



Sanctuary

Edith Wharton , William Fiennes (Foreword by)

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As her marriage to an eminent and wealthy bachelor approaches, Kate Orme should feel nothing but bliss. But when she learns of Denis's guilty secret, she becomes painfully aware of her fiancé's flawed morality. Determined that no child of hers should inherit such character traits, she does everything in her power to instill in their son the highest moral code. Yet, when Dick is faced with a moral choice of his own, she can only watch to see if history will repeat itself. American novelist Edith Wharton (1862–1937) is celebrated for her finely crafted stories of New York mores, including [The Age of Innocence](#).

Sanctuary Details

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Stela says

For a modernist author, Edith Wharton is actually very traditional in *Sanctuary*, which is written almost like a classical work: with compositional equilibrium and morale and care for the metaphor. However, the novella isn't pedantic (I don't think there is a work of Edith Wharton that could be accused of this) and not even the theme – the power of education - would make you think so.

Shortly, this is the story of a young girl whose illusions about "happily ever after" are shattered just before her wedding, by learning that her fiancé not only did a blamable thing, but he is unable to see the evil in what he did, and neither does her father who seems to think too that such things are meant to be rather hidden and forgotten than assumed and dealt with. So Kate Orme makes a surprising decision: instead of cancelling the wedding she decides to go ahead with it in order to prevent Dennis to marry another woman and have children who will behave like him. In other words, she takes upon herself to save the world, to build a sanctuary that will protect the next generation against the evil the society not only accepts but even encourages. And this sanctuary is the education she envisages for her children.

Part 2 shows a widowed Kate with a grown-up child. She succeeded in teaching her son to disregard material rewards but is aware of his incapacity of accepting failure. And here comes a turning point, when Dick is lured by another inheritance (there is a deliberate parallelism between him and his father here) to forget the values his mother tried to inoculate him, and he is conflicted because both his professional future and his future happiness depend on his decision.

But in the end, although he had tried to turn his back on his mother's teaching and see things from another perspective, all he had been taught takes over and wins the inner fight:

"His hands stole back into hers, and he leaned his head against her shoulder like a boy.

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

I know, it seems infinitely boring and irritatingly educational. Additionally, Kate is not a character easy to like - she seems lifeless like an annoying concept, rigid in her beliefs and incredibly egotistical and limited sometimes. But keep in mind this is Edith Wharton we are talking about – a younger one, true, but gifted nonetheless, so the story somehow sounds right and is worth reading since it announces her masterpieces.

Krysta says

I am sorry to report that *Sanctuary* simply was not of the same stuff that made *Age of Innocence* and *House of Mirth* great.

Many have addressed the morality angle behind this book: the main character married a morally deficient man with the hope that she could correct the deficiency in their children. Questionable judgment on her part? Probably. But I found that more impactful, if not interesting, part of *Sanctuary* to be the main character's inevitable development into what can only be called America's first helicopter parent. This woman's over-involvement in her grown son's life was pretty scary, and enough to make any (potential) daughter-in-law

cringe. I would definitely file this book under the 'examples of bad parenting' category first, and 'importance of moral conduct' second!

Judy says

This is a very slight novella by Edith Wharton - I enjoyed her beautiful prose style, but felt that, after a strong and disturbing opening, the rest of the story falls off somewhat and isn't up there with her at her greatest.

Claire says

The very short *Sanctuary* was published in 1903 and, as I thought about it, it struck me how Wharton's oeuvre is of such quality that you can pick anything, from anytime, and you'll still find yourself with something worth reading. Even if it's far from such peaks as *The Age of Innocence* or *The House of Mirth*, it will always be an insightful glance at a character's inner life and moral struggles. She's probably the only one that could have had a remote hope of replacing Jane Austen as first goddess in my personal Pantheon (maybe if I'd found her earlier...).

Pamela says

An about-to-be-married young woman discovers a dark secret about her fiance. This compelling novella describes the choice she makes about what to do with her knowledge, and how that choice plays out over the decades. It's always such a pleasure to sink into Wharton's clean, controlled, evocative prose. So (seemingly) simply wrought, so effective. I found this title at a used book sale; I'd never heard of it. Glad I added it to my Wharton library.

John says

Nature versus nurture underlies the plot of this novella. Kate is about to be married to a wealthy, charming man. However, his morality is weak and he indirectly causes the death of a woman and her son. Kate finds this out and instead of the rose tinted glass future she sees the reality of her marriage to this man. Instead of running a mile she goes through with the wedding. On our time unthinkable but this is the 1900s.

In part 2 of the book it is 25 years later and her son faces his own moral dilemma. Kate would have to be the classic interfering mother except she does not. She believes she has brought up Dick correctly and awaits his final decision on tenterhooks. Dick has to make a decision on using someone else's work to win a competition and also his fiancée who will only marry him if he is successful. I will not give way the outcome but this is a good solid novella with glimpses of the author's brilliance in future novels shining through.

Tatiana says

Do women *still* do this sort of thing - marry a man they suddenly find out is a very unsavory/immoral character because they want to make sure any child born to this man is raised not to be like his father? And then, once this child is all grown-up, instead of advising him what is right or wrong, stand back to let him take the wrong path? Such idealism and passivity are hard for me to comprehend. But, as always, written beautifully.

Calzean says

Kate is happily engaged to Denis. Denis is faced with a moral dilemma and fails to act correctly (in the eyes of Kate). They marry have one child and Kate is determined her son will be of stronger ilk than his father. History repeats and the son faces his own crisis. Does nature, nurture or neither win out? While there is the question of values being explored the book reads like a 18th century story and did not really grab my interest.

Lilmismolly says

I listened to the audio book version of *Sanctuary* narrated by Lee Ann Howlett. *Sanctuary* is one of Wharton's earlier novellas, having been published in 1903. As such it does not have the polished quality of her more famous works, such as *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence*. However, *Sanctuary* includes Wharton's trademark use of dramatic irony.

The story centers on Kate, who marries a man after she discovers that he is morally flawed by failing to acknowledge his now deceased brother's wife and son, thus cutting them out of their legitimate inheritance. After her husband dies and she raises her son into adulthood, the son starts displaying many of his father's flaws. Personally, I felt Kate's actions to be that of a "helicopter parent" and very uncomfortable.

Lee Ann Howlett's performance was solid, having different tones and inflections for the varying characters. Her reading pace was also good and set the proper atmosphere for the story.

In short, *Sanctuary* is worth reading or listening to, especially as a study into Wharton's development of life and moral struggles in her characters, which would eventually earn her a Pulitzer Prize.

Shannon says

I love Edith Wharton. I found this book at a used book sale, and the description on the flap (also the description on *Sanctuary*'s Goodreads site) was intriguing. A dilemma of morality and a woman's honest efforts in conquering it or watching history repeat itself--I bought it and took it home to read.

Unfortunately, I found that reading the flap was not too dissimilar from reading the story. A powerhouse writer like Wharton should have devoted a novel-length work to such an idea. It felt abridged, in a sense, with too much exposition in Part 1. Wharton "tells" the reader about the character of Kate Orme, her

engagement to Peyton, her feelings, her actions--the last of which there are few. The inner psyche is interesting, as Kate weighs the pros and cons of entering a marriage with a deliberate liar, but the resolution seems altogether too rushed; this is to create the effect of a surprise beginning in Part 2, which introduces Dick Peyton and his "mother" (the reader is supposed to "wonder" for the first few paragraphs if Kate went through with the marriage or not), but Wharton could have taken her time in developing the end of Part 1 and still created her tension.

Part 2 begins with Kate's adult son (because, come on, we all knew Kate went through with it). Again, Wharton "tells" the readers that Kate tried to inculcate moral value and judgment in her son, but it would have been much more effective to see this upbringing, especially as it figures so heavily in the conversation in the final scene of the book. Why is the reader deprived of a childhood, even a survey of one, of Dick and his mother, and why does she remain so passive with her son? Passive is the operative word here; I was astonished to see how passive Kate behaved throughout the whole novel; as the main character, it makes for a weak plot and a slow read. Kate reacts to and registers the world around her, and the bulk of the narration is either exposition or inner psyche. The dialogues are few, and the other characters get little "onscreen" time with Kate. An interesting concept of a story, but certainly not one of Wharton's finest.

Argos says

Hepi topu 90 sayfal?k kolay okunan s?radan bir uzun öykü. A?k, ihtiras, h?rs üçgeninde dönen 1900'ler Amerika's?ndan bir kesit. Kafa bo?altnak için ataya s?k??t?rlanılır, ama okunmamas? kay?p olmaz.

Dave says

"Sanctuary" is a novella by Edith Wharton, published in 1903. From what I have read, the plot did not cause any surprises at the time, but today the story seems rather unusual. It is a story which deals with ethics, morality, and family honor. While there is nothing particularly unusual in that, some of the choices made by the main character, Kate, seem rather drastic today, and one has a difficult time imagining that any woman today would make similar choices. The story is divided into two parts.

In the first part, we get to know Kate Orme, a woman who is engaged to Denis Payton. She is a woman who has been sheltered from the realities of the world, and comes to learn of an unpleasant situation involving Arthur, Denis' half-brother after he has passed on. Through learning about the situation and how Arthur's family handles it, Kate is upset with Denis and pushes him to do the moral thing. Arthur's mother comes to talk with her, and Kate learns that it isn't just Denis who is willing to protect the family name regardless of the act. Lastly, she learns from her own father that scandal's have been covered up in her own family. After a bit of soul-searching, Kate comes to the conclusion that the most moral thing for her to do is to marry Denis so that she can try to remove the character taint which his yet to be conceived son have. This decision appears to be very unusual and it is doubtful that anyone today would reason in such a way. Kate also seems to ignore that she herself must be tainted since her own father and family also has displayed moral weakness.

Part two picks up several years later. We learn that Denis passed on when their son, Dick was young, and that he squandered most of their money. We also learn that Kate has put her own interests aside to get Dick the best education she can. Dick is starting his career and an ethical dilemma arises which has Kate worried. She is suspicious of the motives of those around Dick, and becomes worried that he is making the wrong

choice. Everything seems to be pushing him towards the wrong path, and the similarities between his reaction and that of his father Denis when he was trying to hide the truth from her are readily apparent.

It will likely be difficult for many modern-day readers to understand the motivation of Kate in this story, but that is due to changes in our society, and not a flaw in the book itself. Nevertheless, I don't think this book is quite as good as Edith Wharton's previously published works and so I round this one down to three stars. It is still worth reading, especially for those who enjoy her other works, but it isn't quite as accessible.

Michelle says

Hmm. Well, this was not The House of Mirth. The story wasn't as strong, nor the writing as fine as I am accustomed to with Wharton's best. More a little like The Reef. It was short and mostly about the relationship between a mother and a son, and IMO the mother had wayyyyy too much meddling going on in her adult son's life, to the point of spiking a girlfriend's ear with a story she hoped would influence her son to do what she wants. If you want your adult child to do what you want, you need to have the kind of relationship where you can say "I think you should do this" and then leave it. Aargh. Anyway, the mother then got way too rewarded for the meddling. This poor guy will never have a life and I think Mommie Dearest will manage to "influence away" any future spouse material. Not that I liked the girlfriend in the story much better. Argh. It was so short, I'm not sorry I read it, but it's at the bottom of my Wharton oeuvre list at the moment.

Dave says

A two-part plot that is reviewed in detail elsewhere. Wharton's style in 'Sanctuary' is a step in the stream of consciousness direction, as typified by Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, compared to the more accessible yet stronger plotted 'Ethan Frome'. Recommended as a study of literary form or moral dilemma examination.

Misfit says

That should be enough kindle classic freebies for today. Couldn't stand seeing the box of credit card machine tape on my Amazon recent purchases :p
