

Mistaken Charity?

**The Individual in a Social Context in Edith Wharton's
*Summer***

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Abstract

Edith Wharton var en viktig forfatter av såkalte realistiske sosietetsromaner, der hun beskriver overklassen i New York og dens normer og skikker, og gjennom dette kritiserer sin samtid. Grunnet det hemmende miljøet hun beskriver, er Wharton opptatt av hvordan individet fungerer i et slikt samfunn, og hva konsekvensene blir hvis individet overtrer de sosiale normene og reglene som samfunnet har satt. *Summer* beskriver det landlige samfunnet North Dormer som skiller seg fra den type samfunn man finner i mesteparten av hennes forfatterskap. Fokuset i denne hovedoppgaven er å finne ut hvordan *Summer* fortsatt kan defineres som en sosietetsroman til tross for den uvanlige settingen og naturalistiske påvirkninger i teksten. Romanen formidler samfunnskritiske holdninger gjennom litterære karakterer, naturskildringer og naturalisme. Dominansen av sosiale normer i North Dormer kan forklares gjennom en diskusjon av ideologi. I romanen finnes det karakterer som representerer den dominerende ideologien i samfunnet, og andre som gjør motstand mot den dominerende ideologien, representert spesielt gjennom hovedpersonen Charity. Diskusjonen kommer fram til at Charity er påvirket av arv og miljø, og at hun ikke med vitende og vilje går mot samfunnets normer, men at hennes oppførsel, på grunn av en isolert oppvekst og en arv fra moren, er bestemt fra begynnelsen av. Det betyr at hennes forhold til den unge mannen Harney, som får fatale konsekvenser gjennom en graviditet utenfor ekteskap, ikke kan få et lykkelig utfall, og at selv om hun prøver å redde sitt eget rykte og sin egen selvstendige framtid, så har hun ikke muligheten til å forandre sin skjebne.

For years I had wanted to draw life as it really was in the derelict mountain villages of New England, a life even in my time, and a thousandfold more a generation earlier, utterly unlike that seen through the rose-coloured spectacles of my predecessors, Mary Wilkins and Sarah Orne Jewett.

Edith Wharton, *A Backwards Glance* (1934)

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Introduction

Edith Wharton has come to be known as an important intermediary of everyday American life at the turn of the century, and she wrote perhaps what might be called a most thorough fictive study of American culture in her time. Writing fiction from 1890 until her death in 1937, her authorship is extensive and spans over several decades. In a time that saw a lot of changes in society, writers claimed the opportunity to respond to and analyze these current changes through the genre of realism. In the introduction to *American Realism*, Christopher Smith argues that realism aimed for fiction that set out to imitate familiar experiences and places, the real American life, and by this enrich the readers' sense of his or her social environment (8). Because society became such an important focus in this period of time, Wharton's work is greatly concerned with the influence of society on human nature and the analysis of how the life of the individual is shaped by a compromise between personal desire and expectations from society. The individual is always caught in the social norms constructed by the social group, and as Wharton asks in her essay "The Great American Novel": "how much of human nature is left when it is separated from the web of customs, manners and culture it has elaborately spun around itself?" (652). As Carol Singley argues, Wharton's fiction include characters who long for autonomy but must struggle for individuality within a social context, and who are inevitably pulled back into the social web because of their inability to thrive outside the culture that has produced them (9). This type of realist fiction where the reader is awakened to face the reality of socially engaged living is conventionally called novels of manners, and James Tuttleton states that Wharton set out to write "novels in which the manners, social customs and conventions by a given social group play a dominant role in the life of fictional characters" (10). Encouraged by Henry James,

Wharton wrote several novels with a social setting of which she had first-hand knowledge, the upper-class and “old wealth” of New York. Amongst some of her finest novels of this kind are *The House of Mirth* (1905) and the Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Age of Innocence* (1920).

Even though Wharton could metaphorically be considered a “regionalist” of high society in New York, Katherine Joslin argues that her fiction written during and in the aftermath of the First World War moves away from her previously rigorous social depictions, and rather dwells on the psychology of the individual member of society (25). In addition, Wharton turns away from the usual environment of her previous novels and short stories and instead focuses on something that is far removed from her own world; the rural villages of New England. In addition to a number of shorter stories, *Ethan Frome* (1911) and *Summer* (1917) are the two novels of Wharton’s authorship that have a rural setting. This thesis will focus on the novel *Summer*. This novel frequently stands in the shade of some of Wharton’s more canonized works, while I would argue that *Summer*, more than any other of her novels, includes sharp social criticism that is sometimes lost in the rigorous depictions of New York society. *Summer* received mixed reviews when it was published, and interestingly, some critics claimed that *Summer* depicted a society far away from the contemporary reality of the time, as seen in this excerpt from a contemporary review that appeared in 1917; “Possibly Mrs. Wharton has a distinct object in dragging to the light the worst side of a disappearing rural life [...] It has been said since this novel was published that no community similar to the ‘Mountain’ has been known to exist in new England” (“Novels Whose Scenes Are Laid in New England” 261). Another reviewer claimed that “Mrs. Wharton has arranged for Charity’s [the protagonist] misfortune too deliberately, deprived her of aid too sweepingly, afforded her marriage with her guardian too simply” (“Loading the Dice” 251). Reviews such as these make one wonder why Wharton chose to place *Summer* so far from her known environment,

and to place her protagonist Charity in a situation where she has to seize the only options offered to her when her life takes an unexpected turn.

A common motif in all of Wharton's novels resides in the conflict between the will of the individual and the realization that fate is outside the individual's control. Instead, the fate of the individual resides with another force outside the self, this force typically being society. The theme of the individual in conflict with society is still the same throughout Wharton's fiction; however, there are some changes to her choice of tone and focus in the novels set in New England. Where Wharton's New York novels tend to concentrate on how the individual is affected by particular social forces, her New England novels typically do not emphasize details of society and its manners, but rather what kind of *consequences* the exercise of social power may lead to. Where *Summer* for example, spends little time in describing customs and habits in the rural town of North Dormer, *The House of Mirth* shows Wharton's great care in explaining meticulously the manners and traditions of the rich and fashionable in New York, the manner of dress in weddings and the social conventions of courting. Therefore, Wharton's New York novels are extensively more preoccupied with the depictions of contemporary manners than her New England novels, in which the omission or restriction of descriptions of the social environment sharpens the focus on the most important topic at hand; the conflict within the individual. In addition, even more so than her other novels, Wharton's New England novels focus on the determined outcome of events, especially in relation to the determining aspects of heritage and environment. As Donald Pizer expresses, this sense of determinism that presents life shaped by individual choices and controlling forces (97), links Wharton to American turn-of-the-century naturalist authors such as Theodore Dreiser and Stephen Crane. Even though it is fair to say that all of Wharton's novels include some elements of the naturalistic sense of the determined individual, it is still plausible to argue that it is her New England novels that communicate the naturalistic focus the best, especially with

regard to the narration. It might also be possible to claim that perhaps some of the most pessimistic visions of life on the fringes of society might have been lost in an upper-class, New York setting that mainly features financially privileged characters struggling to fit into the fashionable crowd rather than a poor society where characters struggle to literally survive outside the accepted norms of society.

One might argue that *Summer* represents an example of Wharton's excellent ability for detached observation, using a narrator that is placed as an outside voice. Carter argues that true to realist and naturalist philosophy, the authors of this time moved away from American sentimentalism with its tearful scenes and overwrought emotions (47), and rather sought to portray truthfully society as she encountered it. However, despite the use of a narrator as detached observer, the narration is able to evoke emotions or opinions through the reactions of the reader and the dialogue that is created between the reader and the text. Because of this communication between the novel and the reader, one might question whether the choice of a hidden critical voice in the narration is a consequence of the acceptance of the social norms presented, or a way of showing an oppositional stance, and whether the narration can be said to be exclusively detached and neutral. Accordingly, when it comes to the acceptance of the fate of the characters, the reader may conclude that the characters "had it coming" because of their refusal to follow the rules of society, or they might detect an oppositional position in the text towards the power of society. Accordingly, it is possible to notice a tension in the text between an acceptance of the fate of the characters, and a critical position towards the power of society.

In *Summer*, this creative use of the narration to promote several different arguments at the same time will be the starting point for a thematic analysis of the novel. As should be evident from the discussion above, I would argue that it is too simple to label Wharton as solely a society novelist, despite the domination of society fiction in her authorship. If one

tries to focus on Wharton's social themes while simultaneously neglecting her deeper insights into human nature and the dynamics between the individual and society, the analysis of Wharton's fiction will only be partially successful. The label "novels of manners" falls short in describing the complexity and wide perspective of her authorship, and her New England novels clearly show that Wharton's novels contain so much more than the depiction of upper-class issues, and *Summer* includes a diversity within its narration that some of her other novels lack.

Summer depicts the young woman Charity Royall and her struggle to break with the constricting social norms that she believes are holding her back from achieving the independent life that she is aiming for. Her rebellion takes the form of an affair with a young male visitor in town and ends with pregnancy outside marriage. In order to be able to survive in society and to give her unborn child "peace and security" (*Summer* 179), she marries her guardian. Charity is exposed to the norms of society and finds that she has to conform to them in order to survive, both physically and emotionally. As Ammons argues, *Summer* "studies underlying social structures [...] that buttress patriarchal attitudes and prohibit freedom for women, especially sexual passion" (131). Charity tries to state her sexual and emotional independence, free from the expectations of society, but fails miserably. With this in mind, this thesis will explore how manners and social conduct influence both Charity and other individuals in North Dormer, and how the unique personality of each individual is eventually shaped to fit the social norms upheld by society. As argued above, the complexity of *Summer* is mainly found in the narration. Therefore, this thesis will concentrate on textual strategies that are used in order to promote its thematic focus. Each of the chapters will discuss aspects of the social reality presented in *Summer*, and how a meaningful dialogue is created between the text and the reader. The different chapters will focus on how characters represent different ideological positions, how the novel draws on naturalism and determinism to explain the

struggle of the individual within society, and how the use of nature imagery contributes to the theme and the meaning conveyed in the text as a whole.

Through the framework of Terry Eagleton's "Ideology, Fiction, Narrative" (1979), and Michel Foucault's "The Subject and Power" (1982), chapter one will focus on the study of the role of ideology and social norms in *Summer*. According to Louis Althusser, a society in itself is formed by ideology, which in its turn represents a reproduction of the production of ideology (1484). This means that manners would unquestionably represent a form of ideology, or to put it differently, social codes are not "given," but ideologically determined. The chapter will look at how the characters in *Summer* function as mediators of social values and rules of conduct, and furthermore how they interact with the ruling ideology of North Dormer. Based on James H. Kavanaugh's definition of ideology as "a rich system of interpretations which helps form individuals into social subjects" (310), the chapter will also look at ideology's ability to decide how people are to relate to social norms. In this connection, it is also important to look at the role of power and power relations in the ideological landscape of fictional North Dormer, and how it is possible that ideology is created through the application of power to individuals, and the way the individual is shaped through the interaction with ideology and power structures.

Developing the discussion of power from chapter one, chapter two will look more closely at how the novel presents its characters as being influenced by heredity and environment. Looking in particular at the protagonist Charity, this chapter will show *Summer's* interesting use of naturalism and determinism, especially with regards to the determining factors of heritage and environment. This chapter will also relate to the two societies presented in the novel, North Dormer and the Mountain, and how the juxtaposition of these two places helps to promote the idea of the determining influence of heritage and environment. Lastly, this chapter will also focus on how the text develops the ideological

discussion in chapter one even further, and how it might be possible to draw some lines between the narration's usage of naturalistic determinism and the critical dialogue about ideology that is developed between the reader and the text.

Throughout *Summer*, the narration contains elaborate descriptions of nature that change notably as the novel develops. The third and final chapter will focus on how the descriptions of nature can be claimed to contribute to the characterization and development of the characters, and the thematic focus of the novel as a whole. Connected to the previous discussion of ideology, the chapter will look at how the descriptions of nature also communicate the embedded attitudes towards the action that unfolds in the novel. This is especially evident in the use of ironic language or recurrent images of nature, such as the dark and depressing descriptions which may allude to the deterministic aspect of the story. Lastly, it is important to mention the significance of the name of the protagonist in *Summer*, as the title of the novel as well as her name carry a symbolic significance in the story.

Chapter One: The Ideological Scene of *Summer*

The important thing here, I believe, is that truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power [...] truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is the thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint.

Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power".

In *Summer*, the novel's ideological implications are visible in the use of the characters, as they represent different ideological positions. Through the theoretical framework of Terry Eagleton's "Ideology, Fiction, Narrative" (1979), this chapter will focus on how the novel stages a conflict between characters and their different positions in the ideological landscape of North Dormer. As social rules cannot become a dominant ideology without the exercise of power, the discussion of ideology will, through the lens of Michel Foucault's "The Subject and Power" (1982), also focus on how power relations exert a great influence on why the individual is made a subject to ideology. Lastly, the discussion will also consider how the text as a whole conveys a stance with regard to the power of ideology in Wharton's contemporary society.

Firstly, it is important to note *Summer*'s special place in Wharton's authorship. As *Summer* differs from the main tendency in Wharton's novels, its divergence from her earlier and later novels demands a discussion of why the novel presents a setting that is so far removed from the depictions of urban life that are often found in realistic works. The novel begins with an introductory section placing the novel in a specific rural environment:

The springlike transparent sky shed a rain of silver sunshine on the roofs of the village, and on the pastures and larchwoods surrounding it. A little wind moved along the round white clouds on the shoulders of the hills, driving their shadows across the fields and

down the grassy road that takes the name of street when it passes through North Dormer
[...] The place lies high and in the open, and lacks the lavish shade of the more protected
New England villages. (3)

In this short passage, the novel is removed from the bustle of the cities, and its picturesque depictions present it as an idyllic counterpoint to the busy reality of the cities, as it is “left apart by railway, trolley, telegraph, and all the forces that link life to life in modern communities” (5). Thus, the reader is prepared for a fictional world with a limited frame of reference, as the action takes place in a small, isolated society with scarce communication with the outside world. The narration so far is in line with what Donald Pizer explains as the realistic insistence on the depiction of social reality (6), and the placement of the novel within a contemporary timeframe and geographical area presents the reader with a society which, because of its isolated location, still held traditional values that were diminishing in an urbanized and modern turn-of-the-century society. These social values are the main focus of *Summer*, as they present such a dominant force over the individual.

As mentioned in the introduction, Wharton’s novels are mostly considered as realistic novels of manners. According to James W. Tuttleton, the novel of manners is especially preoccupied with how the conventions of a social group play a dominant role in the life of a fictional character (10). In *Summer* the most important focus lies on the descriptions of how the success of a fictional character depends on this character’s ability to conform to the social rules that are set by society, regardless of how the character evaluates the manners and social rules that he or she is expected to follow. The domination of a particular set of social rules may be explained by reference to ideology. In Terry Eagleton’s “Ideology, Fiction, Narrative” ideology is defined as “signifying a set of practical relations with the real” (63), which suggests that ideology decides how the individual is to relate to society, the “real,” and thus sets expectations for accepted behavior. As James H. Kavanaugh explains, “ideology

designates a rich 'system of representations', worked up in specific material practices, which helps form individuals into social subjects who 'freely' internalize an appropriate picture of their social world and their place in it" (310). This means that ideology is so powerful that the individual accepts the expectations set by society because of his or hers incapability to create a meaningful existence outside the dominant ideology. Consequently, the individual becomes a subject to ideology, and the ability to conform becomes a measure for general acceptance in society.

In the words of Eagleton in "Ideology, Fiction, Narrative," ideology prospers as long as subjects do (65). Thus, one might argue that ideology dominates as long as there are individuals that perceive this ideology as "true" or right. According to Michel Foucault in "Truth and Power" (1977), "truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extends it" (1669). This is especially true in a class society such as North Dormer, where the survival of a dominant ideology depends on socially stronger individuals' ability to convince weaker individuals of the unavoidable domination of the social rules that are set as the standard. In *Summer*, there exists a clear relationship between this imposition of specific "true" social rules and the social hierarchy between the characters. Thus, it is important to look at how the novel describes the domination of one specific set of ideological values, and how the social reality in the fictional society of North reflects the relationship between ideology and power in contemporary society.

An analysis of the use of focalization in the text may help to bring out the power relationships between the different characters. The narration largely renders the perspective of Charity, which makes her the focalized character. This is especially reflected in the use of names in the narrative, and other characters tend to be introduced in relation to her. Noticeably, the only person Charity mentions by her first name is her friend Ally, and the

reason why she chooses to address Ally by her first name might be because of their closeness. However, Charity is reluctant to confide in Ally as close friends might do when she is struggling with moral qualms after the affair with Harney and the incident in Nettleton:

At the thought of having to see her, of having to meet her eyes and answer or evade her [Ally's] questions, the whole horror of the previous night's adventure rushed back upon Charity. What had been a feverish nightmare became a cold and unescapable fact. Poor Ally, at that moment, represented North Dormer, with all its mean curiosities, its furtive malice, its sham unconsciousness of evil. (101-02)

At this stage, Charity is beginning to comprehend the magnitude of her actions and starting to understand the necessity for hiding the relationship between her and Harney. This means that by referring to Ally by her first name, the narration signals Charity and Ally's close relationship, as well as the fact that they share the same social status. However, this friendship slowly becomes less important in the narrative as the story progresses and Charity's life takes an unexpected turn, far away from anything Ally would imagine, as she has felt the implications an affair might have in her closest family.

Other characters in the novel are spoken of either by their full name or their last name. Where characters are referred to by their last name, this signals that Charity either does not know them or considers their social status to be greater than hers. An example of this is Harney's fiancée, Annabel Balch, who is described by her first and last name, both because she is a stranger, and probably also because of her position of belonging to a wealthier class than Charity. Curiously enough, characters that one could regard as close to Charity, such as Royall, Harney and Miss Hatchard, are all referred to by their last name throughout the narrative, making the element of familiarity an inadequate explanation for the distinction between the uses of first or last name. Therefore, the use of names probably has its roots in

traditional values of class and power relations. This concurs with Michel Foucault's argument in "The Subject and Power", where he claims that "it [power] brings into play relations between individuals (or between groups)" (786). As Foucault argues, a human being is placed in power relations which are very complex (778), and this especially applies to Charity, as an adopted young girl of dubious heritage and with an ambiguous social status. Therefore, the intricate references to the different characters in the story reveal Charity's place in a social hierarchy, where men were addressed respectfully regardless of familiarity, as seen with both Royall and Harney. Even Miss Hatchard, regardless of her own superior status as one of the most powerful individuals in North Dormer, addresses her nephew Harney by his last name. Therefore, one might argue that the narrator simply adheres to the conventions of how people would address each other in this kind of community.

One could argue that the ideology of North Dormer, where the emphasis lies on the need to conform to the standards of society, is largely presented and secured by the town's inhabitants, who contribute to a coherent society that is knitted together by the dominant ideological standard. As seen in the passage below, most of the inhabitants of North Dormer are presented as an undistinguishable whole that disciplines and punishes, creating sanctions against those individuals that do not conform to the norms of society:

It was the thing that *did* happen between young men and girls, and that North Dormer ignored in public and snickered over on the sly [...] It was what had happened to Ally Hawes' sister Julia, and had ended in her going to Nettleton, and in people's never mentioning her name. (68; author's emphasis)

This example illustrates how behavior that is unacceptable is concealed or "taken care of" to the best of society's ability, so as to keep the sanctioned standard which, as Kavanaugh explains, is the primary point of ideology: "to constitute, adjust and/or transform social

subjects” (314). In a society that relies on long-standing social norms and thus does not allow much room for divergence, individuals will invariably suffer. Passages such as the one above illustrate how the ideology of North Dormer is created and maintained by a general agreement about what is considered proper behavior by the majority of the community. This general agreement is based on the widespread acceptance of social norms, and the unwillingness to change something that has evidently been the ruling norms of this society for quite some time.

Even when a wide acceptance of social norms exist such as in North Dormer, one will always find individuals that oppose what is accepted as the rule. Because of this, when social norms are trusted to be the basis of all interaction, they become an instrument of power which strictly controls the individual and also forces the individual to accept the general expectations of behavior. As Foucault argues, power can be found in everyday life, and it serves to categorize the individual, imposes a law of truth on him that he must recognize, and thus makes the individual a subject (781). As Charity herself explains in *Summer*: “Things don’t change at North Dormer: people just get used to them” (78). Thus, the social norms of North Dormer may not be generally agreed upon, but they are considered too powerful to change, and, as Kavanaugh explains, ideology is created in a situation where every member of a society understands the existing social rules as being either right or impossible to change (308).

Even though this ideological conformity is true for the majority of the inhabitants of North Dormer, the novel also gives voice to characters that are different, and this allows the reader to view North Dormer from a different perspective. The character of Harney serves as an effective illustration of the difference between North Dormer and the urban attitudes and sophistication of the outside world which he represents. As he is a visitor to the town, he brings with him unfamiliar impulses, thus showing the difference between North Dormer and the world at large. Even though Miss Hatchard and her Old Home Week represent North

Dormer as trying to be in touch with contemporary society, the contrast between the realities of the city in comparison to a New England village is especially visible when Harney comes to town. The main purpose of his excursion to North Dormer is to sketch and map out the many old buildings of the town and the surrounding area, looking at their architecture and special place in history. These buildings are not regarded of great importance to the inhabitants of North Dormer, signaling that even though they are surrounded by valuable architecture, the general population is not educated enough to appreciate the cultural treasures these buildings represent, leaving them to a fate of decay and neglect. The difference between Harney and North Dormer in this respect shows that because the town is small and isolated, there is a lack of fresh ideas and impulses that reach North Dormer, and in addition, possibilities of higher education in this rural area are non-existent.

The lack of education and possibilities of travelling to other places can be named as one of the major reasons why Charity is so attracted to Harney. Indeed, Charity's affair with Harney is directly affected by his "foreignness" and the fresh breath of air that he brings to the town. Even though this is not specifically stated, the fact that Harney is an outsider may have added to his allure when Charity and he initially become acquainted at the library. It is important to note that a plausible reason why the first meeting between the two is set in the library is that the difference in education is exposed and reflected. Although Charity functions as the librarian, she is unable to help Harney with his enquiries about specific literature. The library plays an important role in showing how North Dormer is stuck in the past, as the library is full of old books, and has not been updated for years. The few users of the library are not interested in borrowing newer books: "Orma Fry occasionally took out a novel [...]; but no one else asked for anything except, at intervals, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' or 'Opening of a Chestnut Burr,' or Longfellow" (13). This gives the reader a good impression of how the inhabitants of North Dormer are set in their ways and the reason why Harney represents such

a major difference in the life of Charity, a girl raised in the constrictive and old-fashioned ways of North Dormer. In addition, the name of the village also symbolizes how isolated and old-fashioned the town really is. As North Dormer is a town where traditional values dominate, one might say that the name of the town alludes to the word “asleep,” conferring to the French word “dormir” which means “to sleep.” This means that influenced by the village’s placement in rural New England, and thus its isolation from modern progress, the inhabitants of North Dormer are ignorant of the social changes in society. Thus, traditional values of society and a dominant ideology are maintained and reinforced, creating little tolerance of new ways of thinking.

Because the character of Harney communicates traditions and values that are different from the traditions and values of North Dormer, his function in the novel is to shed light on social differences that exist in North Dormer that are not reflected upon by the other characters. As Eagleton argues, “It is not the case that [...] subjects will spontaneously ‘know’ the social formation in the very grain and texture of their ‘lived relations’ to it” (65). Therefore, it is important to recognize that the characters do not tend to reflect on or consciously discern their place in society; this is only visible to the reader. In relation to Charity, her development may be argued to be a consequence of circumstances and bad decisions instead of conscious intentions to oppose the ideology of North Dormer. There are several circumstances which influence the outcome of her affair with Harney. In the same way as North Dormer is “asleep” to modern progress, Charity is ignorant of the consequences that an affair with Harney might have. This can be blamed both on her upbringing and her education. Charity is familiar with the fate of Julia Hawes, but lacks the understanding that the same thing might happen to her: “‘Poor Julia!’ Charity sighed from the height of her purity and security” (81). Although the couple has not been intimate at the point in time, it seems like Charity still does not fully understand that society would regard unchaperoned meetings

between her and Harney as inappropriate, and that her behavior will be met with sanctions if discovered. This realization comes after she spends Fourth of July with him in Nettleton, as will be discussed later on. She is brought up in a society that suppresses affairs between young men and women because they may lead to an unfavorable outcome, and such relationships will naturally be deemed inappropriate. Charity is presented as though she might not understand fully what goes on, and therefore cannot be blamed when she does not recognize the parallels between her affair with Harney and other extra-marital relationships that have been going on in North Dormer, especially because their relationship has not been consummated at this stage. Also, Charity seems unaware of the fact that Harney will probably never marry her, as will be seen later in the discussion.

Some degree of education and knowledge of the world outside the environment of rural New England might have prepared her for the outcome of such an affair. Because Charity has lived most of her life in North Dormer, she does not question the social structure of North Dormer: “she [Charity] found it easier to take North Dormer as the norm of the universe than to go on reading” (5). Although a visit to Nettleton arouses a desire in Charity to discover more than the narrow world of North Dormer, one could argue that she gives up this pursuit too easily. Class may play an important role here, as Charity is certainly very aware of her social position and class. As she is constantly reminded that she is fortunate just to live in North Dormer, she may probably have realized that she will never have the chance to take higher education, as she was denied a place in a boarding school in nearby Starkfield, and has no other opportunities. Even though Royall is considered her benefactor, Charity might be instinctively aware that because of her class and gender, she might not have the possibilities that others have, and a life in a larger town will continue to be an unfulfilled dream. Thus, her wish to discover more through education is only discussed briefly and easily dismissed in the narrative, as Charity herself might have easily dismissed her chances for

higher education. In addition, as Eagleton explains ideology as signifying a set of lived “relations with ‘the real’” (63), this would mean that it is probably easier for Charity, as a participant in the ideology of North Dormer, to take North Dormer’s definition of the “real” as true, and choose the easier road; to give up her pursuit of education and settle for what is offered. Interestingly, this is also what she does with her affair with Harney; as will be seen, she lets him out of his obligations and dismisses her own desires in order to settle for what she perceives as her destiny; a quiet life in North Dormer.

Early in the narrative, the reader gets to know that Charity is different from the rest of society around her because she is adopted from the Mountain, which serves as a counter society of North Dormer. Her different background serves to distinguish her from the conformity of the rest of the population of North Dormer and also signals to the reader that she originally did not belong. As Miss Hatchard, functioning as the spokesperson of North Dormer, articulates, she should consider herself lucky that she was “rescued” from what the inhabitants of North Dormer consider a miserable life in the Mountain. Therefore, she is not only seen as slightly different from her peers; she also lives on the good graces of Royall, her guardian, and should be grateful that she has been given the opportunity to live a better life: “[...] she ought, as Miss Hatchard had once reminded her, to remember that she had been brought down from there [the Mountain], and hold her tongue and be thankful” (6). This emphasis on gratitude is something that is repeated in the narrative, and with it comes Charity’s feeling of guilt. Looking back at the discussion above, one might argue that Miss Hatchard is the one that presses the issue of education on Charity, while Charity accepts the fact that she is not allowed to go to school, perhaps because of her indebtedness and guilt. In another important instance Charity is reminded not to complain, even though Royall has attempted to sexually assault her. Here, Miss Hatchard knowingly avoids Charity’s clear hints about Royall: “I know Mr. Royall is ... trying at times; but his wife bore with him; and you

must always remember, Charity, that it was Mr. Royall who brought you down from the Mountain” (19). The reader notices that Miss Hatchard chooses to appeal to Charity’s sense of dependence on her guardian and her obligation to be grateful instead of giving Charity the opportunity change a situation that has a great impact on Charity’s relationship to Royall. Miss Hatchard does help Charity to hire a maid in the end so that she does not have to be alone with Royall, but the maid is hired on the pretence that Charity is ill and cannot manage all the work herself.

These situations are clear examples of how North Dormer tries to keep up its appearance of propriety and correct manners, and how this affects individuals such as Charity. The emphasis on Charity’s background from the Mountain not only shows the general opinion that she ought to be grateful for her situation and not wish herself anywhere else; it also signals how Charity takes on the role of an outsider of society. This enables her to be situated inside the community of North Dormer, yet she can look at North Dormer with the eyes of an outsider because of her role as an adopted member of the community. This creates a certain distance, allowing the reader to keep a critical view of society through Charity. Thus, the character of Charity fills a specific function in the text as she represents the fate of an individual that, either willingly or unwillingly, opposes the norms of a society firmly ruled by ideology.

It is important to observe that Charity does not necessarily take an active stand against the manners of North Dormer. One might even go so far as claiming that because of her ignorance and lack of understanding of the dynamics of society she is not fully aware that she opposes the manners of the town. This is especially visible early on in the narrative: “She was not an expert work-woman, and it had taken her many weeks to make the half-yard of narrow lace which she kept wound about the buckram back of a disintegrated copy of ‘The Lamplighter’” (7). In this passage, one sees Charity using a popular novel about proper

manners for young women as a tool for making lace as an act of vanity. The use of this particular book is a strong symbol for her opposition against social expectancies, but since the way Charity uses this book seems like a coincidence on her part, it symbolizes her thoughtless behavior rather than an act of rebellion. The narrator presents Charity as though she approaches the affair with Harney with the same amount of carelessness and lack of consciousness. She is having an affair with Harney out of vanity; she is seeking adventure and the thrilling experience of something unknown and forbidden. As will be discussed later in the chapter, it is the intervention of Royall that takes her back to reality and forces her to realize the consequences of her actions and the restrictions of society.

As mentioned, Miss Hatchard functions as the voice of the traditional ways of North Dormer. As discussed above, her role as the voice of the ruling ideology of the community is especially visible in her dialogues with Charity, but she also serves an important function in relation to other aspects of the narrative. Miss Hatchard is never presented in her own right; she is from the beginning only mentioned in connection with other characters, the most significant of them being Harney, her cousin. In addition to being the host of important people that visit North Dormer such as Harney and Annabel Balch, Miss Hatchard is also important as an independent character, however. At the beginning of the novel, Miss Hatchard's important function in North Dormer is spelled out: "In spite of everything — and in spite even of Miss Hatchard — Lawyer Royall ruled in North Dormer" (14). Even though Miss Hatchard is considered below Royall on the social ladder, she is still mentioned in relation to him. While Royall seems to be the most powerful influence in North Dormer because of his education and financial status, Miss Hatchard is also influential in many ways. Her relation to the founder of the town's library signals her deep roots in North Dormer, and this creates her absolutely non-negotiable presence as the inhabitant that knows the community the best. Another example of Miss Hatchard's function as the mediator of tradition is The Old Home

Week, which she established: “North Dormer was preparing for its Old Home Week [...] the matter had become a subject of prolonged and passionate discussions under Miss Hatchard’s roof” (110). The Old Home Week celebrates North Dormer while simultaneously encouraging the young people of North Dormer to stay in the town instead of seeking opportunities elsewhere. Miss Hatchard’s devotion to the town could be said to be described in a tone that is slightly patronizing and ironic:

she [Miss Hatchard] would repeat, for the hundredth time, that she supposed he thought it very bold of little North Dormer to start up and have a Home Week of its own, when so many bigger places hadn’t thought of it yet; but that, after all, Associations counted more than the size of the population, didn’t they? And of course North Dormer was so full of Associations... (111)

Here, the text shows clear communication with the implied reader, signaling that although Miss Hatchard is an important figure of North Dormer, her patriotism and estimation of North Dormer’s importance may be ridiculed, especially by a reader that has knowledge of the increased significance of American cities at the time, and the rapid decline of the importance of rural towns.

What is also important to consider and that has yet to be mentioned, is the positions of the characters that neither explicitly position themselves within the traditions of North Dormer such as Miss Hatchard, nor oppose the social norms of North Dormer such as Charity or Harney. In this regard, Royall, Charity’s guardian, is the best example because he is difficult to place within the social landscape. As mentioned above, Royall is the most powerful man in North Dormer: “[...] lawyer Royall was the biggest man in North Dormer; so much too big for it, in fact, that outsiders, who didn’t know, always wondered how it held

him” (13). This questioning of Royall’s reasons for staying in North Dormer is an important foreshadowing of how Royall struggles with his life there, as will be discussed later on.

Interestingly, Edith Wharton considered Royall one of the most important characters in *Summer*, even though Charity could fairly be considered the protagonist because of the continuous focus on her in the narrative. In a letter written in the same year as *Summer* was published, Wharton writes: “I’m so particularly glad that you like old man Royall. Of course, *he’s* the book!” (“Letter to Bernhard Berenson” 398-99). Royall is important in the narrative for several reasons. First and foremost, one could argue that the main reason for Charity’s wish to escape is initiated by Royall. Royall behaves inappropriately towards Charity in a scene that is described as happening a few years before the time in which the novel is set: “‘You go right back from here,’ she said, in a shrill voice that startled her [...] ‘Charity, let me in. I don’t want the key. I’m a lonesome man,’ he began, in a voice that sometimes moved her” (17). This incidence is referred back to many times later in the narrative, as this episode has great significance for the relationship between Royall and Charity, giving subtle connotations of incestual intent.

Royall’s reactions to the affair between Charity and Harney take on many forms and clearly communicate his ambivalence to their situation, and especially the consequences such an affair has on Charity’s reputation. When Charity and Harney’s romance reaches its first peak at the Fourth of July festivities in Nettleton, the reader receives the first glimpse of Royall’s feelings towards Charity:

[...] among them Charity caught sight of Julia Hawes, her white feather askew, and the face under it flushed with coarse laughter. As she stepped from the gang-plank she stopped short, her dark-ringed eyes darting malice.

“Hullo, Charity Royall!” she called out [...] “Here’s grandpa’s little daughter come to take him home!” [...].

“You whore—you damn—bare-headed whore, you!” he [lawyer Royall] enunciated slowly. (97-98)

Here, Royall reacts strongly to the fact that Charity is out in public with a man without his knowledge. His reaction can be interpreted in two ways. Even though he finds himself in a compromising situation, he can still openly condemn Charity's behavior. This is a clear example of double standards, where different social rules apply to men and women. In a situation such as the one described in the passage above, Charity suffers under social standards that favor the freedom of men while explicitly showing disapproval of women who want to enjoy the same freedom, or in the case of Charity, enjoy such a freedom without thinking of the consequences. The application of different social norms is made possible by relations of power. In the situation above, Royall is able to force social norms upon Charity because the power granted to him by society. Consequently, he is able to categorize her as a promiscuous woman. His use of power shapes the interaction between them, and as Foucault argues: "this form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorize the individual [and] subject to someone else by control and dependence" (781).

In *Summer*, society indirectly grants power to influential individuals, such as Royall. This means that a circular relationship exists between the power of an individual and the society in which this power is exerted. On the one hand, individuals are granted the power to create social rules because of the high regard society grants these individuals. Simultaneously, individuals are the ones that "create" society; they decide social norms and create social hierarchies. As Foucault argues, "the 'modern state' [...] is a very sophisticated structure, in which individuals can be integrated, under one condition: that this individuality would be shaped in a new form and submitted to a set of very specific patterns" (783). Royall's behavior in the quote above can be explained by his knowledge of his superior position in the situation; he may even feel entitled to his reaction. It is important to notice here that his outburst is only directed at Charity and her compromising situation, and is not directed

towards Harney, signaling Harney's privileged status as male, rich and cosmopolitan, making him more equal to Royall and therefore literally unapproachable.

The incident in Nettleton serves as a good example of how Royall's feelings towards Charity cannot easily be defined. In the situation in Nettleton, Royall takes on a specific paternal role and one might argue that beneath his insults, it is his desire to protect which motivates his rage towards Charity and her act of irresponsibility. Another of Royall's attempts to protect his daughter occurs after the incident in Nettleton, when Charity is again caught with Harney alone. Interestingly, this time, Royall's rage is directed at Charity, but he indirectly places his criticism on Harney instead, while addressing Charity: "Mr. Royall turned to her. 'Ask him when he's going to marry you then' — [...] He swung back again upon the young man. 'And you know why you ain't asked her to marry you, and why you don't mean to'" (134-35). By directing his criticism towards Harney, Royall wants to protect Charity and make her aware of the danger of pursuing a relationship with a young man without a promise of marriage. Even though Charity seems unconscious or not willing to consider the possibility that Harney uses her as a summer romance, the way Royall is presented in the narrative shows his awareness of the double standards that exist in such a relationship and the fact that Harney will never marry Charity, which will leave her in an unfavorable situation.

One could argue that Royall's sudden anger in the two situations described above could spring from other motivations than paternal care, especially because the relationship between them has been so ambiguous. Therefore, it is possible to claim that his reaction to the young couple might be provoked by his own feelings; incestual love for a young woman who is legally and morally considered his own daughter. Thus, the anger that Royall is expressing may be interpreted not only as rage towards the incriminating situation that Charity finds herself in, but may also spring out of jealousy towards Harney, jealousy fuelled by the fact

that Harney is the one that has won Charity's confidence and affection instead of himself. Royall's ambiguous behavior leaves the reader wondering where his interests lie and whether he behaves as he does because of his own interest in Charity, or because of his paternal care and aspiration to save Charity from the sanctions set forth by society if her relationship with Harney is discovered. Accordingly, it is difficult to place him within the ideological landscape of North Dormer because he supports society's norms by openly condemning Charity's behavior, while simultaneously trying to save her from the norms that will in their own right denounce her and have a great impact on how she will be perceived in society. It is also important to remember that Royall's ambivalence towards the norms of North Dormer is most likely rooted in his internal struggle between paternal and erotic feelings with regards to Charity, which means that sanctions would undoubtedly be imposed on him as well if his erotic feelings were known. Thus, Royall's ambivalence about the ideology of society and the underlying motivation of his own complex feelings are probably the reason why Wharton considered Royall to be so important. Also, it is possible to trace Royall's dilemma throughout the narrative, and his difficulty to decide what role he is to have towards Charity underlies all interaction between these two characters.

The marriage between Charity and Royall is the climax of the novel. Charity's attempts to escape the isolation and drudgery of North Dormer are curbed, and her affair with Harney is effectively hidden from the public. The narration reveals different attitudes towards this marriage. By looking at these attitudes, it is possible to draw some conclusions as to where the text is positioned within the ideological landscape of its time. On the one hand, the text communicates positive aspects of the marriage, as seen in the final scene of the novel:

“You're a good girl Charity.”

Their eyes met, and something rose in his that she had never seen there: a look that made her feel ashamed and yet secure.

“I guess you're good, too,” she said, shyly and quickly. [...]

Late that evening, in the cold autumn moonlight, they drove up to the door of the red house. (190)

Here, there are several allusions to positive aspects of the marriage. The passage shows that the development in the life of Charity and Royall during that fateful summer has led to the growth of some kind of understanding between them. He saves her from social sanctions, and forgets her promiscuous behavior by calling her a “good girl,” while she accepts his offer of marriage and therefore calls for an understanding between them.

What is important to understand is that even though the text presents the marriage as positive, this last passage also has a pessimistic tinge to it, reflecting negative attitudes. Even though Charity is offered security and sanctuary through the marriage, the reader is also made aware that as a result of the alliance between Royall and Charity, her much-wanted freedom and autonomy will be gone. Also, in the final passages of the novel, Charity is described as marrying Royall in a daze, weary of the impossible situation she has gotten herself into and tempted by the warmth and security that Royall’s offer of marriage gives her. The reader is also made aware that by her marriage to Royall, the possibility of a happy ending with Harney is made impossible. Regardless of her attempts to change her fate of an isolated life without personal freedom, Charity is bound to stay in North Dormer. Thus, the marriage between the two can be seen as not only the best possible escape from a compromising situation; it is also the unavoidable result of constricting social norms and merciless social ideology.

Summer presents characters that all play an important part in depicting the diversity of the social landscape of North Dormer. Through the depiction of how a multiplicity of characters communicate with the ruling ideology of society, the text shows the marked difference between how society sanctions unwanted behavior according to where the individual is placed in the social hierarchy. Thus, one might argue that the characters in *Summer* become mediators for the challenging of conventional values, and by extension, the

ideological landscape of the contemporary society that the text draws upon. In “Ideology, Fiction, Narrative” Eagleton argues:

The ideological effect indeed consists in the arresting of a chain polyvocal signification in such a way as to fix, stabilize, and privilege certain signifiers which then, becoming as they do the modes in which the subject’s “lived” relation to the “real” is articulated, contribute to the securing of the conditions of existence of certain dominant social relations. (79)

All literary texts are in some sense ideological, and especially because *Summer* describes social values, it will be possible to detect a degree of evaluation in the narration. Accordingly, the values conveyed by the narrator and the text as a whole may be at odds with the values upheld by the society that is presented in the novel. At this stage of the thesis, it is too early to decide whether *Summer* takes an oppositional or subversive position with regard to the ideological positions presented in this chapter. Yet, as one may note that the text objects to the social conditions of its time by showing the constricting environment and suffocating social norms that an individual is bound to face, while at the same time acknowledging the ideology and social conditions of its time by showing that the characters in *Summer* are helpless “characters” in a social “scene.” Thus, the discussion of how the characters relate to social norms shows that the novel neither tries to secure nor transform ideological conditions; rather it tries to show several sides to an ideological struggle. In other words, the text stages a dialogue with its own time and readers. As Wharton herself states in her article “The Vice of Reading” (1903): “What is reading, in the last analysis, but an interchange of thought between writer and reader?” (513). By showing that ideology affects individuals differently according to their social position, the novel makes the reader aware of the ideological struggle the individual is forced to face, and thus reaches its goal of encouraging critical thinking about

the social conditions of its time, and making both the contemporary and present-time reader aware of the individual's place within society and its ruling ideology.

Chapter Two: Nature or Nurture?

The Naturalistic Influence in *Summer*

Oh Carrie, Carrie! Oh, blind strivings of the human heart!
Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie*

Wharton's *Summer* is considered to belong to the realistic subgenre of novels of manners. Yet, as Donna M. Campbell suggests in *Resisting Regionalism* (1994), Wharton was aware of the risk of being identified solely as a society novelist, implying that she would be defined as a regionalist writer and a mass-producer of novels of this sort (149-50). Possibly in order to avoid this label and to tell the story of a young woman without the sentimentality of the female domestic novel, Wharton made use of naturalist conventions which demanded objective detachment and thematic determinism (151). Where realism believed in ethical choice and second chances, naturalism doubted the autonomy of the individual, and rather views him or her as over-determined, such as is seen in *Summer*'s treatment of its characters, in particular the protagonist Charity. Therefore, the analysis of *Summer* requires a discussion about how naturalism influences the thematic focus of the novel. Furthermore, it is important to look at how the use of naturalistic textual strategies creates a dialogue between text and reader, and how this dialogue contributes to the discussion of the ideological position of the text.

In *Summer* as well as other of Wharton's canonized works such as *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence*, it is apparent that a main objective is to reflect the changing social reality of the time through the depiction of how a social identity is shaped by the interplay between the individual "self" and the social group. In *Summer*, as Wharton explains in her autobiography *A Backward Glance*, she goes beyond the usual boundaries of class and

geography and turns away from the scene of New York with its “pathetic picturesqueness” (6). By depicting what she called “the derelict mountain villages of New England [...] grim places, morally and physically” (293-94), Wharton’s movement towards a rural setting agrees with Donna Campbell’s claim that there was a long-standing naturalistic practice of setting the action amid rural and western landscapes (155). Despite its rural focus, the novel is in dialogue with its time, looking at how a small town suffers under the lack of communication with the “outside world” in a time that saw great changes in American society. Since the society depicted in *Summer* is not distinct from what one might find in a piece of realist fiction, the difference can be found in the way the novel relies on extensive use of naturalistic conventions, especially with regards to the ways in which society influences the individual.

Even though Wharton tried to avoid the label of the typical female writer of society fiction, her authorship is dominated by novels and short stories of this sort. In her fiction, Wharton renders what Lawrence Gilman calls “a social condition” (307), the compelling social issue of gender, class and the fate of those who try to exceed its boundaries. However, by placing some of her fiction in the landscape of New England, she showed diversity and a willingness to go beyond the boundaries of her immediate environment. While her ambition went past the intent to describe the region, there are suggestions of Wharton’s wish to closely describe certain distinctive features of the area in which *Summer* is placed, especially with regards to Charity. Her small-town ways are visible in this excerpt: “I saw you going into her house just now, didn’t I?” she asked, with the New England avoidance of the proper name” (9). Here, the narration pays attention to Charity’s spoken language, perhaps typical of the area, as well as betraying what one might view as an urban disdain for the habit of avoiding the use of the proper name, revealing a value judgment on the part of the narrator. The role of the narrator will be discussed at length later in the chapter. Although passages like this one show that Wharton occasionally pays attention to New England speech, the rendering of

direct speech is not consistent, and cannot be regarded as a whole-hearted attempt to document regional particularities, such as her New York novels are famous for doing. One might observe that the choice of placing *Summer* in a New England setting provides an environment strictly determined by its isolation and lack of communication with the outside world, as well as a focus on a different group of people than what Wharton normally depicted, thus allowing a different set of current social issues to come to light.

Despite the difference in the choice of setting, the realistic notion of the demands and constraints of class and gender is visible. Yet, *Summer* also explains its characters as being victims of both their instinctual drives and of society. Heredity, together with environment and social background play a much larger role than free will in determining a character's fate. In other words, characters are determined by forces outside their own power of influence, unable to fight against circumstances that are deemed as unchangeable. As Scott Emmert explains, Wharton presented female characters that desired an identity outside of the socially determined one, but who are ultimately imprisoned by society's approval (Par. 24). The naturalistic claim that individuals lack free will and the possibilities to decide their own destiny differs from realism. Lee Clark Mitchell maintains that realists believed that the self to some degree stands free from circumstance, in the sense that an individual is granted the capacity to morally consider actions that are only conditionally theirs (15).

By using a naturalistic convention in explaining that the individual is determined by hereditary qualities as well as the demands of society, and disregarding the individual as an independent agent, *Summer* takes the realistic society novel a step further. Despite the differences between *Summer* and the fiction of canonized American naturalists such as Stephen Crane and Theodore Dreiser, Wharton's fiction can be classified as naturalistic because it focuses on behavior as partly explained through causes such as parentage, which Mitchell explains, is typical of naturalistic fiction (13). Where realistic fiction would allow

characters to have the ability of free thinking and the freedom of choice, the narration in *Summer* depicts its protagonist Charity and her life as determined and not free.

Realism and naturalism and the relations between them are defined differently by different theorists and critics. The subsequent discussion of *Summer* will regardless be based on the assumption that both naturalism and realism are founded upon the accurate depiction of a social reality. Abrams explains in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*:

Realistic fiction is written to give the effect that it represents life and the social world as it seems to the common reader. [...] Naturalism is a mode of fiction that was developed by a school of writers in accordance to a particular philosophical thesis. This thesis [...] held that a human being exists entirely in the order of nature. [...] and therefore, such a being is merely a higher- order animal whose character and behavior are entirely determined by two kinds of forces, heredity and environment. (260-61)

Tracing Abrams's definition of realism and naturalism in *Summer*, this would mean that one would find a consistent play in the narrative between the naturalistic aspect of determination and the realist representation of individuals in society.

In "The Rewards of Representation: Edith Wharton, Lily Bart and the Writer/Reader Interchange" (1991), Barbara Hochman describes *The House of Mirth's* protagonist Lily Bart as "a commodity created by her personal history and culture" (151), which also applies to Charity. In *Summer*, the reader notices the juxtaposition of two different societies, namely North Dormer, where the story is set, and the Mountain, which is consistently mentioned in connection with Charity. Because there is a compelling divergence between the two places, Charity's development is influenced by the fact that she cannot find out if her personality is a result of her history or her upbringing. As the story progresses, it is clear that Charity's sense of self is strongly connected to the place in which she find herself, creating what Scott Emmert explains as being a frequent structure of naturalist novels, "to be dependent upon

different ‘temporary worlds’ through which characters carry their desires and seek their identities” (Par. 8). The personality of a character cannot, as Wharton argues in *The Writing of Fiction*, “be reproducible by a sharp black line, [as] each of us flows imperceptibly into adjacent people and things” (7). Taking Wharton’s statement into consideration, this means that Charity takes on a personality that is defined by how she is perceived in different societies. This is especially seen in Charity’s relationship to North Dormer, where the narrative presents Charity as constantly aware of her role as an outsider. As discussed in chapter one, Charity’s awareness of her position in North Dormer is first and foremost encouraged by Mrs. Hatchard, who constantly emphasizes Charity’s obligation to be grateful for the fact that she is brought down from the Mountain. This functions as a invariable reminder of Charity’s dual belonging, and Jennie Kassanoff argues that Charity “embodies the conflation of town and Mountain, legal and illegal, daughter and lover” (qtd. in Campbell 165).

At the beginning of the novel, the reader meets a young woman who is beginning to be aware of the limited opportunities that North Dormer has to offer her, making her repeat several times to herself: “How I hate everything!” (4), signaling that she understands how she is controlled by her situation. This phrase is repeated several times in the first pages of the novel, and then disappears as soon as Harney is introduced to the story, signaling his significance for her as an opportunity for release from her current situation. What is apparent, however, is that it is neither education nor marriage that Charity seeks; she declines the opportunity for additional schooling and takes no interest in the village boys. Instead, the beginning of the novel implies that Charity seeks adventure, a thrill without consequences or responsibility. This creates a picture of Charity as a thoughtless, narrow-minded village girl, not so unlike Lily Bart in Wharton’s *The House of Mirth* (1905), who also only cares for what her desires demand of her in the immediate situation that she finds herself in. In Charity’s

case, her situation demands the desire for change, and the opportunities for change are found in Harney.

One might argue that the relationship between Charity and Harney coincides with Charity's discovery of her heritage and roots, although it is more plausible to claim that it is the very affair with Harney that spurs the acute conflict concerning Charity's relationship with North Dormer, her sense of attachment to the Mountain and her following realization of how her roots makes her different from the other residents of the town. Yet, from the beginning of the novel, the narrative hints at Charity's roots and North Dormer's expectations regarding Charity's obligations to feel grateful for being rescued from the Mountain. Interestingly, Charity is always reminded that she should be grateful and discrete every time she decides to give voice to her opinions or to do something that goes against the town's decorum. In chapter one, the incident where Royall has tried to break into his adoptive daughter's bedroom at nighttime becomes the most obvious example of the double standards in North Dormer, mainly because this indiscretion is so scandalous that Miss Hatchard does everything she can to keep the situation a secret. The need to maintain the façade of a respectable society is a recurrent image in Wharton's fiction.

Culture and society are the primary deterministic elements in *Summer*. Through her indiscretion with Harney, Charity is delivered her true social history, and from there on it is this definition of her heritage that decides Charity's choices: "She knew at last: knew that she was the child of a drunken convict and of a mother who wasn't 'half human' and was glad to have her go; and she had heard this story of her origin related to the one being in whose eye she longed to seem superior to the people about her!" (47). Royall is the one that so far has decided the fate of Charity's life: he has taken her down from the Mountain, kept her from further education and violated her personal integrity through his sexual advance. In addition, he also reveals to her who her parents are. The revelation of her parentage is yet another

factor that will determine her further development. As will be discussed later, Royall leads Charity to the altar at the end of the story, thus determining the rest of Charity's life from this point on. This means that Charity's sense of self will always be determined by the standards of society and how society defines the Mountain and the people living there.

In addition to labeling and determining Charity's sense of self and placing her in the social hierarchy of North Dormer, society also participates in determining how Charity views the Mountain and the people there, showing that Charity is indeed thoroughly influenced by her environment. In the words of the well-known naturalist Stephen Crane in the introduction to *Maggie* (1893), "[*Maggie*] tries to show that environment is a tremendous thing in the world and frequently shapes lives regardless" (qtd. in Davitt Bell 134). Ironically, if applied to Wharton's novel, this means that despite the fact that Charity can be said to be labeled as an outsider in North Dormer, she is still a member of that very society. This is especially visible in an episode where Charity comes face to face with a man from the Mountain, Liff Hyatt: "She continued to look up on his weather-beaten face, with feverish hollows below the cheekbones and the pale yellow eyes of a harmless animal. 'I wonder if he is related to me?' she thought with a shiver of disdain" (36). As Charity in this instance shows clear negative emotions towards her kin, this reflects how Charity is also strongly influenced by the culture that she has grown up in. As Charity has lived most of her life in North Dormer, it is natural that she is a product of this environment, no matter where she was born. Thus, one might argue that her sense of values and morals is the result of her upbringing, and not heredity, and that Charity's sense of self takes a middle position between the role as a young woman from the Mountain and the adoptive daughter of the most prominent member of the town.

As she is a product of her environment, Charity knows her position in society. Towards the ending of the novel, in an oddly-phrased letter to Harney, Charity shows her understanding of the social hierarchy that she is a part of: "I want you should marry Annabel

Balch if you promised to. I think maybe you were afraid I'd feel too bad about it. I feel I'd rather you acted right. Your loving Charity" (144). This letter reveals how Charity understands her place in society. While Harney has been engaged to Annabel Balch, he has simultaneously conducted an affair with Charity, and as mentioned in chapter one, this is a clear case of double standards. In the letter, Charity makes no remark of this, placing herself within the frame of social rules set in society, where these differences between men and women and between women of different rank are taken as a matter of course. In addition, Charity also communicates her perception of her own place in society, encouraging Harney to do "the right thing," which is to marry the upper-class woman her was betrothed to, and not the poorer uneducated girl he got pregnant. Here, the social criticism of the novel is clearly visible, directed at the social standards of the time which trapped the individual, and particularly women, in social situations where decorum came before everything. There is also some subtle irony in the phrase "the right thing" where the "right" course of action is not always the morally right choice, but the choice that society approves of. Irony serves to underline Wharton's insistence on the deterministic aspect of society, while it also fits the description of the realistic novel of manners. In other words, *Summer's* treatment of the issue of society shows how the novel is influenced by both realism and naturalism. On the one hand, the novel is realistic in its focus, showing how society influences characters and makes the individual a subject of society. Yet, in a realistic novel, the individual is given more choice to act in ways that would influence their own life. According to William Dean Howells, a great advocate of realism in turn-of-the-century America, "the moral responsibility of literary characters is founded on the belief that characters are free to choose between right and wrong, and to learn from the experience of such choices" (qtd. in Davitt Bell 109). In *Summer*, Charity is the classical example of a character that cannot do anything else but to be a passive product of outside forces, as will be shown below.

As the relationship with Harney progresses, Charity finds herself in the unfortunate situation of being pregnant outside marriage. As Harney does nothing to change a situation that is not accepted in society, as well as the strained relationship between her and Royall, Charity is forced to seek refuge in the place where she is told that she belongs, the Mountain. At this point, one might argue that Charity not only wants to seek sanctuary for herself and her unborn child in a community that might accept the result of behavior that violates North Dormer's social norms; it might be possible to claim that Charity's journey towards clarifying her identity necessarily needs to end in the Mountain, the place that has defined her for so long. In addition, as the Mountain has been described to Charity as a place of morally promiscuous behavior, the place might offer her the moral liberty that North Dormer cannot provide for her. Paradoxically, the reader will recognize that the freedom Charity seeks in the Mountain is not a "real" freedom in the sense that the Mountain becomes her only option, the option brought forward by the lack of other alternatives. During the only night Charity spends in the Mountain, it becomes clear to her that she cannot stay there; thoroughly influenced by her environment she is too unlike the people she is related to, and in addition she understands that the Mountain will not bring her the sanctuary she wishes for. In the following paragraph, the difference between Charity and the people in the Mountain becomes clear:

The old woman and the children were still sleeping when Charity rose from her mattress. [...] She was faint with hunger, and had nothing left in her satchel; but on the table she saw the half of a stale loaf. No doubt it was going to serve as the breakfast of old Mrs. Hyatt and the children; but Charity did not care, she had her own baby to think of. She broke of a piece of bread and ate it greedily; then her glance fell on the thin faces of the sleeping children, and filled with compunction she rummaged in her satchel for something with which to pay for what she had taken. She found one of the pretty chemises that Ally had made for her. [...] It was one of the dainty things on which she

had squandered her savings, and as she looked at it the blood rushed to her forehead. [...]

She [...] lifted the latch and went out. (171-72)

This passage is narrated with a subtle hint of irony, as Charity exchanges something as fundamental as bread for an object of luxury and vainness; a chemise that the people in the Mountain probably have no use for. The contrast between the chemise and bread underlines how Charity has grown up in an environment far away from the surroundings she now finds herself in.

In addition to contrasting the life Charity led in North Dormer to the life she so desperately tried to start in the Mountain, this passage also shows something equally interesting. Here, the act of leaving something behind as “payment” for Mrs. Hyatt and the children is not a necessary gesture, as Charity will probably never return to these people. Because Charity has developed and matured at this point of the narrative, it is possible that leaving something behind has become an automatic act of conscience. Barbara Hochman suggests in “The rewards of Representation; Edith Wharton, Lily Bart and the Writer/Reader Interchange” (1991) that Lily Bart in Wharton’s *The House of Mirth* carries out a selfless gesture of burning letters that might have saved her socially before she takes her own life, as a last act of maturity (148). It is possible that the ambition is the same in *Summer*, showing a new and more mature Charity handing over an object from her earlier life, leaving the worryless time behind and taking responsibility as an adult. As the thematic focus in the two novels is similar, one might also argue that both Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth* and Charity commit some form of suicide; Charity resigns her individuality and independent future for the sake of her child, thus symbolically extinguishing her own life.

Even though Charity tries to free herself from the social norms of North Dormer, her environment has affected her profoundly, consequently showing that she can neither stay in the Mountain, nor fit into North Dormer as an unwed mother. The demands of her class and

gender make her dependent on society, and she is not able to transcend these demands. The circumstances surrounding her arrival in North Dormer will always force her into a continued relation with her past, and because of the marks her past has put on her personality, she will always be affected by her dual belonging. As it is the common valuation of norms that matters in society, Charity will constantly seek approval from others in order to fit into society. Yet, *Summer* also shows that despite her upbringing and environment, Charity is naïve enough to engage in an affair with Harney, and she needs Royall to remind her of her social place and obligations, as well as explaining to her the double standards that so evidently characterize the relationship between Harney and Charity. Bearing in mind the naturalistic belief in the domination of genes, one might argue that it is hereditary causes that make Charity act in opposition to every social norm she is raised to respect. As the narrative subtly implies, Charity's mother also gave birth to her child outside any legal frames, making Charity's affair with Harney similar to the situation her mother found herself in when she was born. This situation is especially interesting because the novel implies that Charity and her mother are so unlike, living totally different lives and being surrounded by completely divergent moral standards. Yet, as they suffer the same fate, this shows naturalism's insistence on the force of heredity and its ability to dominate the human being despite attempts to curb its domination on the individual. Thus, throughout the narrative, the text carries with it the implication that Charity carries with her a heritage that her having been brought up in a middle-class family and environment cannot erase.

Accordingly, in addition to the focus on heredity and environment, one could argue that the text carries with it the ambition to bring forth the social criticism typical of the realistic novel of manners through the focus on the domination of the class system and the relationship between strong men and weaker women, making the novel in any regard what Lee Clark Mitchell calls "pessimistic realism" (11). The time *Summer* is set in insisted on the

chastity and purity of young women and the prohibition of behavior that was exclusively allowed for men. Scott Emmert discusses Wharton's focus on the repression of young women, asserting that the social norms of the time pressured women into "Lady-like behavior [that] demanded the total suppression of instinct" (par. 1). Accordingly, in *Summer*, this repression of instincts in Charity is represented as the result of the expectations of society. As the story contains naturalistic elements, this repression of instincts may also refer to the hereditary nature of Charity's parentage. Thus, the repression of instinct in Charity that comes to light could be considered as a result of a hereditary behavior that Royall claims to have seen in her mother. Even though this is not explicitly stated, one might argue that the sexual maturing in Charity finds its expression in the affair with Harney, while in the spirit of naturalism, being determined from the start, the affair cannot be successful, resulting in pregnancy and Charity's destiny. The narration shows that Charity's emotional impoverishment and her subsequent affair with Harney are both a result of a hereditary inclination towards such a destiny, as well as being a result of a constricted and conservative everyday life.

In a discussion of deterministic elements in *Summer*, it is especially important to look at the relationships between men and women in the narrative. Even though Charity's life is eventually destined by the rules of society and the dominance of heritage, her life also consistently revolves around her relationship to dominant men. At the beginning of the story, Charity is defined by her role as Royall's adoptive daughter, and he offers not only fraternal protection and a secure life; he also decides the direction of her life, an example being when Charity abstains from further schooling because Royall indirectly persuades her not to leave North Dormer. Their relationship is redefined because of his initial advancement in the past which implied the violation of the set roles of their relationship, and one might argue that Charity seeks another strong male figure that might provide the protective role that she needs. The choice falls on Harney, probably because he is a stranger, but also because he is educated

and of higher status, something that automatically ranks him above Charity. Although the relationship between Harney and Charity is sexual, the two characters also take on the roles of the dominant father figure and the dependent daughter. For Charity, the feelings she has for Harney is a mixture of both desire and a longing for protection: “Confusedly, the young man in the library had made her feel for the first time what might be the sweetness of dependence” (14). One might argue that the relationship between Charity and Harney is based on the fact that Harney represents someone to rely on when the trust between her and Royall has failed, as much as for love or escape: “His words had been more fraternal than lover-like” (62). Therefore, the relationship between them fills different needs; while Charity seeks a stronger male character to depend on, Harney takes advantage of a young woman of inferior social status. Thus, Charity is constantly defined by her relationship to strong men.

One might argue that because Charity has always been defined by others, she constantly seek out other people’s definition of herself instead of obtaining her own definition of her personality. Charity, similarly to Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth*, to borrow Hochman’s phrase, essentially becomes “a commodity created by her personal history and culture” (151). Charity appears to be forever determined to “belong” to somebody, to have her “self” categorized by the society she is a part of in addition to her heritage and the fraternal domination of stronger males. As Charity ends up marrying the one male that has defined her throughout her life, one might argue that she is forever determined to be a powerless subject to other’s definitions of her, unable to ever find her own individuality in a free world. It is in this interchange between the two elements of heredity and environment which has determined Charity’s identity. Her true identity can only be captured in this exchange between heritage and environment.

In order to fully grasp the naturalistic influence in *Summer*, it is also important to look at how the story is narrated. First and foremost, *Summer* shows absence of narrational

comment, and utilizes what Donna Campbell defines as the naturalistic convention of a detached narration (151). This is especially visible in this scene from the Mountain where Charity sees her dead mother for the first time.

Charity, trembling and sick, knelt beside him, and tried to compose her mother's body. She drew the stocking over the dreadful glistening leg, and pulled the skirt down to the battered upturned boots. As she did so, she looked at her mother's face, thin yet swollen, with lips parted in a frozen gasp above the broken teeth. There was no sign in it of anything human: she lay there like a dead dog in a ditch. Charity's hands grew cold as they touched her. (163)

This scene and Charity's reactions are presented in a detached, factual manner, despite the graveness of the situation and the emotional burden Charity has to endure. Thus, in situations like the passage quoted above, the narrational voice is solely the communicator of events and emotions.

Yet, the novel also shows evidence of how the narrator still is able to communicate ironic distance and judgments in the text. This is especially visible in instances where the reader gets to hear Charity's narrow and limited thoughts on what happens to her, while the reader, viewing the situation from the outside, is probably better informed than Charity: "She had always dimly guessed him to be in touch with important people [...] but she felt it all to be so far beyond her understanding that the whole subject hung like a luminous mist on the farthest end of her thoughts" (127). In passages like this, the reader might find her lack of understanding frustrating. The narration also contains the inclusion of reported speech where characters express opinions about Charity and the action in general: "Everyone in the village had told her so ever since she had been brought here as a child. Even old Miss Hatchard had said to her, on a terrible occasion in her life: 'my child, you must never cease to remember

that it was Mr. Royall that brought you down from the Mountain” (6). Here, the sense of dependence that Charity ought to feel is expressed through the inhabitants of the village.

There are other means of communication between the text and the reader, for example through the use of irony: “A few minutes after Mr. Harney’s departure she formed this decision, put away her lace, fastened the shutters, and turned the key in the door of the temple of knowledge” (12). In this paragraph, Charity leaves the tiny village library, which is mockingly named “the temple of knowledge.” From the beginning, the library is described as poky and outdated, which makes its nickname a ridicule of its current state. It is evident that Charity is not the source of these observations, mainly for two reasons. From the beginning, the reader gets to know Charity as a self-centered young woman without much education. In this exact scene Charity is pictured as being preoccupied with other thoughts as she locks the door to the library. This would mean that there is an external voice here that subtly communicates the inadequacy of the town’s library, presupposing the ability of an educated reader to understand the irony in the phrase “the temple of knowledge.” The use of irony and the presence of an external voice are evident several places in the novel, yet the text strictly enforces the limited focalization through Charity throughout. Thus, the narrator presents a specific set of values which demand the reader to engage in the story. While the text is generally characterized by the naturalistic trait that Davitt Bell describes as detached narration “unmediated by language, a direct transmission of ‘real life’ ” (133), at the same time the narrator offers subjective value judgments. By the use of irony in communication with the reader, the reader is firmly placed as a spectator of events, underlining the limitations of the character in the story, and the reader becomes the witness to a chain of events that is determined from the start and impossible to change. Thus, irony and subtle comments are being used in order to promote a naturalistic literary theme, and become effective tools for Wharton’s aim of social criticism.

This chapter has shown how *Summer* promotes social criticism through the use of naturalistic and realistic literary means. The social criticism culminates in the marriage between Charity and Royall. Charity's marriage to her guardian is subtly described as not only the only viable solution, but also the best possible outcome for her. As Charity will never be able to transcend her gender and class, her marriage will reinstate her position as that of an adequate member of North Dormer and also a powerful one, as she will fill the role as Mrs. Royall. Here, it is important to distinguish between the issues of class and rank. Even though Charity belongs to the same class as many others in North Dormer, she is distinguished by her rank, being deemed lower in rank than many of the other members of her class because of her ties to the Mountain. Her reinstatement as Royall's wife does not change her position within the class she belongs to, but significantly improves her rank in society, as she will then be considered a respectable married woman, and the marriage will create a respectable façade.

As Carol Wershoven argues, Charity and Royall achieves a dual growth through "looking life in the face" (118). This means that the resolving of the novel serves to clarify Royall's significance in the novel, as discussed in chapter one. Both Charity and Royall are outsiders in North Dormer, Charity by her background and her affair with a city gentleman, Royall by his status: "the fact that lawyer Royall was 'the biggest man in North Dormer'; so much big for it, in fact, that outsiders, who didn't know, always wondered how it held him" (13). In addition, Royall is different because of his drunken behavior in public and the fact that he marries his morally considered stepdaughter, thoroughly violating social norms. They have both broken social norms in the past, so by marrying, the two characters show their final subordination to the power of social laws, and as Wershoven argues, coming together as adults, without illusions (122). Charity had illusions of an independent life in the Mountain, but as we have seen, Charity had to establish contact with her maternal roots in order to understand her own maternal role and responsibility. Because of the importance of class, rank

and the ambition to keep a decent façade in society, the alliance between the two will eventually secure their own and the unborn child's survival in a society where social standing is everything.

The analysis of *Summer* shows how the individual is determined by heritage and the influence of environment. Even though Charity tries to take control over her life and travels to the Mountain to seek a way out of her dilemma, she is left unable to act against circumstance, and becomes the ultimate naturalistic character trapped in a situation she cannot escape. The following quote becomes a clear indictment of how Charity eventually understands her role as a victim of her environment: "The more she thought about these things the more the sense of fatality weighted on her; she felt the uselessness of struggling against the circumstances" (143). She realizes that she is subject to the determining force of her heritage, and succumbs to its will: "She supposed it was something in her blood that made the Mountain the only answer to her questioning, the inevitable escape from all that hemmed her and beset her" (154). Interestingly, this would mean that Charity's choice to leave for the Mountain may be predestined in order for her to realize the futility of acting against society. In the chapter "Naturalism and the Excluded Self" Mitchell states that nothing about choice itself denies determinism, since characters opting for an alternative may still be determined to make that exact choice (8). This is intriguing, as this means that the narrative in naturalistic works may present the opportunity of choice, but only as an illusion. Free will is never an option in *Summer*.

The naturalistic aspect in the novel relies on how Charity's identity is created *for* her, thus showing that Charity's development relies on the realization that the only way she can create an identity for herself is through her relations to other forces. These forces are represented not only by her heritage, but also by how she is defined by society through her associations to the Mountain and eventually by her relations to stronger individuals in the

same social hierarchy. The novel shows that even though Charity is initially a weak character, she matures and grows in the narrative, indicating that she comes to understand that she has to conform to the role that is expected from her and thus abandon her dreams of breaking free. In the words of the early review of *Summer* by Lawrence Gilman, “the history of Charity Royall ends grayly [sic], resignedly, with long anonymous years of kindly and terrible amelioration stretching vacantly before her” (307).

Gilman states that *Summer* “is a conventional romance of seduction and betrayal [...] with its aura of a little life unwanted and unloved, and matrimony ultimately enforced to appease an outraged community” (306). Charity’s situation makes her unable to leave her previous life behind, and eventually she makes her return to everything she tried to escape: “then her mind revolted at the thought of becoming one of the miserable herd from which she sprang, and it seemed as though, to save her child from such a fate, she would find strength to travel any distance, and bear any burden life might put on her” (171). The outcome of her sexuality becomes maternity and responsibility rather than individuality and physical freedom. In order to avoid the sanctions of North Dormer, she has no other choice but to let Royall save her: “The physical strain of the night and day had left no room in her mind for new sensations and she followed Mr. Royall as passively as a tired child” (180). She is led like a child to the altar, at that point caring only for “the pleasant animal sensations of warmth and rest” (176). Here, Charity is left in despair over her own situation, succumbing to what Elizabeth Ammons describes as “perpetual daughterhood” (141). Thus, Charity survives by adapting to an environment she understands, North Dormer, when she cannot comprehend how her personality and her actions can be a result of many impulses, both hereditary and learned. Furthermore, Charity truly becomes a determined character in a social scene when the reader understands that even if Charity were to find a successful way to leave North Dormer, she would never be able to thrive outside the society that has created her. This also

refers back to Carol Singley's argument mentioned in the introduction, where she states that Wharton's fiction includes characters that are unable to thrive outside the culture that has produced them (9). Because of this, she accepts the fate she initially had dismissed as unacceptable, and marries Royall.

Based on the assumption that realism and naturalism are literary traditions with the same aim of social criticism, *Summer* shows how Wharton has made use of features from both realism and naturalism in order to communicate how the individual is wholly dependent on society. As we have seen, Charity tries to shed the label society has put on her and to escape the constricting social norms of her environment, but fails as her heritage and environment prevent the possibility of an independent definition of self. The most noticeable element of determinism lies in the focus on how Charity tries to change her own destiny, but how her history and culture make it impossible for her to go beyond the limits that are set for her. Because of her trip to the Mountain, Charity succumbs to her predestined social identity by still defining herself as "her mother's child," and gives up her ambitions when faced with the fact that she will never be free from the heritage that has decided her fate. It is this interplay between the determining aspect of her heritage and the constraints of class and gender that creates Charity's sense of self, and it is through the naturalistic belief in the absolute determinism of outside forces that the reader is to understand that Charity is never free of circumstances, no matter how she tries to change her destiny.

Thus, the use of determinism shows how the individual is utterly dependent of his/her relationship to society regardless of whether it is through established ideas of class and gender, or the ever-shifting cultural and social attitudes towards behavior that go against the standard or established norms of society. The text shows the unchangeable element of social norms and how humans are determined by their place in the class system, compromising the

idea that the individual self has a decisive influence regarding their place in a social community.

Chapter Three: Nature Imagery in the *Summer* Landscape

The impression produced by a landscape, a street or a house should always, to the novelist, be an event in the history of the soul.

Edith Wharton, *The Writing of Fiction* (85)

So far the discussion has concentrated on how *Summer* shows the individual as shaped through power relations and the ideology of society, as well as the determining forces of heritage and environment. While some reference has been made to the use of different literary strategies in the novel, there is one important literary strategy that is yet to be mentioned. The prominent use of nature imagery, introduced already in the title *Summer*, signifies the temporal frame of the novel where the protagonist meets her love and develops an affair within a summer landscape, and by autumn she is alone and pregnant. Therefore, it is especially interesting to look at how the descriptions of nature do not simply function as an artistic embellishment, but represent a significant literary device: nature imagery contributes to the characterization of characters, the thematic focus, and the meaning conveyed in the text as a whole. In this context, it is also interesting to look at how the names of the characters, and how both names and nature imagery serve to evoke thematic connotations in the text.

As discussed in chapter one, contemporary America struggled with rapid urban development and a decline in the former way of living largely connected to rural values and a peaceful existence. Therefore, regional fiction provided a literary “escape” that many readers sought, presenting descriptions of an idyllic rural setting, often accompanied by elaborate descriptions of beautiful scenery. Wharton states in *A Backward Glance* that “the novelist should deal only with what is within his reach,” and, in her case, “the material nearest to hand” (206) would be New York’s fashionable society. Still, she may still be associated with the realistic subgenre of regionalism, as Wharton moves *Summer* from her typical setting into

a rural and idyllic landscape. This can especially be seen in this passage, taken from the first page of the novel, where a rural village could be said to provide a literary escape:

It was the beginning of a June afternoon. The springlike transparent sky shed a rain of silver sunshine on the roofs of the village, and on the pastures and larchwoods surrounding it. A little wind moved among the round white clouds on the shoulders of the hills, driving their shadows across the fields and down the grassy road that takes the name of street when it passes through North Dormer. (3)

While this early passage places the novel in a specific landscape, the reader soon becomes aware that the small town of North Dormer is set up against the city of Nettleton on the one hand, and the poor rural community of the Mountain on the other. Thus, it is important to look at how the text constructs the difference between the rural landscape and the city. Regardless of the idealization of untouched nature, there is no such thing as the perfect idyllic scene in the novel; it is always interrupted or revealed as illusionary. This interruption of urban problems in an idyllic world is shown specifically in one scene, taken from Charity and Harney's visit to Nettleton. Their journey on the Lake is rendered almost exclusively through abundant descriptions of nature:

The Lake at last [...]. Charity and Harney had secured a boat and, getting away from the wharves and the refreshment-booths, they drifted idly along, hugging the shadow of the shore. [...] The Lake was so smooth that the reflection of the trees on its edge seemed enamelled on a solid surface. [...]

A green veil of willows overhung them. Beyond the trees wheat-fields sparkled in the sun; and all along the horizon the clear hills throbbed with light. (92)

Here, the use of positive words is dominant, and the scene takes on an almost super-natural quality, creating a fantasy for the reader. This idyll is soon to be broken, as the couple's time

in the boat is interrupted: “Boats were beginning to thicken on the Lake and the clang of incessantly arriving trolleys announced the return of the crowds from the ball-field. [...] The trolleys roaring out from Nettleton became great luminous serpents coiling in and out among the trees” (93-94). Here, the bustle of human activity is again visible, and the rich language from the scene above is gone. Instead, words with negative connotations are used, such as “incessant,” “roaring,” and “serpent.” This makes the lake-scene the most obvious example of the contrast between the calm and tranquil mood at the Lake, and the busy and disturbing qualities of Nettleton. The juxtaposition of tranquil nature and busy civilization in these passages brings out what Greg Garrard explains as a contrast that runs through the pastoral tradition, namely the “spatial distinction” of town as frenetic and impersonal and country as peaceful and abundant (35). Even though this passage in the novel favors the idyllic scene at the lake by its positive descriptions, it is still important to remember that this peaceful scene is interrupted, consequently contesting the Arcadian view of rural life that can be found in regional literature as well as the pastoral.

Significantly, the protagonist’s dilemma largely stems from the fact that she identifies with two different places: the Mountain and North Dormer, while Nettleton somehow represents the promise of freedom, at least in the early part of the novel. As discussed in chapter two, it is the dual forces of heritage, represented by the Mountain, and the environment of North Dormer that eventually decides Charity’s fate. This agrees with Judith Fetterly and Marjorie Pryse’s argument, when they claim that, “Regionalist writers frequently connect their interest in character to an interest in development and discovery of identity, specifically in relation to home, region and community [... and] her [the character’s] relationship to place — to the regional landscape — is central to her discovery of self (xvi).

In “The Biological Clock: Edith Wharton, Naturalism and the Temporality of Womanhood,” Jennifer L. Fleissner argues that the traditional novelistic female experience is

“the drama of the single misstep” (529), which indeed fits the plot of *Summer* perfectly. It is interesting to see how the novel revolves around this “single misstep,” and how the nature descriptions fit accordingly. As seen above, the novel starts out promising with the romanticized presentation of North Dormer. Yet, because of Charity’s affair with Harney and the subsequent sanctions from society, the superficial idyll of North Dormer declines quickly as the novel continues. This deterioration receives its clearest expression in the fate of Charity, who is the one character that feels the impact of ideology most severely.

Interestingly, Jennifer L. Fleissner refers to what she calls a “nature-based conception of the feminine plot in literature in which the woman as a delicate flower buds, blooms, and finally must shrivel and fade (521). Following Fleissner’s argument, one could characterize Charity as the “flower” of the narrative, and her story contains a “temporal limit” (528) measuring the time she is allowed to bloom. This temporal frame is twofold, as one can both relate this to the timeframe of the story as a whole as well as Charity’s individual development.

From the beginning of the novel, the reader understands that during the timeframe of the novel, Charity will develop mentally as well as physically mainly due to the affair with Harney. Her physical development is often described through the use of nature imagery, as seen here:

On such an afternoon Charity Royall lay on a ridge above a sunlit hollow, her face pressed to the earth and the warm currents of the grass running through her. [...] All this bubbling of sap and slipping of sheaths and bursting of calyxes was carried through her on mingled currents of fragrance. Every leaf and bud and blade seemed to contribute its exhalation to the pervading sweetness in which the pungency of pine-sap prevailed over the spice of thyme and the subtle perfume of fern, and all were merged in a moist earth-smell that was like the breath of some huge sun-warmed animal. (34-35)

This passage, found when the relationship between Charity and Harney is introduced, contains several metaphors for Charity's development. The most notable aspect in this passage is the tangible quality of the nature described, the small details of the summery landscape, and the powerful images they represent. "The bubbling of sap and the slipping of sheaths" describe processes in nature that may be connected to Charity's development into womanhood which has just started at this point. Elizabeth Ammons argues that "[...] of Wharton's heroines, Charity is also the most openly sexual" (134), as we can see, for instance, in this passage: "She often climbed up the hill and lay there alone for the mere pleasure of feeling the wind and of rubbing her cheeks in the grass" (13). Charity's emotions are just as powerful as the blossoming in nature that is described in these examples, and they foreshadow the development of a sexual relationship between her and Harney.

Positive nature imagery is used in the descriptions of the early phase of the relationship between Charity and Harney. In these scenes, Charity's feelings are in focus, conveyed through nature imagery:

The haze of the morning had become a sort of clear tremor over everything, like the colorless vibration about a flame; and the opulent landscape seemed to drop under it. But to Charity the heat was a stimulant: it enveloped the whole world in the same glow that burned at her heart. (84)

The nature descriptions in this passage, taken from Charity and Harney's visit in Nettleton, poses as a clear example of how Charity's emotional life is often described indirectly, and references to nature convey the depth of Charity's feelings, positive and negative. Similarly to the first passage cited above, in this scene, one might argue that Charity becomes one with nature, as it suggests that she is affected by nature both physically and spiritually. In scenes where Charity experiences something for the first time, the use of nature imagery serves to

enhance the feeling of novelty for the reader and to emphasize Charity's limited life experience: "Harney secured the last two places on the stand from which the more privileged were to see the fireworks [...] It was as if all the latent beauty of things had been unveiled to her. She could not imagine that the world held anything more powerful" (95-9).

As the narrative progresses and Charity slowly pieces together her past, it is possible to register a change in the descriptions of nature. If one looks back at the argument in chapter two, Charity is presented as a girl unworried by life, mainly because of her relatively privileged and protected upbringing. The use of positive images of nature in such situations indicates that Charity is in love and carefree, predicting the attitude towards the imminent affair with Harney that eventually becomes her downfall. Charity's feelings are, for example, described in positive tones in the following passage: "What did it matter where she came from, or whose child she was, when love was dancing in her veins, and down the road she saw young Harney coming towards her?" (50). This description is complemented by positive nature imagery:

The air was cool and clear, with the autumnal sparkle that a north wind brings to the hills in early summer, and the night had been so still that the dew hung on everything, not as lingering moisture, but in separate beads that glittered like diamonds on the ferns and grasses. (50)

It is possible to analyze such a description as solely reflecting Charity's state of mind; however, descriptions such as these might also reflect on the general mood of the story so far, since Charity is yet to experience the hardships of womanhood, and she has to mature and take responsibility for her actions. In addition, one might argue that the generally optimistic tone is a sign of Charity's life at this point of the narrative: while her behavior is regarded as promiscuous by contemporary society, she is still relatively free to make her own choices.

The illusion that she is liberated from the constricted environment of North Dormer when the young lovers are together alone in Nettleton reinforces her feeling of freedom: “An unknown Harney had revealed himself, a Harney who dominated her and yet over whom she felt herself possessed of a new mysterious power” (97). This passage is significant, as the narrator clearly states that Charity is aware of his domination over her, yet she also feels empowered.

Notably, she does not feel this power in the relationship with Royall, the power she feels in the relationship with Harney is most arguably the newfound power of sexuality, and the freedom and equality with Harney she imagines that this will bring her. The passage above serves to underline the irony of the fact that Charity feels herself empowered by one of the things that will eventually lead to her downfall in society.

As Charity’s story progresses, the descriptions of nature become increasingly more negative as they enhance the thematic focus of the determined aspect of Charity’s fate, as well as foreshadowing that the relationship between Charity and Harney is doomed to fail. Yet, there are instances where the same setting is described, but with different overtones, implying that the mood of the character influences the descriptions. This is especially visible in two passages where the same house used in two different contexts. The first passage reflects a pessimistic mood, and indicates what is happening to Charity in this particular situation:

The little old house — its wooden walls sun-bleached to a ghostly grey — stood in an orchard above the road. The garden palings had fallen, but the broken gate dangled between its posts, and the path to the house was marked by rose-bushes run wild and hanging their small pale blossoms above the crowding grasses [...] and the door itself lay rotting in the grass, with an old apple-tree fallen across it. (107)

In this passage, Charity seeks somewhere to rest as she has run away from North Dormer after she was caught in Nettleton with Harney, and she is afraid of the consequences when the

rumor reaches town. Harney comes after her, and they talk. One might therefore argue that the focus on depressing details of disorder and decay indicate Charity's miserable state of mind, and that the circumstances in which she seeks the house influences her assessment of it. On a deeper level, the negative descriptions may serve to foreshadow the negative turn in their relationship. Further on it is understood that the friendship between Charity and Harney is taken to a new level at this point: "But once more, as she spoke, she became aware that he was no longer listening. 'Kiss me again—like last night,' he said, pushing her hair back as if to draw her whole face up in his kiss" (109). As discussed in chapter two, there is an implicit criticism of the double standards of society here. Even though Charity's reputation is on the line, and she is upset by the reactions her trip to Nettleton evoked, the narrative pictures Harney as not caring about the situation she is in.

The scene above marks the beginning of the sexual affair between Charity and Harney, and the depictions of landscape and nature become increasingly positive in the following pages, especially because one might argue that Charity is visibly blind with love for Harney: "All her tossing contradictory impulses were merged in a fatalistic acceptance of his will [...] she felt as she sometimes did after lying on the grass and staring up too long at the sky; her eyes were so full of light that everything about her was a blur" (113). Looking at this passage, the reader understands that the narration will be colored by Charity's perception of the relationship between her and Harney, and this is especially visible in a passage that describes the same house as in the passage discussed earlier:

In the gold-powdered sunset it looked more than ever like some frail shell dried and washed by many seasons; but at the back, whither Charity advanced, drawing her bicycle after her, there were signs of recent habitation [...]

She was always glad when she got to the little house before Harney. She liked to have time to take in every detail of its secret sweetness — the shadows of the apple-trees swaying on the grass, the old walnuts rounding their domes below the road, the meadows sloping westward in the afternoon light — before his first kiss blotted it all out. (115-16)

It is clear that Charity's state of happiness influences her vision of the old house; where one might argue that the previous passage described the house and its surroundings in a more realistic manner, this passage shows a romanticized version of the same place, thoroughly colored by the fact that the house is the place of the secret meetings between the two young lovers.

There are yet other examples of how nature is used to enlighten the reader on different aspects of Charity's development that are not clearly visible on the surface of the narrative, but that have great significance for the thematic focus of the novel. This is especially visible in the use of nature imagery in connection with Charity's heritage. The actual use of the word *nature* is limited, and it appears only once in the entirety of the novel. Still, images of nature are seen frequently throughout the novel, especially in connection with descriptions of emotions: "She sat with half-closed eyes as the train rushed through the familiar landscape, and now the memories of her former journey, instead of flying before her like dead leaves, seemed to be ripening in her blood like sleeping grain" (148). Images taken from vegetative life — found in the contrast between "dead leaves" and "sleeping grain" — point to the opposition between death and life, indicative of how she turns from a depressed mood to optimism, a sense of promise, or the evolvment of something new in her life. Also seen in the passage above, the interrelationship between nature, emotions and issues that the individual is concerned with is in some instances implied through the use of the word *blood*: "Her happy blood bathed her to the forehead. He was praising her — and praising her because she came from the Mountain!" (42). Here Charity's blood does not only illustrate the physical

surge of contented emotions; the blood might also refer to Charity's nature, her character, and the pride that is evoked when her heritage is praised. These passages reflect different aspects of Charity's development through nature imagery; her sensual awakening is suggested by the pungent descriptions of the blossoming in nature, the hints of her past, the positive development of her relationship with Harney, and the broadening of Charity's knowledge of the world through the experience of Nettleton on the Fourth of July.

In a scene where Charity encounters a family from the Mountain for the first time together with Harney, the deterministic element of heritage in the story comes to light, at the same time as the weather in the narrative changes drastically. It seems as though nature condemns or disapproves of the relationship, and this functions as a foreshadowing of its failure: "Harney jumped down and helped Charity out; and as he did so the rain broke on them. It came slantwise, on a furious gale [...] turning the road into a river, and making hissing pools of every hollow" (53). Here, the use of words with negative connotations such as "furious," "hissing" and "gale" shows how the narrative suddenly changes tone, literally creating a shadow over the relationship between the two young people. The foreshadowing of the disruption of Charity's present life and happiness is also found in another passage in the text. In this scene, a man from the Mountain, Liff Hyatt, is introduced: "Charity had lain there a long time, passive and sun-warmed as the slope on which she lay, when there came between her eyes and the dancing butterfly the sight of a man's foot in a large worn boot covered with red mud" (35). This passage is significant, as it not only shows the literal disruption of Charity's dream, but on a deeper level also shows how Charity's harmonious state of ignorance is interrupted by someone from outside her isolated world, first Harney and then Liff Hyatt, representing the city and the Mountain, the very places that will upset her own existence. Already on the next pages of the novel, Charity starts to reflect on her heritage: "But all that had happened to her within the last few weeks had stirred her to the sleeping

depths. She had become absorbingly interesting to herself, and everything that had to do with her past was illuminated by this sudden curiosity” (38).

Her curiosity about her past is soon answered, as Charity encounters her kin in a scene which contains a notable number of negative descriptions:

There were three people in the kitchen to which the door admitted them. An old woman with a handkerchief over her head was sitting by the window. She held a sickly-looking kitten on her knees, and whenever it jumped down and tried to limp away she stooped and lifted without any change on her aged, unnoticing face. [...] The place was bare and miserable and the air heavy with the smell of dirt and stale tobacco. Charity’s heart sank. Old derided tales of the Mountain people came back to her, and the woman’s stare was so disconcerting, and the face of the sleeping man so sodden and bestial, that her disgust was tinged with a vague dread. (53)

This passage clearly marks the difference between the people from the Mountain and Charity. Compared to passages discussed earlier, there is a notable change of tone here. There is no nature imagery, only the extensive application of words with negative connotations: “sodden,” “bestial,” “bare,” “miserable.” Although one might argue that the use of negative words may be credited to the fact that the narration only reflects the reality of the situation, this kind of negative descriptions are rare in the text. Rather, the pessimistic portrayal of people from the Mountain may be argued to juxtapose Charity and the people she is related to, and further the thematic focus on the influence of society and heritage. The contrast between the lush landscape of North Dormer discussed earlier and the barren landscape of the Mountain also enhances the difference between the two societies and emphasizes the negative manner in which the Mountain is presented throughout the text:

As the road mounted the country grew bleaker, and they drove across fields of faded mountain grass bleached by long months beneath the snow. In the hollows a few white birches trembled, or a mountain ash lit its scarlet clusters; but only a scant growth of pines darkened the granite ledges. The wind was blowing fiercely across the open slopes; the horse faced it with bent head and straining flanks, and now and then the buggy swayed so that Charity had to clutch its side. (159-60)

Here, the difference between the two societies is so distinct that there is no mistaking the literary aim behind the negative descriptions and the use of words such as “trembled,” “bleaker,” “faded” and “darkened.” As the scene is pictured in the summer-time, it is curious how the powerful and blooming landscape of North Dormer is so different in the Mountain, with its “grass bleached by the snow,” and no traces of the seasonal features of summer. The lack of summer qualities in the Mountain also contributes to the symbolical enhancement of the deterministic aim of the story, as figuratively, Charity’s “summer” or prime of youth is over at this stage of the narrative, and there is only a bleak future ahead. This use of nature imagery in the narrative concurs with what Fleissner describes as “the fatally deterministic unfolding of nature’s plot, the story of the woman as flower” (540). The discussion above has shown that in *Summer* nature imagery implicitly serves to compare Charity with a flower; her budding as a young woman, her blooming sexuality through her affair with Harney, and a figurative “wither and fade” when her pregnancy becomes known to her and she is forced to marry Royall. According to Elizabeth Ammons, “with this October wedding, her spirit, in effect, dies” (138). The last sentence of the story efficiently illustrates the metaphorical end of summer: “Late that evening, in the cold autumn moonlight, they drove up to the door of the red house” (190).

As shown above, the text uses descriptions of nature to promote thematic meaning.

The discussion so far has concentrated on the use of nature as a literary strategy, but the use of

names is also an important literary strategy that is worth attention. If one considers other novels by Wharton, in *The House of Mirth*, the protagonist is called Lily, which might be related to her transient role in society and the fragile limits of her existence; as a flower in a vase. In *The Age of Innocence*, the protagonist Newland Archer questions the values on which he was raised. The name Newland might signal a change from old values and customs to a newly defined New York society; a new social “land.” This suggestive use of names is also visible in *Summer*, and names tend to have embedded connotations that either contribute to the characterization of a particular character or to the overall aim of social criticism in the text. In the “Vice of Reading” Wharton looks at what she calls “the mechanical reader,” and states that such a reader misses “a fleeting allusion, suggested sometimes by the turn of a phrase or by the mere complexion of a word” (516), indicating that she may have consciously used names to create a new layer of meaning in the text. The name of the protagonist Charity is hardly coincidental, as it alludes to Charity’s personal history as well as pointing to what becomes her destiny. In chapter one, the discussion touched upon how Charity is always reminded to feel indebted for what Royall has provided for her, and to accept her situation, as she has been so fortunate to live in North Dormer rather than the Mountain. Because of this, one might argue that Charity’s name refers above all to her status in North Dormer as someone who has to rely on the goodwill of others, a “charity case” who will always be defined by what someone else is willing to provide for her. This relates both to her initial indebtedness to Royall, to her affair with Harney and its consequences, as she again has to rely on her guardian’s charity in order to be rescued from a life in shame.

So far, besides setting the stage for the novel, descriptions of nature also bear thematic significance as they both foreshadow and enhance the plot, and contribute to characterization and the social criticism in the novel. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the setting might call to mind the literary subgenre of regionalism, as the idealization of the setting is

typical of regionalist literary works. The claim for regionalist representation might be refuted by Wharton's autobiography *A Backward Glance*, where she states that her depiction of New England life went against "the reflection of local life in the rose-and-lavender pages of their favorite authoresses" (294). This shows that even though Wharton might have been inspired by the rural location of regionalist fiction, she may not have aimed for the glorification of rural life often found in these novels. Thus, one might say that the descriptions of nature evoke the pastoral, and that Wharton might have borrowed elements from the pastoral in some of the passages described above in order to promote their thematic function.

According to M.H Abrams in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, the pastoral might be applied to "any work which represents a withdrawal to a place apart that is close to the elemental rhythms of nature, where the protagonist receives a new perspective on the complexities, frustrations, and conflicts of the social world" (203). Abrams' assessment of the pastoral could be considered too wide, as a preoccupation with nature and rurality can certainly be found in many works that do not belong to the pastoral. Still, some of the passages discussed earlier can be argued to be influenced by the pastoral, especially if one considers Terry Gifford's description of the pastoral as "essentially a discourse of retreat which may, as we have seen, either simply *escape* from the complexities of the city [...] or *explore* them" (46; author's emphasis). Many of the passages above show both the escape and the exploration of the complexities of a rural society that, despite the contemporary belief in its lack of intricacy, was not as simple and rose-colored as it was often pictured. Yet, as seen above, the novel begins with a passage that idealizes the rural landscape, in phrases such as "springlike transparent sky," "a rain of silver sunshine," "pastures and larchwoods," "round white clouds" (3). At the surface level, the novel provides the escape that Gifford mentions. But it also explores what lies beneath this positive veneer of rural idyll. The allusions to the pastoral in the first passage of the novel may represent an example of what Gifford explains

as the “skeptical use of the term [...], implying that the pastoral vision is too simplified and thus an idealization of the reality of life in the country” (2). As Wharton aimed for a reconsideration of the regionalist portrayal of rural life in *Summer*, the skeptical use of the pastoral fits this aim perfectly.

The use of pastoral descriptions of nature adds to the significance of certain passages, especially in relation to the descriptions of Charity. These descriptions might be called pastoral first and foremost because they give expression to what Gifford refers to as “a delight in the natural” (2), which is precisely what these passages picture. The passage where Charity feels united with nature when experiencing her sensual awakening, expresses a delight in the natural on several levels:

On such an afternoon Charity Royall lay on a ridge above a sunlit hollow, her face pressed to the earth and the warm currents of the grass running through her. [...] All this bubbling of sap and slipping of sheaths and bursting of calyxes was carried through her on mingled currents of fragrance. Every leaf and bud and blade seemed to contribute its exhalation to the pervading sweetness in which the pungency of pine-sap prevailed over the spice of thyme and the subtle perfume of fern, and all were merged in a moist earth-smell that was like the breath of some huge sun-warmed animal. (34-35)

As mentioned above, this passage is one of the most potent descriptions of Charity’s development as a mature and sensual being. The pastoral delight in the natural derives from Charity’s figurative enjoyment of nature as the only source of pleasure, as the descriptions allude to compelling sensual processes. In addition, the use of nature here draws on the pastoral delight in a natural setting as well as the regionalist enhancement of the positive qualities of nature, which support the use of descriptions with positive connotations such as “sunlit,” “pervading sweetness,” “warm currents” and “moist earth-smell.” This is also seen in the scene at the Lake discussed earlier in this chapter, where in particular the last section of

that passage clearly shows the pleasure that such a natural scene may provide for its spectators: “The Lake was so smooth that the reflection of the trees on its edge seemed enamelled on a solid surface. [...] A green veil of willows overhung them. Beyond the trees wheat-fields sparkled in the sun; and all along the horizon the clear hills throbbed with light” (92).

The analysis has shown that the use of nature imagery adds thematic significance in the scenes which focus on Charity’s development, emphasizing the deterministic theme of the story. In the church-scene, Charity’s thoughts about her own fortune and the determined fate she is to endure are contrasted in the space of few pages:

It was a joy to Charity to sing [...] All the glow in her blood, the breath of the summer earth, the rustle of the forest, the fresh call of birds at sunrise, and the brooding midday languors, seemed to pass into her untrained voice, lifted and led by the sustaining chorus. (123-24)

Charity stared straight ahead of her and then, dropping her flowers, fell face downward at Mr. Royall’s feet. (129)

These passages effectively sum up the discussion of nature used as a literary device. While the first passage illustrates Charity’s worryless happiness, pictured in positive descriptions of nature, the second passage foreshadows Charity’s eventual fate: to drop at Royall’s feet and become a victim to the power of society. The fact that Charity drops her flowers is significant; the passage above it is the last in the novel where positive illustrations of nature are found, signifying that nature from this point on will only be associated with the consequences of Charity’s affair with Harney, and not the sensual enjoyment of nature that is previously found in the novel.

In chapter one, the discussion centered on the ideological layers of the text in reference to characters and structures power in North Dormer. This chapter has focused on the analysis and discussion of how nature imagery functions in the text to bring out the theme of *Summer*. Through the use of nature imagery, Wharton gives her characters voice and subjectivity, as well as providing the narrative with an additional layer of meaning that functions as a strengthening device for the novel's ideological implications. In relation to Charity, the use of nature imagery first and foremost provides the reader with a more nuanced picture of her personality, her development and her relationship to Harney. In addition, the descriptions of nature vary throughout the narrative, from optimistic and rich to negative and stark. They help to underline the deterministic aspect of the novel, the development of the doomed relationship between Charity and Harney, and to foreshadow Charity's fate as the wife of Royall, who is legally considered her father. Thus, the use of nature imagery in the narrative serves to sharpen and expand on the thematic significance of heritage and environment. Consequently, it also supports the social criticism conveyed in the novel, and serves to bring out the ideological position of the text.

Conclusion

This thesis was initially based on the curiosity about the noticeable difference between Wharton's New England novel *Summer* and her other novels set in New York. The challenge became to find out whether *Summer* can rightly be called a novel of manners because of its setting and the characters portrayed, which are very different from what one finds in the majority of Wharton's novels. Through the analysis of the novel, one might conclude that despite the change of setting and the absence of long-winded depictions of social customs, the thematic focus is the same as in many of Wharton's novels; the individual's struggle to fit into a society that does not give room for individuality and personal choices. The social criticism in *Summer* comes to light through the use of several literary strategies, which also help decide where the text is placed in the ideological landscape presented in the novel, and by extension, the ideological landscape of Wharton's contemporary time. Thus, one might be able to define whether the novel takes on an oppositional or subversive attitude towards the social norms presented.

The thematic core of *Summer* is the discussion of how the protagonist, based on her heredity and her interaction with social norms, is driven to what the narrative eventually presents as her only option: to marry her guardian and sacrifice her individuality and freedom. Similar motifs are seen in many of Wharton's literary works. Yet, there are some notable differences in *Summer*, as the fate of her protagonist is solely dependent on the determined forces of heritage and environment. True, the element of determinism is seen in several of Wharton's novels, but society is frequently named as the most important force outside the individual, which determines how the individual behaves in a social context. Similarly to Wharton's other novels, Charity is greatly influenced by her environment, and in chapter one

she is characterized as both narrow minded and carefree. In addition, her lack of education and experience of the world outside the constricted environment of North Dormer also influences her into taking ill-fated decisions in her relationship with Harney.

As seen in the discussion in chapter two, Charity is determined by both heritage and environment. The fact that she is born in the Mountain and raised in North Dormer creates a compelling conflict within Charity, which is initiated by the fact that she is truly influenced not only both the culture of North Dormer, but also her heritage from the Mountain. Thus, Charity struggles with the fact that she is raised in North Dormer and carries with her its cultural heritage, while she is also stigmatized by her affiliation with the Mountain. When one looks back at the analysis of Charity in chapter one, one understands that she is thoroughly influenced by culture, which is especially seen in Charity's own evaluation of the people in the Mountain.

The element of heritage becomes crucially important especially because naturalism explains the individual's fate as decided by hereditary qualities in addition to their environment. Therefore, one might argue that despite Charity's allegedly constricted world view and the consequences this might have had on her actions, it is Charity's inheritance from her mother that eventually shapes her decisions. Given that North Dormer perceives the people from the Mountain as morally careless, Charity is led to believe that, as a direct consequence of her pregnancy outside wedlock, she is doomed to the same fate as her mother because of her maternal heritage. This again shows the ever-developing battle between Charity's upbringing and her heritage. Thus, Charity is ultimately determined by both forces, and her "true" identity cannot be captured in this complex exchange between heritage and environment, because her sense of "self" is perpetually colored by inherited character traits and the society she is a part of. The individual succumbs to a predefined social role because of the constraints of class and gender, compromising the individual "self" in order to fit into a

social community. *Summer* effectively dramatizes how the individual, in particular Charity, struggles to resist a socially constructed sense of self. Eventually Charity cannot transcend her gender and class despite her efforts to be physically and emotionally free from the expectations of society.

As seen in the discussion above, the individual is explained as being a product of social norms as well as hereditary qualities. This places *Summer* in an especially interesting position in Wharton's authorship which generally features novels where the manners of society are deemed the most important signifier for the development of the individual "self." The social criticism in *Summer* takes on the form of a discussion of the individual within a social context, and how the individuality of a character is forsaken because he or she is expected to conform to a social standard. Even though the narrative in *Summer* does not include any direct commentary on what is happening in the story, it is possible to detect a voice in the narration that communicates with the reader and thus creates a dialogue between the reader and the text. This thesis defines the literary strategies that are used in order to promote this dialogue, in particular the use of irony and nature imagery. However, the most important literary strategy is the use of the characters in order to promote ideological positions. As chapter one concluded, the use of the characters makes the reader aware of the different sides in the ideological struggle presented in the text. Yet, the reader becomes aware that the text, through the use of naturalistic determinism, shows the inescapability of heredity and social norms and the futility of fighting forces beyond the individual's control. As seen, Charity tries to escape social obligations, but cannot thrive outside the environment that has created her and eventually made her a subject to social norms.

The element of determinism and the power of social norms influence the ideological position of the text as a whole. *Summer* recognizes the social problems that come to light in the text, and is openly critical of the double standards between men and women in a society

that openly tries to conceal behavior that goes against the norms of society, regardless of the consequences it might have for the individual. Yet, despite the awareness of social conditions, *Summer* is defeatist. Through the element of determinism the text shows that one cannot fight against nature, thus disregarding the individual's attempts to defy and change its destiny. The individual can essentially only fulfill its determined destiny, decided by outside forces.

Through the depiction of a wide specter of characters, all intertwined in the social web of manners and social customs, Edith Wharton has managed to create a novel that, through the depiction of a society marked by its constricted setting and its rigid social structure, shows how the individual is indeed always forced to hold social conventions. In this respect, *Summer* is an important addition to Wharton's collection of novels of manners. Despite the fact that Wharton used features of naturalism in many of her novels, especially in *Ethan Frome*, it is in *Summer* that the reader gets to know just how all-encompassing determinism might be, and just how far the social reality is from the individual's control.

Looking back at my research, I came across several of Wharton's short stories which convey the same thematic focus as in *Summer*. In retrospect, it would have been interesting to bring some of these short stories into the discussion of *Summer*, as they might have been an interesting addition to the discussion of naturalism. I have made frequent references to *The House of Mirth* in this thesis, and a larger project would probably have benefited from the inclusion of a more extensive analysis of this novel.

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