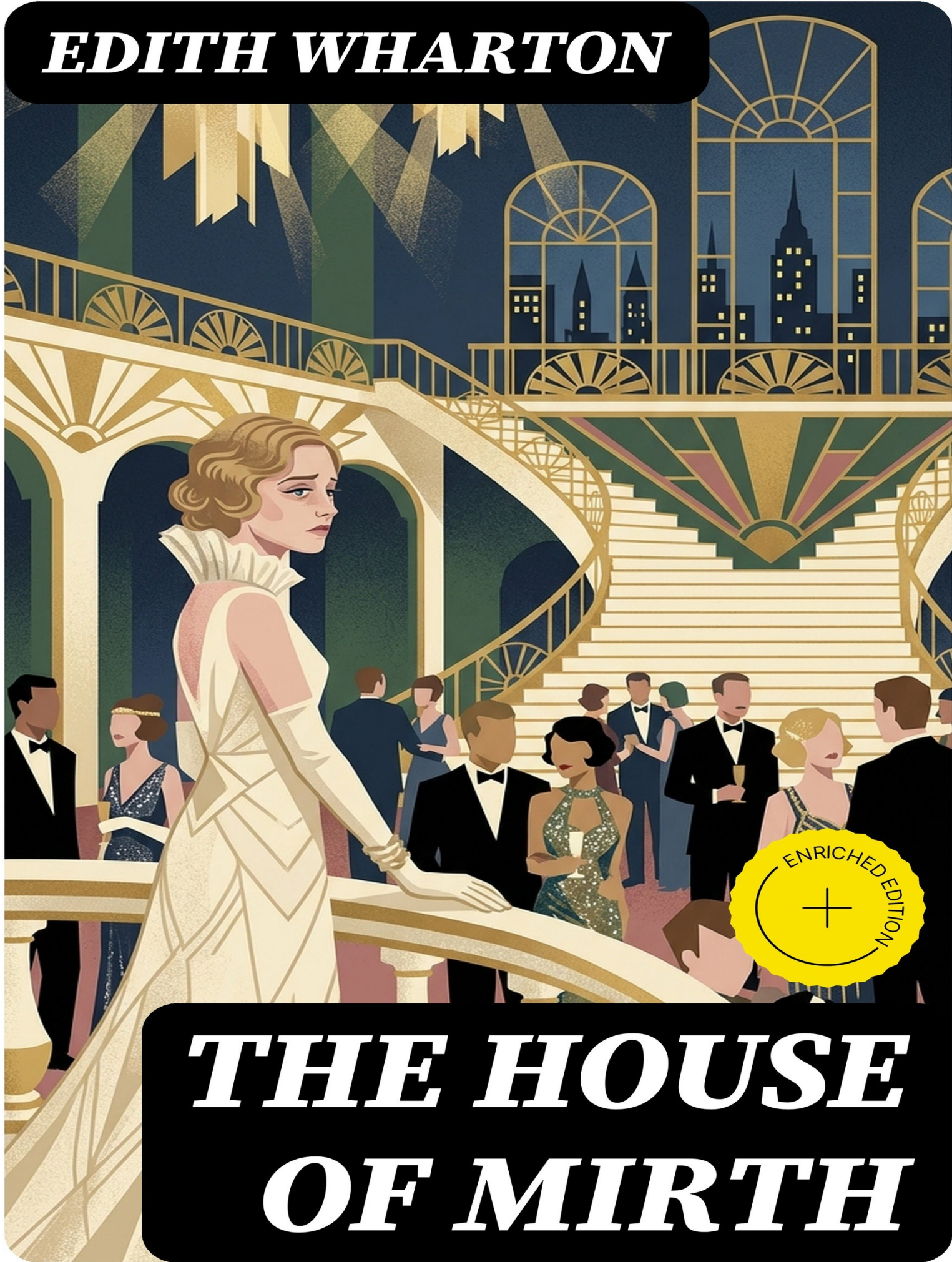


EDITH WHARTON



***THE HOUSE
OF MIRTH***

Edith Wharton

The House of Mirth (Annotated)

**Enriched Edition. A Gilded Age Social Satire of
Wealth, Marriage, Class Ambition, and the Price of
Social Acceptance**

*In this **enriched edition**, we have carefully created added
value for your reading experience.*

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Maxwell Clark

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Introduction

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In a world where beauty functions as currency and reputation as law, one misstep can turn social privilege into a trap.

Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, first published in 1905, endures as a classic because it renders social life with the precision of a moral anatomist and the force of a tragic design. Its achievement lies not in sensational plot turns but in its steady, lucid exposure of how a community's rules shape individual choices. Wharton combines psychological insight with a cool, observant narrative intelligence, producing a novel that feels both intimate and analytical. The book's lasting stature comes from this balance: it is at once a compelling story and a sustained inquiry into power, value, and belonging.

Written in the early twentieth century and set among New York's fashionable circles, the novel reflects the social milieu Wharton knew and scrutinized. By the time of its publication, American society was negotiating rapid economic change and a newly conspicuous culture of wealth. *The House of Mirth* captures a moment when old codes of conduct still claimed authority even as money and display reconfigured social hierarchies. Wharton's realism is attentive to surfaces—dress, interiors, conversation—while never mistaking them for mere decoration. They become instruments through which the era's expectations are enforced.

At the center of the novel is Lily Bart, a young woman whose position depends on navigating a world of rigid conventions and limited acceptable futures. She moves within a network of wealthy acquaintances, social invitations, and unspoken rules that reward the right alliances and punish deviation. The premise is simple and stark: Lily must secure her place in society while confronting the costs of the very system that grants her access. Wharton builds this setup without relying on melodrama, instead showing how daily decisions, social pressures, and economic realities interlock. The stakes are personal, yet the forces are structural.

Wharton's classic status also rests on the novel's technical control. The narrative voice observes its characters with an exacting clarity that reveals both their self-deceptions and their vulnerabilities. Scenes of drawing rooms, country houses, and public spaces become stages where gestures and phrasing carry real consequence. Wharton's prose is disciplined and visual, creating a social landscape that feels tangible and governed by rules as binding as any legal code. The result is a novel in which atmosphere and ethics are inseparable. Readers come away understanding not only what happens, but how a culture makes certain outcomes plausible.

The House of Mirth is frequently recognized for its incisive treatment of money and marriage as organizing forces of social life. Wharton depicts economic dependence not as an abstract theme but as a daily condition that shapes judgment and freedom. Marriage appears less as romance than as a sanctioned means of stability, mobility,

or protection, especially for women. Yet the novel refuses simple moralizing: it portrays characters who are calculating, kind, cruel, or conflicted, often at once. This complexity gives the book its enduring power. It forces readers to consider how virtue and survival may be set at odds by circumstance.

Equally central is Wharton's attention to social performance. The novel shows how the self can become a project, maintained through appearances, conversational finesse, and constant vigilance. The pressure to be admired, to remain desirable, and to avoid gossip is not merely vanity; it is a means of staying afloat. Wharton traces how quickly admiration can curdle into suspicion, and how a community can enforce its norms through exclusion rather than open accusation. Without revealing later developments, it is enough to say that Lily's environment is both dazzling and unforgiving. The glamour is real, but so are the penalties.

Wharton's portrayal of New York high society helped set a standard for American novels of manners. She demonstrates how a narrow social setting can illuminate broad questions about ethics, agency, and social justice. *The House of Mirth* shows that the tensions of class are not confined to workplaces or politics; they are present in leisure, etiquette, and friendship. By rendering these subtleties with seriousness, Wharton expanded what American fiction could claim as significant material. Her example encouraged later writers to treat social observation as a legitimate vehicle for critique. The novel's influence persists in fiction that studies privilege from within.

The book also remains notable for its focus on a woman's constrained options within a socially regulated economy. Wharton does not present these constraints as individual failings; they are embedded in institutions, expectations, and the distribution of resources. The novel's sympathy is tempered by unsparing clarity, which makes its social critique more convincing. Rather than offering easy villains or simple solutions, Wharton shows how ordinary people participate in a system that harms even those it celebrates. This method—patient, observant, and ethically alert—has resonated with generations of readers. It keeps the novel from aging into a mere period piece.

Although rooted in its time, *The House of Mirth* sustains suspense through the immediacy of its dilemmas. Readers recognize the familiar pressures of status anxiety, the fear of misinterpretation, and the difficulty of making choices under scrutiny. Wharton's world is governed by invitations, introductions, and reputational currents, yet the emotional experiences are widely legible: hope, shame, longing, and calculation. The novel's realism does not flatten its characters; it reveals them as beings who want dignity as well as comfort. That layered humanity is part of why the book continues to attract new audiences.

The novel's title hints at a social house built on pleasure, display, and collective amusement, but Wharton is attentive to what such mirth conceals. Entertainment becomes labor, charm becomes strategy, and leisure becomes a contested arena where power is negotiated. Wharton's control of tone—at once elegant and critical—invites readers to admire the beauty of the setting while questioning its cost. This dual

response is essential to the book's artistry. It teaches readers to read surfaces as meaningful, not superficial. In doing so, it sharpens our perception of how cultures manufacture consensus about what is valuable.

As a work of American literature, *The House of Mirth* also stands as a bridge between nineteenth-century social realism and later modern psychological and social critique. It invites comparison with other novels of manners while remaining distinct in its American setting and its attention to finance and reputation as intertwined forces. Wharton's particular accomplishment is to make a specific social world feel at once historically situated and structurally recognizable. Her method has influenced writers who examine class, gender, and the performative nature of identity. The novel's critical legacy lies in this combination of narrative drive and sociological acuity. It remains a model of how fiction can think as well as feel.', 'More than a century after its 1905 publication, *The House of Mirth* speaks to contemporary concerns about inequality, social mobility, and the policing of public image. Modern readers can see in its world the early outlines of pressures that now play out on larger stages, from professional networks to media-driven reputations. Wharton's novel endures because it refuses to reduce its heroine or her society to caricature; it insists on complexity, consequence, and the gravity of choices made within constraint. Its appeal is lasting precisely because its questions remain unsettled. What does it cost to belong, and who gets to decide the terms? In returning to Wharton's New York, readers confront those questions with renewed clarity.

Synopsis

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Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905) follows Lily Bart, a beautiful and socially accomplished young woman moving through New York's fashionable world at the turn of the twentieth century. Introduced amid the rituals of travel, visits, and leisure, Lily appears adept at the codes that govern her circle, yet she is also financially insecure and dependent on the goodwill of wealthy acquaintances. The novel quickly frames her central dilemma: she must secure stability without forfeiting the self-respect and personal freedom she values, while her society treats marriage and money as the primary measures of success.

paragraphs continue: Lily navigates a sequence of social gatherings and country-house weekends where status is displayed and tested through small gestures, invitations, and affiliations. Her beauty and charm make her desirable, but they also intensify expectations that she will make a strategically advantageous match. Potential suitors and benefactors evaluate her as an asset, and friends alternately support or exploit her as it suits their interests. Wharton depicts this milieu as governed by unspoken rules, with reputations formed by hints and insinuations as much as by observable actions, leaving little margin for missteps.

paragraphs continue: A key thread involves Lily's tenuous finances and the pressure of debts incurred to maintain appearances. She relies on wealthy relatives and the fluctuating generosity of her circle, and she confronts

the reality that glamour is expensive and credit is conditional. As she considers marriage as a solution, she also recognizes the compromises it may require, including the surrender of independence and the acceptance of values she does not fully share. The novel places her internal debates alongside the external scrutiny of a community that demands conformity while pretending to prize refinement.

paragraphs continue: Lily's relationships with several men illuminate different possibilities within this world: security through conventional alliance, comfort through patronage, or companionship that does not neatly translate into financial rescue. Among these figures is Lawrence Selden, whose relative detachment from high society and critical intelligence attract Lily even as his position offers limited material protection. Their conversations raise questions about freedom, moral responsibility, and what it would mean to live outside the "tribe" of wealth. Yet even moments of candor are constrained by gossip and by the social risks of being misunderstood.

paragraphs continue: As the narrative progresses, Lily becomes entangled in rivalries among women who compete for attention, influence, and control over social narratives. Friendships prove transactional, and hostesses wield invitations and exclusions as instruments of power. Wharton shows how small slights can be amplified into lasting damage, and how people with money can absorb scandals that would ruin someone less protected. Lily's own choices, sometimes impulsive and sometimes principled, interact with these forces in ways that expose the fragility of her

position and the ease with which society can recast her image.

paragraphs continue: The novel also introduces the role of information and suspicion as social currency. Rumors circulate rapidly, and private encounters can be interpreted to serve others' agendas. Lily confronts situations in which discretion, honesty, and self-preservation pull in different directions. Wharton's depiction of this environment emphasizes that ethical behavior does not always receive social reward, especially when it conflicts with economic interests. Lily's efforts to maintain dignity can paradoxically increase her vulnerability, because she lacks the financial buffer that allows others to treat moral compromise as merely another cost of doing business.

paragraphs continue: Increasingly pressured, Lily faces narrowing options for remaining in the world she has been trained to inhabit. Wharton traces how dependence on fashionable society creates a kind of captivity: one must keep spending to appear worthy, yet any lapse invites exclusion and further financial strain. Lily attempts to find stability through work and through revised expectations, but she confronts limited opportunities for women of her background and education. The contrast between the elegance of drawing rooms and the harsher realities beyond them becomes more pronounced, sharpening the novel's critique of class and gender constraints.

paragraphs continue: Alongside Lily's decline in social standing, the novel continues to examine Selden's perspective and the broader moral landscape of the elite. Characters who profit from the system justify themselves

through polite language and selective memory, while those who suffer are urged to accept blame for circumstances shaped by unequal power. Wharton portrays a society that prizes taste and leisure but depends on economic arrangements and social exclusions it prefers not to acknowledge. Lily's story becomes a lens through which the reader sees how beauty, virtue, and intelligence can be treated as commodities when survival is tied to public perception.

paragraphs continue: In its final movement, *The House of Mirth* sustains tension around whether Lily can secure a livable future and what form personal integrity can take under relentless social pressure. The narrative remains focused on the consequences of a world that equates worth with wealth and treats women's lives as strategic assets. Without relying on sensational revelations, Wharton builds a cumulative portrait of how ordinary social mechanisms—gossip, debt, invitation, and advantage—can determine a person's fate. The book endures as a pointed examination of privilege, constraint, and the human cost of making society itself into a marketplace.

Historical Context

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The House of Mirth is set primarily in New York City and its nearby resorts in the early years of the twentieth century, when the nation's financial and social power was increasingly concentrated in a small, highly visible elite. The dominant institutions shaping the novel's world include private wealth held through investment and inheritance, exclusive social clubs and "society" drawing rooms, and the informal but rigid codes of reputation enforced by that social circle. Wharton places her characters amid Fifth Avenue households, country estates, and seasonal travel patterns that were recognizable features of upper-class life in this period.

The novel's social landscape reflects the aftermath of the Gilded Age (roughly the 1870s through the 1890s) and the opening decades of the Progressive Era (about 1890s–1910s). Enormous fortunes had been made in railroads, finance, steel, and other industries, producing a wealthy class whose consumption became a public spectacle. At the same time, reformers criticized corruption, monopolies, and inequality, and journalists publicized the mechanisms of power. Wharton's narrative draws on this historical tension: luxury and certainty on the surface, anxiety and social scrutiny beneath it.

Edith Wharton (born 1862) was herself formed by "Old New York" society, the established Protestant elite that prized lineage, manners, and controlled access to social

spaces. By the late nineteenth century, that older elite faced competition from newly wealthy families whose fortunes were made in relatively recent industrial and financial expansion. Social standing could no longer rest on pedigree alone; it also depended on money, display, and strategic alliances. The House of Mirth stages these pressures through a world in which invitations, introductions, and gossip function as forms of social governance, determining who is sheltered and who is exposed.

By the 1890s and early 1900s, New York City had become a national hub of finance, with Wall Street shaping business practices and personal wealth. Speculation, stock manipulation, and insider advantage were widely discussed, and trust-busting debates highlighted the reach of large corporate combinations. Wharton's novel repeatedly turns to the language of investments and "tips" to show how money flows through personal networks. This is historically consonant with the era's blend of formal markets and informal influence, in which social proximity to financiers could create opportunities—and public scandal when such dealings appeared improper.

The book also reflects the period's highly visible culture of leisure among the rich, including travel between city and countryside and attendance at resorts. In the late nineteenth century, places such as Newport, Rhode Island, became symbols of extravagant summer "cottages" that were in fact mansions, while New York's elite maintained seasonal rounds of dinners, opera, and country-house weekends. Such patterns were enabled by rail travel and a

growing service economy. Wharton's settings make clear that leisure was not simply relaxation; it was a stage for competition, matchmaking, and the performance of belonging.

Conspicuous consumption, a term famously analyzed by economist Thorstein Veblen in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), provides a key historical lens for the novel's preoccupations. Veblen described how the wealthy used visible waste and luxury to signal status, and how social honor became tied to expensive display. Wharton's characters inhabit a culture where clothing, interiors, and entertainment communicate rank. The novel echoes this critique by showing that luxury can be both a social necessity and a trap, demanding continuous expenditure to maintain one's position and making personal worth appear interchangeable with outward signs.

The gender order of the era is essential context. Women of the upper classes often faced expectations to marry advantageously, manage social households, and embody respectability, while many legal and economic structures limited independent female security. In many states, married women's property rights had expanded over the nineteenth century, but financial autonomy in practice still often depended on family arrangements, inheritance, or marriage settlements. Employment for "ladies" carried stigma in elite circles. Wharton draws on these constraints to illustrate how a woman's social value could be treated as precarious capital, vulnerable to reputation and to the availability of a suitable marriage.

Courtship and marriage were deeply entwined with class maintenance. Elite families frequently viewed marriage as a means of consolidating wealth, stabilizing status, and regulating access to social circles. Divorce, though increasingly visible by the early twentieth century, remained socially damaging in many respectable settings, and sexual double standards often gave men wider latitude than women. Wharton portrays a world in which engagement and marriage negotiations are inseparable from calculations of income and connections. The novel's depiction of rumor and moral judgment reflects how reputation operated as a form of social currency, particularly for women whose prospects were considered fragile.

The early twentieth century also saw expanding consumer culture. Department stores, ready-to-wear clothing, and mass advertising grew, especially in major cities, making fashionable goods more accessible and intensifying attention to style as a social marker. While the novel focuses on the wealthy, it still registers a broader context in which goods circulate and appearances matter. Fashionable dress, costly entertaining, and the expectation of constant novelty were historically linked to new retail and production systems. Wharton uses these everyday material pressures to show how a social environment can demand continuous spending to avoid being read as "behind."

Domestic service was another enabling institution of elite life. In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century urban America, middle- and upper-class households often relied on servants for cooking, cleaning, and personal care, though labor markets for domestic work were changing.

Immigration and internal migration shaped the supply of servants, and reformers and workers debated hours, conditions, and respect. Wharton's society depends on this largely invisible labor to sustain its rituals of leisure. The very possibility of frequent dinners, travel, and meticulous presentation rests on household labor systems that were common in this historical moment.

New York's rapid growth and immigration are an important backdrop even when the narrative remains within elite spaces. Between roughly 1880 and 1920, the United States experienced large-scale immigration, with New York as a major entry point. The city's population expanded and neighborhoods transformed, while tenement reform, public health, and labor issues became urgent political topics. Wharton's focus on a narrow social stratum can be read against this broader urban reality: the wealthy world depicted in the novel is insulated, yet its wealth is connected to an urban economy and to a city whose inequalities were increasingly visible.

The Progressive Era context included campaigns against political corruption and for social reform, including women's suffrage activism, settlement house work, and investigations into labor conditions. New York State and City were sites of both machine politics and reform movements, and journalists publicized abuses in business and government. Wharton was not writing a reform tract, but she was attentive to how institutions and social codes constrain individuals. The novel's critique of hypocrisy and punitive morality resonates with an era that was publicly

debating the costs of unchecked power and the need for ethical standards.

Entertainment culture also informs the novel's settings. The Metropolitan Opera, founded in the 1880s, became a central venue for New York's social display; attending was as much about being seen as hearing music. Theater, restaurants, and private parties similarly functioned as social arenas. Such spaces relied on a mix of new wealth and established families, and they reinforced hierarchies through boxes, invitations, and seating. Wharton draws on these recognizable institutions of urban high society to show that culture could be used as an instrument of social sorting rather than purely aesthetic enjoyment.

Technological and infrastructural changes shaped the mobility and rhythm of elite life. By the turn of the century, rail networks made travel between city, country estates, and resorts relatively routine for those who could afford it. Urban improvements such as electric lighting and expanded transportation systems altered nightlife and public spaces, while telephones and faster mail affected communication among households. Wharton's characters' rapid movements and constant social coordination reflect a historically plausible world of improved connectivity—one that intensified social surveillance by enabling information, invitations, and rumors to circulate quickly.

The world of *The House of Mirth* is also linked to the legal and financial mechanics of inheritance and trusts. Large fortunes were often managed through family arrangements and investments, and access to capital could hinge on the terms of wills, allowances, and social expectations about

what was “proper.” For women especially, financial stability might depend on relatives’ decisions or on marriage settlements rather than wages. Wharton’s attention to allowances, debts, and the need to maintain appearances reflects these historically grounded realities of wealth management and dependency within elite families.

Wharton wrote the novel in a period when American literary realism and naturalism were examining social forces and their effects on individual lives. Writers and critics increasingly treated economic pressures, social environments, and institutional power as shaping character and fate. Wharton’s own experience within the elite gave her detailed knowledge of its rituals, while her career placed her within a professionalizing literary culture that valued social observation. The novel’s precise rendering of manners and money aligns with this broader literary movement toward depicting society as a system with rules and consequences.

In closing, *The House of Mirth* functions as both mirror and critique of early twentieth-century American high society, revealing how wealth, gender norms, and reputational discipline operated as interlocking historical forces. Without requiring sensational plot turns, Wharton shows how institutions that appear informal—visits, invitations, gossip, and marriage expectations—can have material power over livelihoods. The novel also reflects a transitional era in which old claims of lineage confronted new financial realities, and public debates about inequality shadowed private luxury. Its historical significance lies in

exposing the costs of a culture that turns social belonging into an unforgiving economy.

Author Biography

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Edith Wharton (1862–1937) was an American novelist, short-story writer, and critic whose work helped define literary realism in the early twentieth century. Born in New York City and active on both sides of the Atlantic, she became a sharp observer of wealth, custom, and moral constraint, especially within elite social worlds. Her fiction is noted for its disciplined prose, psychological insight, and attention to the pressures that institutions and conventions impose on individual choice. Across novels, novellas, travel writing, and criticism, she developed a distinctive voice that linked American subjects to European literary traditions.

Wharton received a largely private education, typical of her social milieu, supplemented by extensive reading and travel. She read widely in European literature and engaged deeply with the craft of fiction, later addressing questions of technique in essays and in her well-known critical study *The Writing of Fiction*. Her work shows the imprint of nineteenth-century realism and the emerging modern psychological novel, alongside an enduring interest in the social uses of etiquette, taste, and “good form.” Rather than grounding her authority in formal academic credentials, Wharton built her literary formation through disciplined study, revision, and engagement with contemporary literary debates.

She began publishing in the late nineteenth century, first gaining recognition with fiction and essays that demonstrated her command of setting and social nuance.

The House of Mirth (1905) established her as a major novelist, portraying the costs of status and the narrow avenues available to women seeking autonomy. Ethan Frome (1911), a stark New England tale, showed her ability to move beyond metropolitan settings into regional tragedy and compressed narrative form. Her range also included expertly constructed short stories, some of them unsettling or supernatural, which displayed her control of atmosphere and irony.

Wharton's middle career consolidated her reputation through a sequence of major novels and varied nonfiction. The Custom of the Country (1913) offered a bracing account of ambition and social mobility, while The Age of Innocence (1920) revisited old New York society with elegiac restraint and moral complexity. In addition to novels, she produced travel writing and works on design and culture, including The Decoration of Houses (1897), coauthored with architect Ogden Codman Jr., which influenced American interior taste and reflected her interest in how environments shape behavior. Critics often noted her balance of social observation with formal craftsmanship.

A defining feature of Wharton's art is her analysis of how class, money, and social ritual regulate intimate life and public opportunity. Her narrators and focal characters frequently confront conflicts between personal desire and communal expectation, and her plots turn on subtle negotiations of reputation, propriety, and power. While her work can be unsparing about privilege, it also examines the vulnerabilities and self-deceptions that accompany it, avoiding simple moral allegory. She wrote with a controlled,

ironic intelligence that made her fiction both a record of changing social orders and a study of enduring human motives.

During the First World War, Wharton lived in France and became publicly involved in relief work, writing and speaking in support of wartime humanitarian efforts. The experience sharpened her attention to displacement, loss, and the fragility of social stability, themes that appear across her later fiction and essays. In the 1920s and 1930s she continued to publish steadily, producing novels, short stories, and memoir. *A Backward Glance* (1934) offered an account of her literary life and the worlds she had known, reinforcing her status as a leading interpreter of transatlantic culture.

Wharton spent her later years in France and remained an active writer until near the end of her life, dying in 1937. Her legacy rests on both her artistic rigor and her clear-eyed portrayal of social constraint, particularly in the United States during periods of rapid economic and cultural change. *The Age of Innocence*, *The House of Mirth*, *Ethan Frome*, and her short fiction continue to be widely read, adapted, and taught for their precision of style and moral nuance. Contemporary readers return to Wharton for her examinations of inequality, gendered expectation, and the costs of belonging in tightly bounded communities.

THE HOUSE OF MIRTH

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Riviera; journalists writing these notes reported fashionable doings for newspapers and magazines. Dabham, the writer mentioned, represents the small but influential press that could publicize and shape reputations.

49 A protegee (here spelled in all caps) refers to a young woman under the informal patronage or protection of a socially powerful person. In Gilded Age society, such sponsorship could open doors but was also precarious, since a patron's favour might be withdrawn at any time and leave the protegee socially exposed.

50 "Twelvemonth" is an older word for a period of twelve months. In the passage it refers to the legal year often allowed for settling an estate or contesting a will, a common practical delay in the distribution of legacies.

51 A "coupe" on a restaurant menu denotes an ice-cream-based dessert served in a glass or shallow dish; COUPE JACQUES is a named variant typical of French-influenced American dining of the period. Such menu items signal the fashionable, continental dining habits of upper-class society in the novel.

52 Peches a la Melba (French for "Peaches à la Melba") is a dessert of peaches with ice cream and a raspberry sauce, named for the Australian opera singer Dame Nellie Melba (active in the late 19th and early 20th centuries). Its appearance on the menu reflects contemporary high-society tastes and the habit of honoring celebrities by naming dishes after them.

53 Coney Island, a Brooklyn peninsula, was famous by the late 19th century as a mass-entertainment seaside resort with amusement parks, sideshows and rides. Calling

something a "social Coney Island" evokes a loud, gaudy, populist entertainment atmosphere as opposed to refined high society.

54 "TABLEAUX" refers to tableaux vivants or staged, often decorative group scenes where actors or guests pose without movement, a popular feature of social entertainments and amateur theatricals in the period. In the novel, tableaux are theatrical amusements used at parties and charity events, marking the performative aspect of fashionable social life.

55 Fifth Avenue is a major north-south thoroughfare in Manhattan that by the late 19th/early 20th century had become synonymous with New York wealth, fashionable residences, and public display. In the novel its appearance signals the seat of high society and the contrast between country and town social seasons.

56 The Horse Show refers to the large social and sporting exhibitions of high-bred horses that doubled as major society events in New York (often associated with the National Horse Show). Such shows were important occasions for public display, social networking, and the exhibition of fashionable dress and carriages.

57 A brougham is a closed, four-wheeled carriage popular in the 19th century; 'brougham-windows' refers to the small windows of such carriages. The image evokes the private, vehicle-based mode of visiting and display used by the well-to-do in the novel's setting.

58 'Keeping up' is an idiom meaning maintaining appearances and the outward signs of a fashionable lifestyle, often at considerable expense. Wharton uses it as

a theme to show the social pressure on characters to preserve status even when financially strained.

59 The 'elevated' refers to the elevated railway ('El')—an above-street train common in New York from the late 19th century onward. Its noise and presence marked urban modernity and are used here to set the scene of the city's less genteel streets.

60 The Arion Ball alludes to society balls associated with the Arion Society, a historic musical and social organization in New York. Such named balls were prominent social functions where fashionable couples appeared and where reputation and connections were on display.

61 Virot is a proper name associated with fashionable Parisian millinery in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; a 'Virot hat' would indicate a high-fashion, often imported design. Mentioning a Virot hat signals a wearer's social aspirations and the circulation of European fashion in New York society.

62 'Orangeine' appears as an over-the-counter tonic or stimulant in the text; products with similar names were marketed in the era as patent medicines to relieve fatigue or sleeplessness. The novel's use of such a preparation underscores characters' reliance on stimulants and the period's looser regulation of remedies.

63 'Sunday Supplements' refers to the illustrated magazine sections or pictorial supplements that accompanied Sunday newspapers and often included portraits, society news, and fashion features. Being pictured or praised in these supplements could enhance a person's public visibility and social standing.

64 Regina's refers to Mme. Regina's millinery workshop — a fashionable hat-making establishment where young women served apprenticeships. In the novel it represents the practical trade Lily attempts as a fallback from her social life; such ateliers were common training sites for milliners in the late 19th/early 20th century.

65 A Latin phrase meaning 'scattered fragments' (literally 'dispersed limbs'), often used to describe ruined or broken remains. Here it is used metaphorically to describe shattered railings and other vestiges that reveal the former social life of the neighbourhood.

66 A barouche is a four-wheeled, open carriage used by the well-to-do; 'C-spring' names the curved, C-shaped springs fitted to the carriage to give a smoother ride. The image marks Mrs. Van Osburgh's wealth and the conspicuous display of high society on Fifth Avenue.

67 A decorative style inspired by the wall-paintings and motifs uncovered at the ancient Roman city of Pompeii, popular in 19th-century interior design. Mention of 'Pompeian decoration' signals an attempt at classical elegance in the boarding-house vestibule despite the building's overall shabby condition.

68 Likely refers to the small genre statuettes by John Rogers (19th-century American sculptor) or similar mass-produced figurines that were common in Victorian parlours. Such objects were typical middle-class decorative items and here underline the boarding-house's modest aspirations to genteel taste.

69 Short for chloral hydrate, a sedative-hypnotic commonly prescribed in the late 1800s and early 1900s as a