothers as whole people, and not machines designed by nature or society whose only task is to raise socially satisfactory children. Certainly Charity is more than "just a woman" or "just a pregnant girl in a sticky situation," rather, as has been proven many times earlier, she is a complete and independent human being. In fact, as Charity begins to recognize her new responsibilities as a mother, she is able to regain some of the independence that she lost when she fell victim to Harney’s socially regulated game. Though her marriage to Lawyer Royall may have restricted her freedom superficially, she will gain something new by giving birth and raising her child. Though it seems almost paradoxical, the only way Charity can attain the new power of motherhood is by submitting to the socially required marriage that is responsible for restricting all of the previous power she held as single woman. As she has seen by example of her own mother, attempting to leave society with a child only results in the passing on of societal condemnation to that child. If Charity would have
stayed up on the Mountain with her people after the funeral, she would eventually no longer be fit to rejoin the society she left behind but would finally feel obligated to give up her child for its own sake. As a result, Charity submits to her maternal promptings and sacrifices freedom over her own life for an influence over that of her child.

Before Charity can fully accept her role as mother, she must journey to the place of her birth and face her own heritage. She now realizes that her own situation is not far from her mother's and thus seeks her out to find both sanctuary as well as the answers she is looking for. Of course once she arrives at the ramshackle gathering of huts from which Lawyer Royall had "rescued" her, Charity realizes that what she is looking for cannot be explained to her by the missing maternal figure in her life, but must be realized within herself. When this realization is at its fullest, Charity has a revelation about her mother's decision to give her away so many years before:

Well, after all, was her mother so much to blame? Charity, since that day, had always thought of her as destitute of all human feeling; now she seemed merely pitiful. What mother would not want to save her child from such a life? Charity thought of the future of her own child, and tears welled into aching eyes, and ran down over her face. If she had been less exhausted, less burdened with his weight, she would have sprung up then and there and fled away. (173)
Suzan Goodman explains that "Charity must...define herself in relation to her own mother and to the child she carries. Projected motherhood has made her more keenly aware of her own motherlessness, and her journey to the mountain, prompted by desperate need, is itself a quest for identity" (F&R 81). It is at this point in the novel when Charity's maternal promptings assail her with their full force. Beforehand she was aware of her obligation to her unborn child, but never before was she so conscious of the magnitude of the sacrifice that might be required of her. By her mother's selfless action in sending her to live with Lawyer Royall, Charity has received not only the benefit of escaping from the dire straits of complete poverty, but also learns the true price of being a "good" mother. Certainly if a woman of such "loose" morals as Charity's mother could be so truly noble at heart and yet be so oppressed by prudish ideals that she be driven from her world to live and die like an animal, then there must be a deeply-rooted flaw in the community that upholds such ideals. Goodman goes on to note that though Charity's mother was condemned by society for her promiscuity, Wharton redeems her by showing that her choice to run away to the mountains and eventually give her child away is an alternative both to abortion or a life of prostitution (81).

Wharton's criticism of societal views of motherhood is compounded by the fact that Charity's adopted mother, Mrs. Royall, has had all the benefits of a solid upbringing, a stable marriage, and a steady income and yet fails to be
a good parent herself. Mrs. Royall was alive and capable during Charity's childhood and yet did not contribute to her adopted daughter's sense of self. She did not instill values or morals within Charity either directly or by example. In fact, it seems that the only commendable attribute that Mrs. Royall helped Charity establish was to strengthen her will by showing her exactly what she did not want to be. Although Mrs. Royall is mentioned only briefly and certainly was not a disagreeable parent, she was quite ineffective and is remembered by her adopted daughter only as being "sad and timid and weak" (13) while living under the dominant force of Lawyer Royall. In contrast, Charity speculates that her birth mother must have been "young and slight, with quick motions of the blood like hers" (37) so that even an imaginary mother, and eventually a dead one, has more to offer than the impotent Mrs. Royall. By this contrast Charity recognizes for herself that money and social position are not enough make a good mother and that being a good mother is also not adequate to make a person socially successful. Rhonda Skillem suggests that Charity learns that the "maternal community" does not provide for any economic or representational power by example of her mother (132). Clearly Wharton is making the point that good motherhood is not a matter of good breeding or a lack of passion, sexual or otherwise.
Though the novel closes with Charity submitting herself to an apparently loveless marriage, the circumstances are far too complex to interpret her act as a total surrender. As was mentioned earlier, Charity adopts a new power in marriage that, at least partially, helps to cushion the blow of losing her previously boundless freedom. Not only will she have a great deal of influence over a young and malleable person when her child is born, but she will establish herself as the true matron of the Royall household, a role she was only partially able to fulfill before. Though her liberties in society will be greatly reduced, her liberties in the Royall household will increase greatly. Charity still retains her ability to dominate the will of Lawyer Royall, but will now have cause to question where he goes and how he spends his money. Though these issues were not of much interest to her before, she was certainly not in a position to demand such information then as under her new circumstances. In other words, she need not feel nearly as obligated to explain herself to her husband as he should to her. Unfortunately, an additional price that must be paid is Charity's sexuality, which cannot express itself in the arms of Lawyer Royal, but Charity will likely continue to make such tradeoffs throughout her marriage.

What Carol Wershoven points out is that if Charity had gone off to New York and married Hamey, she might have been much more restricted in her actions. From Wershoven's point of view, Charity is better off having
accepted the power allotted to her within the red walls of the Royall household than she would have been had she pursued the superficial liberty of a New York life with her lover (122). As interesting as this point is, however, it is more likely that the greatest threat that Charity would have faced had she gone to marry Harney is a loveless marriage even worse than that with Lawyer Royall. In addition to this, by keeping her child, as well as keeping it secret from Harney, Charity has already established a certain level of her maternal power. She has the authority to dictate whether Harney has a clean conscience as well as the power to regulate any influence he might otherwise wish to assert over his own child. After her visit to Dr. Mirkle when her pregnancy is fully realized, “[Charity] no longer had any difficulty in picturing herself as Harney’s wife now that she was the mother of his child; and compared to her sovereign right, Annabel Balch’s claim seemed no more than a girl’s sentimental fancy” (151)³.

Despite the realization of the power that her pregnancy allows her over Harney’s life, Charity refuses to give in to the desire to use that power. She is determined that if Harney should stay with her, even eventually marry her, he will do so completely of his own free will and not take any action because Lawyer Royall, society, or moral obligation prompt him to do so.

³ In her short story “Roman Fever,” Wharton explores in more detail the claim that the mother of a man’s child holds over his motherless wife. The conclusion drawn is very similar to the one that Charity makes in Summer.
Again, Wharton is demonstrating through Charity the uprightness of a character who might otherwise be criticized for being promiscuous. Perhaps Charity has too ideal an image of what her future should be like, but certainly it is better to have aspirations that are too high to attain than to be of such low character that aspirations do not even exist. Motherhood, as portrayed through Charity, does not make a person more righteous and simply giving birth or attempting to raise a child does not make a woman a good mother. Wharton has seen in her own society that money and prudishness are considered to be the foundation of good motherhood and has created Charity Royall to prove just what a farce such a belief truly is. The lack of a strong central maternal character in Summer illustrates above all else that despite the potential of strong women like Charity and her mother, society will simply not allow that potential to be realized if such women do not submit to its many regulations.

V

Although the events that take place within the pages of Summer do not mirror those of Wharton's life, there is a tie between the author and the events of her text that many critics have taken the time to explore. Because Wharton was making such strong social comments in her novel, it is only logical that certain personal feelings would interject themselves among the
pages of Summer, but her connection to Charity goes deeper than merely sympathy for her plight. Suzan Goodman, whose comments regarding Wharton's tendency to insert autobiographical elements into her texts were mentioned earlier, states that Summer is an example of the author's ability to "find or create one's own mother if the original seems...inadequate" and that her choice of genre in general "can be seen as an attempt to fuse the two seemingly antithetical forces that ruled her childhood: God and mother" (M&D 130). It is difficult to imagine how Wharton could be attempting to "create" her own mother in a novel in which a central maternal figure was so absent, but the devotion that Charity has to her unborn child would definitely be a trait that any child should wish of its own mother. What is apparent though, is Wharton's continuing struggle to understand a motherhood that she never acted on and was never able to experience first hand. This in itself is perhaps Wharton's most intimate tie to the text.

What Goodman suggests in another of her works is that Charity's identification with, but eventual rejection of her mother, mirrors Wharton's own (F&R 81-82). How true this might be is difficult even to speculate, especially considering the fact that Charity eventually came to grips with her mother and understood the sacrifice she had made for her, while Wharton did not appear to have ever fully accepted her own experiences with her mother as adequate. Certainly Wharton spent the better part of her life
attempting to understand her mother, and it would seem that many of her biographers agree that she was never able to find such comfort in her lifetime, but *Summer* is more a novel about how society attempts to create mothers and the tragic consequences of the failed endeavors, than an exploration of her own mother. If Wharton is saying anything about her mother through this text, it tells us that her mother had the upbringing, the money, and the influence to be a great mother, and yet still failed to have the compassion of a poor and socially flawed mountain girl like Charity Royall.

Wharton's anger towards the stifling restrictions that society places on sexual expression, especially of women, also acts as a link to the novel. Wharton herself was certainly not very aware of the sexual relations between men and woman until after she was married, and yet Charity already claims to know "all about men" even before having had her romantic relationship with Harney. In this respect, Charity's summer romance reflects the sort of relationship that Wharton would have liked to have been able to at least understand, if not actually experience, when she was a younger woman. David Holbrook suggests that though Charity is a very different person from Wharton, "she is yet another alter ego; we see the world of the remote village through her eyes, and we experience through her the yearnings to fulfill herself sexually, from adolescence through motherhood" (97). This would seem likely as Wharton illustrates through *Summer* that budding sexuality is
a natural and healthy thing but that it has terrible consequences when it is forced into hiding by the same smothering and restrictive societal rules that had kept her in blinders for so much of her life.

A somewhat less specific tie that Wharton may have had to this novel is suggested by Cynthia Griffin Wolf who says that, "Summer offers a suggestion for attainable happiness—paradoxically, a happiness thoroughly colored by imperfection. The kind of halfway happiness, perhaps, that was the utmost Edith Wharton herself ever managed to achieve" (398). An observation made on a similar note by Kathy Fedorko is that "As mother and writer [Wharton] is empowered by [Charity's] courageous plunge into the dark abyss of self-knowledge, because these choices evolved out of her confrontation with overwhelming uncertainties and fears about herself" (82). What these two ideas have in common is that they suggest that Wharton used Charity as a mirror of her own failures and fears in life. Perhaps she felt that she had once had the power to be so much more than she became, had failed to take advantage of it, and eventually found herself trapped in an unhappy marriage. Because Wharton had divorced her husband just three years prior to the publication of Summer, she had only recently begun to explore the new limits of her economic and social independence, and Charity's plight may reflect her own fear of being a victim of circumstance despite all of her efforts to the contrary. What is evident overall, however, is
that both Charity and Wharton faced many obstacles and tragedies in their lives, but neither ever surrendered willingly to the demands of society.

***

For as brief a novel as *Summer* is, it explores a vast arena of subject matter that Wharton's original critics were either blind to, or simply chose to dismiss. It addresses the consequences of the sexual repression that Freud made so well-known, the farce of Eugenic-based thinking, as well as the true qualities necessary for a woman to be a good person and mother as opposed to those that culture dictates are best. Certainly Wharton put a great deal of thought into the crafting of Charity Royall, whose spirit withstood the crushing blows that society dealt it, and yet was able to bend to the needs of her child without being broken, though not without serious and unfortunate sacrifices such as her sexuality. Charity acts both as a reflection of characteristics that Wharton wished she could have expressed when she was young, as well as those she was fortunate enough to avoid.

Though flawed in ways that often condemned her by her community, Charity rises from the ashes of her summer of passion and error as a heroine, due to her strength and perseverance. Wharton's lesson to her readers is not only that societal thinking is fundamentally flawed and harmful when it attempts to confine and control, but also that though a true individual
may be beaten down, she never need be mastered. Although Charity does eventually marry Lawyer Royall as a means of protecting her baby, she does not surrender her power over him or his red house. Though her choices in life have been restricted, Charity has not lost her spirit and Wharton leaves her readers with the hope that she will not only learn to appreciate her situation, but will also be a wonderful mother because she has both the material means that her own mother lacked, as well as the passion to do so.

What Wharton ultimately says in Summer is that society unfairly restricts women through denial of their sexuality and by claiming that poor mothers are the cause of social woes. Wharton leaves no room for doubt that such thinking results in even the strongest of women facing hardship and loss because they are not allowed to realize themselves as whole individuals and must instead deny their passions for the sake of appearances. It was those appearances that Wharton was subject to all of her childhood and was forced to deal with even as she lay on her death bed.
CHAPTER TWO: PEDAGOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As a novel, *Summer* is an appropriate novel for classroom use, especially at the high school level, for many reasons. To begin with, many high schools already use *Ethan Frome* as part of their English curriculum and *Summer* is an excellent companion to that novel. If two novels by one author are too much for one semester, then certainly *Summer* would be appropriate for the second semester, or any class that would act as a continuation of the first. In addition to its textual similarities and connections with *Ethan Frome*, *Summer* is also one of Wharton's shorter novels and does not require a great deal of time to read and so can be explored in its entirety within a reasonable amount of time.

A second consideration, more closely tied to high school students than to post-secondary scholars, is that *Summer* is fairly easy to comprehend. The English that Wharton uses is quite modern and the vocabulary is not unduly complex. The events of the novel flow in a generally straight line and there are few, if any, events that are difficult to understand within the context of the novel. These factors are important to consider because for students to feel comfortable talking about a book they must first be at least somewhat comfortable reading it. Certainly Wharton's *Summer* is not intimidating at all for an early twentieth-century piece of literature and though students are
often irritated by the sight of a stack of novels when they walk into the classroom, there should be no fear in their eyes when they see that they are to read *Summer*. Of course when working with students of varying reading ability some frustration may arise, but nothing that cannot be worked out through class discussion and regular review of assigned readings in the novel.

As has been discussed earlier, *Summer* is almost bursting with social commentary, much of which is still relevant today. The issue of what makes a good mother, or even what makes a good parent, the constant debate over custody battles, adoption proceedings, and deliberations to determine unfit parents are in the media almost every day. In addition, the issue of women's roles and the unfair restrictions that society places on women has unfortunately not resolved itself in the eighty-one years since Wharton wrote her novel, and as such remains a fertile source of discussion. Students should be encouraged to question the decisions that Charity makes in the novel and consider what alternatives she would have had then, as opposed to today. They should ask themselves what options were open to a young woman in Charity's position and how things could have worked out differently. There are limitless directions to take a discussion as it is related to *Summer*, many of which are significance and important to a high school audience.
What makes this novel potentially appealing to a high school-aged group is that the character of Charity Royal is herself an independent and headstrong young woman who shows no fear. She lives by her own rules and rebels against any attempt to control her, which is an attitude often admired and questioned by teenagers. Though the ending might be a disappointment for many, it is an excellent opening for discussion as students work through their own understanding of Charity's decisions. Whether or not many of the students can relate to Charity's plight is unknown, but it is likely that a great many of them will be able to sympathize with the hardship that she experiences. Students should understand that many of the factors that drove Charity along her course to the end of the novel were beyond her control, as is often the case in life, and they should be allowed to determine if those factors were fair to Charity or anyone else in her situation. Students should be encouraged to identify similarities between Charity's situation and possible scenarios that happen today. It is important for them to recognize that the world has not changed nearly as much as it should have since 1917 and that what Charity and Lucious experience in the novel is not nearly as fictional as they might think. The world still places unfair demands upon women while continuing to restrain their passions and aspirations, and when students are asked to consider this they will have an excellent outlet for discussion.
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