

# Edith Wharton : Novellas and Other Writings : Madame De Treymes / Ethan Frome / Summer / Old New York / The Mother's Recompense / A Backward Glance (Library of America)

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Collected in this Library of America volume are no fewer than six of the works of Edith Wharton: novels, novellas, and her renowned autobiography, *A Backward Glance*. Together they represent nearly a quarter century in the productive life of one of the most accomplished and admired of American writers.

*Madame de Treymes* (1907) is set in fashionable Paris society, where a once free-spirited American woman is trying to extricate herself, with the help of a fellow countryman, from her marriage to an aristocratic Frenchman.

Such a village is the scene of *Ethan Frome* (1911), a tale of marital entrapment even more relentless. Ethan's unhappy marriage and his desperate love for his wife's cousin Mattie drive him to an act of shattering violence. The magnificent coda is a classic of American realistic fiction.

Set in the same region of the Berkshires, Wharton called *Summer* (1917) "the Hot Ethan." It is the story of a young woman's initiation into the intricate sexual and social mores of a small town-and her revolt against them.

Observations of the American scene continue in the four novellas that make up *Old New York* (1924). They take us from the 1840s of "False Dawn," where a young man is ostracized for his avant garde taste in art, to the 1870s of "New Year's Day," where a domestic scandal unfolds.

The poignancies of parenthood are also the theme of *The Mother's Recompense* (1925). Kate Clephane, a divorced woman who has been living in Europe, returns to New York to find her former lover engaged to her daughter-and to face the emotional tangles of this unusual triangle.

The fullest portraits of New York are saved for *A Backward Glance* (1934), one of the most compelling of American autobiographies. Another perspective is offered in "Life and I," an autobiographical fragment that shows a younger Wharton writing with great frankness about her early life. It is published here for the first time.

LIBRARY OF AMERICA is an independent nonprofit cultural organization founded in 1979 to preserve our nation's literary heritage by publishing, and keeping permanently in print, America's best and most significant writing. The Library of America series includes more than 300 volumes to date, authoritative editions that average 1,000 pages in length, feature cloth covers, sewn bindings, and ribbon markers, and are printed on premium acid-free paper that will last for centuries.

The Library of America, a nonprofit publisher, is dedicated to preserving America's best and most significant writing in handsome, enduring volumes, featuring authoritative texts. Edith Wharton (1862-1937) is a central figure in American literature, a masterful chronicler of her age and prolific writer in many modes. Her major works include *The House of Mirth* (1905), *Ethan Frome* (1911), *The Custom of the Country* (1913) and *The Age of Innocence* (1920), for which she received the Pulitzer Prize, the first awarded to a woman.

Cynthia Griffin Wolff, volume editor, is professor of Literature emerita at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the author of *A Feast of Words: The Triumph of Edith Wharton*.

#### Other Books

*The Fruit of the Tree*, Set in the Berkshires of western Massachusetts during the height of the progressive era, the book centers on heroine Justine Brent, a professionally trained nurse who is called upon to attend her childhood friend Bessy Westmore, a rich textile mill owner left paralyzed by a riding accident. When Bessy begs to be released from a life of intense pain and suffering, Justine debates the moral issues and makes the difficult choice to administer a lethal dose of morphine. After Bessy dies, Justine falls in love with her widowed husband and joins him in his efforts to create better conditions for the factory workers. Questions surrounding Bessy's death, however, haunt their relationship, and Justine learns first-hand the tragic consequences of social idealism and reform. Full of plot twists and turns and finely drawn characters, *The Fruit of the Tree* is a must read for anyone who has ever fallen under the spell of Wharton's superb prose. We are delighted to publish this classic book as part of our extensive Classic Library collection. Many of the books in our collection have been out of print for decades, and therefore have not been accessible to the general public. The aim of our publishing program is to facilitate rapid access to this vast reservoir of literature, and our view is that this is a significant literary work, which deserves to be brought back into print after many decades. The contents of the vast majority of titles in the Classic Library have been scanned from the original works. To ensure a high quality product, each title has been meticulously hand curated by our staff. Our philosophy has been guided by a desire to provide the reader with a book that is as close as possible to ownership of the original work. We hope that you will enjoy this wonderful classic work, and that for you it becomes an enriching experience.

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