

About ethan frome by edith wharton



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Set in the early twentieth century, *Ethan Frome* was a novella written by Edith Wharton, the first woman to win a Pulitzer Prize for Literature. Edith Wharton's paternal family, the Joneses, were a wealthy and socially affluent family. As a result she was well educated (Wharton iv).

Her novella, *Ethan Frome*, was a representation of the experiences that she went through during those times. Everything in the book from Ethan and Zenobia's marriage to the sled accident was derived from an actual experience. The fact that her writing portrayed her real life could be an outcome of the type of writer she was, or just unintentional circumstance. Because she used her environment as her inspiration, her writing portrays three dimensional characters who are influenced by multiple factors when it comes to their actions. Edith Wharton gives a snippet of what her life might have looked like through *Ethan Frome*. Ethan and Zenobia (Zeena) Frome had a complicated relationship. Ethan married Zeena, who was seven years his senior, to fill the hole created by the death of his mother. She soon became the bane of his existence, constantly complaining about her multiple illnesses (Wharton 41).

Similarly Edith married Edward Wharton, who was twelve years her senior, and who suffered from a mental illness (Wharton iv). The impact of her passionless marriage was strong enough that it was transferred into her writing. The book may have been her outlet to express what she was going through in her own marriage. During her times divorce was a taboo subject for women to talk about, let alone write about. This may have prompted her to switch gender roles when expressing her thoughts, using Ethan as her voice rather than Zeena. Her unhappy marriage also influenced her to base

the premise of the book around an ongoing affair between Ethan and Mattie, much like her affair with Morton Fullerton. The other commonality between Edith and Ethan's respective spouses was their illness. While Edward was actually sick, Zeena was portrayed as a hypochondriac, complaining about her supposed illnesses to a point where Ethan started believing in them. This characteristic could be Wharton's representation of her husband's personality. As a whole Wharton uses the book to express her inner thoughts about her own marriage. The sledding accident that injured both Mattie and Ethan was in fact not an accident at all. The incident was a real life occurrence that took place in 1904 in Massachusetts and ended up being fatal for one of the sledders (Wharton 111). The incident shaped both the setting and the climax of the play. In the book Starkfield is a snowy town in Massachusetts, very similar to the site of the accident in real life. Wharton may have used the scene to come up with one of the most important motifs in the book- winter. The season played a vital role in influencing the emotions, events and actions of the characters leading to the sledding accident in the book. Mattie and Ethan decided that since they couldn't be together that only thing left to do was to kill themselves.

The climax of the novel showed the two lovers sledding down a hill and crashing into a tree (Wharton 92). While Wharton's reasoning behind using the accident as a template for her book is unclear, it is obvious that the incident was supposed to shock the protagonist back to a sense of reality. Just because Ethan was unable to be with the love of his life, it didn't mean that he could just forget his responsibilities and burdens that he needed to face. It was as if Wharton was saying that since she had to go through life so

did Ethan. The biographical aspects of Ethan Frome were definitely present intentionally. Looking through the novel can help comprehend the life behind the woman who is Edith Wharton. While she may not have explicitly stated why she chose to incorporate her experiences into her writing, she did implicitly show us the what society expected back in those days. Her experiences also helped enrich the personality and behavior of the characters, making them come across as real people rather than fictional personas. Edith Wharton's work will forever be regarded as a work that grasped the true values of twentieth century America, primarily because it contained actual happenings of the author's life.