

ETHAN FROME by Edith Wharton (1911)
FOOLSCAP GLOBAL STORY GRID – © Shawn Coyne

GLOBAL STORY	GLOBAL GENRE: Society > Domestic		
	External Genre: Society > Domestic (+Obsession Love Story subplot)		
	External Value at Stake: Power/Impotence		
	Internal Genre: Status > Pathetic		
	Internal Value at Stake: Success/Failure		
	Conventions:		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One central character with offshoots that embody main character’s personality traits: Ethan, Zenobia “Zeena” Frome, Mattie Silver • Big canvas (internal or external): Ethan retreats from oppressive environment into his mind. • Shapeshifters: Zeena is generous and caring at first but becomes tyrannical after they are married and suffers from a vague ailment that incapacitates her except when she has a strong desire. • Clear revolutionary point of no return: Ethan and Mattie break Zeena’s dish while she’s away. • Vanquished are doomed to exile: Ethan is exiled from Starkfield society after the accident. • Power divide: Zeena’s illness and Ethan’s sense of obligation give her power over him. • Win-but-lose/lose-but-win ending: Ethan and Mattie are together in the end, but after the accident, she is no more pleasant than Zeena. 		
	Obligatory Scenes:		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inciting threat to the reigning power: Ethan is attentive to Mattie when she moves in the Fromes. • Protagonist denies responsibility to respond: Ethan refuses to stand up for Mattie when Zeena says she should be married off, but says they can’t afford to hire someone. • Forced to respond, the protagonist lashes out: Ethan promises to take Mattie sledding. • Learn what antagonist’s object of desire is: Zeena wants Mattie gone to keep Ethan from straying. • Initial strategy fails: Zeena hires a girl to help her, and with no extra room, Mattie must leave. • Protagonist, realizing they must change their approach to turn the power tables, reaches all is lost moment: Ethan realizes he can’t run away with Mattie and he can’t stand up to Zeena. • Revolution scene (Core Event): Ethan and Mattie attempt suicide to escape from the misery of life apart from one another. • Protagonists are rewarded on one or more levels: Ethan gets his conscious object of desire because he gets to live with Mattie, but injured Mattie isn’t the person he fell in love with. 		
	Point of View: 1st person (framing story); 3rd person omniscient selective/objective (central story)		
Objects of Desire: Ethan <i>wants</i> power (autonomy) to be with Mattie but <i>needs</i> to realize that being with Mattie means abandoning his moral code.			
Controlling Idea/Theme: Extreme poverty keeps young working-class people in its grip by limiting their options and sapping their ability and will to revolt.			
BEGINNING HOOK		External Charge	Internal Charge
	Inciting Incident (coincidental): Mattie moves in with Ethan and Zeena, Ethan falls in love with her, and he does her chores.	-/+	-/+
	Turning Point Progressive Complication (Action): Zeena says Mattie must marry.	+/-	+/-
	Crisis (BBC): Will Ethan challenge Zeena or let Mattie go?	?	?
	Climax: Ethan says they can’t afford to hire someone to replace Mattie.	-/+	+/-
	Resolution: Zeena appears to let it go.	-/+	-/+
MIDDLE BUILD		External Charge	Internal Charge
	Inciting Incident (coincidental): Zeena leaves Ethan and Mattie home alone.	-/+	-/+
	Turning Point Progressive Complication (Action): Zeena returns early from her trip, having hired a girl to replace Mattie.	+/-	+/-
	Crisis (BBC): Will Ethan challenge Zeena or let Mattie go?	?	?
	Climax: He can’t challenge Zeena or run away with Mattie.	-/--	-/--
	Resolution: Ethan insists on taking Mattie to the train station.	-/+	-/+
ENDING PAYOFF		External Charge	Internal Charge
	Inciting Incident (causal): Ethan and Mattie leave for the station.	-/+	-/+
	Turning Point Progressive Complication (Action): Mattie suggests suicide.	-/+	-/--
	Crisis (BBC): Will Ethan die or risk life without Mattie?	?	?
	Climax: He decides it’s better to die.	-/+	-/--
	Resolution: An image of Zeena distracts Ethan, and he and Mattie are horribly injured; Zeena ends up nursing both, and Mattie is as bitter and unhappy as Zeena had been.	+/-	-/+