

age of innocence by edith wharton

Age of Innocence by Edith Wharton: A Timeless Exploration of Society and Desire

age of innocence by edith wharton stands as one of the most celebrated novels in American literature, capturing the intricate social dynamics of New York's elite in the late 19th century. Through its rich portrayal of characters and the constraints imposed by rigid social codes, the novel delves deep into themes of love, duty, and societal expectations. If you've ever wondered how literature can reflect the tension between personal desire and social obligation, this masterpiece offers profound insights wrapped in elegant prose.

Understanding the Context of Age of Innocence by Edith Wharton

To fully appreciate age of innocence by edith wharton, it helps to understand the historical and cultural backdrop against which the story unfolds. Published in 1920, the novel is set during the 1870s in New York City, a period marked by strict social conventions among the upper class. Wharton, herself an insider in this world, uses her sharp eye and personal experience to paint a vivid picture of the "old money" aristocracy and its unyielding rules.

This setting is crucial because it serves as more than just a backdrop—it actively shapes the characters' decisions and conflicts throughout the narrative. The tension between individual passion and societal expectations is at the heart of the story, making the setting a vital component of the novel's enduring appeal.

Plot Overview: The Subtle Drama of the Age of Innocence

At its core, age of innocence by edith wharton tells the story of Newland Archer, a young lawyer engaged to the beautiful and conventional May Welland. Their engagement and eventual marriage seem like the perfect match by society's standards. However, Newland's world is disrupted when the unconventional and charismatic Countess Ellen Olenska returns to New York, seeking a divorce from her European husband.

The novel explores Newland's growing fascination and emotional conflict as he navigates his feelings for Ellen against the expectations placed upon him by his fiancée, family, and social circle. The story's tension is subtle yet powerful, highlighting the sacrifices and compromises demanded by the social order.

Key Characters and Their Roles

- **Newland Archer:** The protagonist, torn between passion and duty.
- **May Welland:** The embodiment of societal conformity and innocence.
- **Ellen Olenska:** A symbol of independence and challenge to social norms.
- **Other socialites:** Various characters who represent the rigid social structure and its mechanisms of control.

Each character serves a purpose in illustrating different facets of the social milieu and the personal cost of adhering to or resisting it.

Themes Explored in *Age of Innocence* by Edith Wharton

One reason *Age of Innocence* by Edith Wharton has remained relevant is its exploration of universal themes—many of which resonate even today.

Society vs. Individual Desire

The novel's most prominent theme is the clash between societal expectations and personal longing. Newland Archer's internal struggle exemplifies how social norms can suppress true feelings and desires. This theme invites readers to reflect on the often invisible pressures exerted by tradition and class.

The Illusion of Innocence

Despite the title, the "age of innocence" is anything but innocent. Wharton exposes the hypocrisy and repression lurking beneath the polished surface of high society. The novel critiques the idealized image of social grace, revealing the emotional sacrifices and moral compromises it entails.

Marriage and Gender Roles

In *Age of Innocence* by Edith Wharton, marriage is portrayed not simply as a romantic union but as a social contract bound by expectations. The roles of men and women are clearly defined, and deviation from these roles invites scandal or ostracism. Ellen's character, in particular, challenges the traditional role of women, highlighting the limited options available to those who sought independence.

Literary Style and Narrative Techniques

Edith Wharton's writing style in *Age of Innocence* is characterized by elegance, precision, and subtle irony. Her use of third-person narration allows readers intimate access to Newland Archer's thoughts and feelings, while also providing a broader critique of society.

Symbolism and Imagery

Wharton employs rich symbolism throughout the novel. For instance, the recurring motif of windows symbolizes the divide between inner desires and external appearances. The lavish settings and detailed descriptions of clothing and social rituals further immerse readers in the era's atmosphere.

Dialogue and Social Nuance

The novel's dialogue is carefully crafted to convey the unspoken rules and tensions of social interaction. Often, what characters do not say is as telling as their spoken words, reflecting the repressive nature of the society Wharton depicts.

Why *Age of Innocence* by Edith Wharton Still Matters Today

More than a century after its publication, *Age of Innocence* by Edith Wharton continues to captivate readers and scholars alike. Its examination of social constraints, identity, and moral complexity remains relevant in a world where individuals still grapple with balancing personal freedom and societal expectations.

Insights for Modern Readers

- **Understanding social dynamics:** The novel offers a window into how social environments shape behavior, a lesson applicable to contemporary social and professional settings.
- **Reflection on conformity:** Readers can explore the cost of conformity and the courage required to challenge norms.
- **Appreciating literary craftsmanship:** Wharton's nuanced character development and narrative structure provide rich material for literary analysis.

Adaptations and Cultural Impact

The novel's enduring popularity has led to several adaptations, including the acclaimed 1993 film directed by Martin Scorsese, starring Daniel Day-Lewis and Michelle Pfeiffer. These adaptations help introduce the story to new audiences, preserving its legacy and continuing the conversation about its

themes.

Tips for Reading and Appreciating *Age of Innocence* by Edith Wharton

If you're approaching *Age of Innocence* by Edith Wharton for the first time or revisiting it, here are some tips to enrich your reading experience:

1. **Pay attention to social cues:** Much of the novel's tension arises from subtle social interactions. Notice what characters say and, importantly, what they avoid saying.
2. **Consider historical context:** Understanding the Gilded Age and its social hierarchies enhances comprehension of the characters' motivations.
3. **Reflect on modern parallels:** Think about how the themes of social expectation and personal freedom resonate in today's world.
4. **Explore critical analyses:** Reading essays and critiques can deepen your appreciation of Wharton's literary techniques and thematic concerns.

Engaging with the novel actively will uncover layers of meaning that make it a rewarding literary experience.

Wharton's *Age of Innocence* remains a brilliant and poignant exploration of the human heart caught between passion and propriety, a story that continues to invite reflection long after the final page is turned.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main theme of 'The Age of Innocence' by Edith Wharton?

'The Age of Innocence' primarily explores themes of societal expectations, the conflict between individual desires and social conventions, and the constraints of upper-class New York society in the 1870s.

Who are the central characters in 'The Age of Innocence'?

The central characters are Newland Archer, a young lawyer; May Welland, his fiancée; and Ellen Olenska, May's unconventional cousin who challenges societal norms.

How does Edith Wharton portray New York society in 'The Age of Innocence'?

Wharton portrays New York society as rigid, conservative, and obsessed with appearances and social status, highlighting the pressures to conform and the consequences of defying social expectations.

What role does Ellen Olenska play in the novel?

Ellen Olenska represents a challenge to traditional social norms. Her return to New York and her scandalous past disrupt the established order and force Newland Archer to confront his own values and desires.

How does 'The Age of Innocence' reflect Edith Wharton's views on marriage?

The novel critiques marriage as an institution often governed by social duty and appearances rather than love or personal fulfillment, as seen in the relationships and societal pressures faced by the characters.

What is the significance of the novel's title, 'The Age of Innocence'?

The title is ironic, referring to a period that appears innocent and genteel on the surface but is actually marked by hypocrisy, repression, and rigid social codes.

In what year was 'The Age of Innocence' published?

'The Age of Innocence' was published in 1920.

Did 'The Age of Innocence' receive any major literary awards?

Yes, Edith Wharton won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1921 for 'The Age of Innocence,' making her the first woman to receive the award.

How is social class depicted in 'The Age of Innocence'?

Social class is depicted as a powerful force that dictates behavior, relationships, and individual freedom, with strict boundaries maintained to preserve the status quo.

Has 'The Age of Innocence' been adapted into other media?

Yes, 'The Age of Innocence' has been adapted into several films, most notably the 1993 movie directed by Martin Scorsese, as well as stage productions and radio dramas.

Additional Resources

Age of Innocence by Edith Wharton: A Timeless Exploration of Society and Desire

age of innocence by edith wharton stands as a monumental work in American literature, offering a penetrating examination of New York's high society during the late 19th century. First published in 1920, this Pulitzer Prize-winning novel delves into themes of social convention, personal freedom, and the conflict between passion and duty. Edith Wharton's masterful narrative captures the subtle nuances of a rigid social order on the brink of change, making the novel not only a period piece but a timeless reflection on human nature and societal expectations.

In-depth Analysis of Age of Innocence by Edith Wharton

At its core, *Age of Innocence* by Edith Wharton is an incisive critique of the upper-class society in which the characters are enmeshed. The story revolves around Newland Archer, a young lawyer engaged to May Welland, a woman emblematic of the social norms and decorum of the time. Archer's encounter with May's cousin, the unconventional Countess Ellen Olenska, ignites a profound inner conflict between adhering to societal expectations and pursuing genuine personal happiness.

Wharton's portrayal of New York's elite is meticulous and evocative, highlighting the intricate social codes that govern behavior, relationships, and reputation. Through her detailed descriptions of lavish balls, formal dinners, and whispered conversations, she reveals the performative nature of this society, where appearances often outweigh authentic emotion or individual desires.

Themes and Symbolism

One of the novel's most compelling features is its exploration of the tension between individual desire and societal obligation. Newland Archer embodies this struggle, torn between his love for Ellen Olenska, who represents freedom and unconventionality, and his duty to May Welland, the embodiment of social conformity.

Wharton uses symbolism adeptly throughout the novel. The "age of innocence" itself is a layered metaphor, referring both to the seemingly innocent, genteel society and the underlying repression and moral rigidity that define it. Objects such as the opera house, the lavish ballrooms, and even the characters' clothing serve as symbols of the era's strict codes and the facades maintained by its inhabitants.

Character Development and Interpersonal Dynamics

The characters in *Age of Innocence* are crafted with psychological depth and subtlety. Newland Archer's internal conflict is portrayed with nuance, capturing the complexity of a man caught between progress and tradition. Ellen Olenska's character challenges the status quo, embodying both vulnerability and strength as she navigates exile and scandal.

May Welland, often perceived as the archetype of the demure and obedient fiancée, reveals layers of complexity by the novel's end. Wharton's approach avoids simplistic characterizations, instead illustrating how individuals are shaped—and constrained—by their environment.

Comparative Context and Literary Significance

When compared to other novels depicting social stratification and personal conflict, such as Henry James's works or F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, *Age of Innocence* by Edith Wharton offers a distinct perspective rooted in the Gilded Age's elite circles. Unlike *Gatsby*'s more flamboyant critique of the American Dream, Wharton's narrative is restrained, emphasizing subtle social pressures and the invisible chains of etiquette.

The novel's significance also lies in its historical context. Written during the early 20th century, it reflects a society grappling with modernization yet clinging to entrenched traditions. Its reception was marked by critical acclaim, earning Wharton the Pulitzer Prize in 1921—the first woman to receive this honor for fiction—underscoring its literary impact.

Pros and Cons of the Novel's Style and Approach

- **Pros:** Wharton's elegant prose and detailed social observation create an immersive experience that vividly reconstructs a vanished world. The psychological realism enriches character motivations, allowing readers to empathize with their dilemmas.
- **Cons:** Some readers may find the pacing slow and the focus on social minutiae dense, which can reduce immediacy or emotional engagement. The subtlety of the narrative requires careful reading to appreciate the underlying tensions fully.

Adaptations and Cultural Legacy

Age of Innocence has been adapted into several notable films and stage productions, most famously Martin Scorsese's 1993 film starring Daniel Day-Lewis and Michelle Pfeiffer. These adaptations have contributed to the novel's enduring popularity, introducing Wharton's themes to broader audiences.

The novel continues to be studied in academic settings for its insights into gender roles, social conformity, and the limits placed on personal freedom by societal expectations. Its nuanced critique of the American aristocracy remains relevant, offering parallels to modern discussions about class and cultural identity.

Why Age of Innocence by Edith Wharton Still Resonates Today

Despite being set over a century ago, the issues raised in *Age of Innocence* by Edith Wharton—such as the conflict between individual desires and societal pressures—are universally resonant. The novel's exploration of the cost of conformity and the sacrifices required to maintain social order speaks to contemporary readers navigating their own complex social landscapes.

Moreover, Wharton's incisive commentary on the roles assigned by gender and class invites ongoing reflection on how much has changed and what remains entrenched in modern culture. The enduring appeal of the novel lies in its ability to provoke thought about the balance between personal authenticity and external expectations.

In conclusion, *Age of Innocence* by Edith Wharton remains a cornerstone of American literary canon, offering a richly textured narrative that intertwines historical detail with timeless human concerns. Its profound examination of the subtleties of social life and the intricacies of the human heart ensures its place as a work of enduring relevance and insight.

Age Of Innocence By Edith Wharton

age of innocence by edith wharton: *The Age of Innocence* Edith Wharton, 1920

age of innocence by edith wharton: The Age of Innocence Edith Wharton, 2006-02-09 Edith Wharton's most famous novel, written immediately after the end of the First World War, is a brilliantly realized anatomy of New York society in the 1870s. The charming Newland Archer is content to live within its constraints until he meets Ellen Olenska, whose arrival threatens his impending marriage as well as his comfortable future. - ;'They lived in a kind of hieroglyphic world, where the real thing was never said or done or even thought, but only represented by a set of arbitrary signs.' Edith Wharton's most famous novel, written immediately after the end of the First World War, is a brilliantly realized anatomy of New York society in the 1870s, the world in which she grew up, and from which she spent her life escaping. Newland Archer, Wharton's protagonist, charming, tactful, enlightened, is a thorough product of this society; he accepts its standards and abides by its rules but he also recognizes its limitations. His engagement to the impeccable May Welland assures him of a safe and conventional future, until the arrival of May's cousin Ellen Olenska puts all his plans in jeopardy. Independent, free-thinking, scandalously separated from her husband, Ellen forces Archer to question the values and assumptions of his narrow world. As their love for each other grows, Archer has to decide where his ultimate loyalty lies. -

age of innocence by edith wharton: The Age of Innocence Edith Wharton, 2013-08-19 Newland and Emily are getting married. And it is a perfect match, for a lawyer. Newland is from one of New York's best families and, as luck would have it, a lawyer. Emily is sheltered and beautiful. But Mary's cousin appears on the scene, and the Countessa is 30 years old ... and fresh from a scandalous break-up.

age of innocence by edith wharton: The Age of Innocence Edith Wharton, 2021-08-15 *The Age of Innocence* was originally published in 1920 as a four-part series in *Pictorial Review*, then later that same year as Wharton's twelfth novel. It went on to win the 1921 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, making Wharton the first woman to win the award. Upper-class New York gentleman Newland Archer is set to wed May Welland in a picture-perfect

union when the bride's cousin, Ellen Olenska, returns from a failed marriage overseas. As Newland endeavors to help Countess Olenska be reinstated into the family's good graces, his affections for her grow. Newland soon finds himself torn between his desire to conform to the society he knows and his new-found passion for the forbidden Countess.

age of innocence by edith wharton: *The Age of Innocence* Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence* is a 1920 novel by American author Edith Wharton. It was her twelfth novel, and was initially serialized in 1920 in four parts, in the magazine *Pictorial Review*. Later that year, it was released as a book by D. Appleton & Company. It won the 1921 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, making Wharton the first woman to win the prize.[1] Though the committee had initially agreed to give the award to Sinclair Lewis for *Main Street*, the judges, in rejecting his book on political grounds, established Wharton as the American 'First Lady of Letters'.[2] The story is set in the 1870s, in upper-class, Gilded-Age New York City. Wharton wrote the book in her 50s, after she had established herself as a strong author, with publishers clamoring for her work. Newland Archer, gentleman lawyer and heir to one of New York City's most illustrious families, happily anticipates his highly desirable marriage to the sheltered and beautiful May Welland. Yet he finds reason to doubt his choice of bride after the appearance of Countess Ellen Olenska, May's exotic and beautiful 30-year-old cousin. Olenska strikes Archer as the opposite of the innocent and ignorant May Welland. Ellen has returned to New York from Europe after scandalously separating herself (per rumor) from a disastrous marriage to a Polish count. At first, Ellen's arrival and its potential taint on the reputation of his bride-to-be's family disturbs Newland, but he becomes intrigued by the worldly Ellen, who brazenly flouts New York society's fastidious rules. As Newland's admiration for the countess grows, so do his doubts about marrying May, a perfect product of Old New York society; his match with May no longer seems the ideal fate he had imagined. Ellen's decision to divorce Count Olenski causes a social crisis for the other members of her family, who are terrified of scandal and disgrace. Living apart can be tolerated, but divorce is unacceptable. To save the Welland family's reputation, a law partner of Newland asks him to dissuade Countess Olenska from going through with the divorce. He succeeds, but in the process comes to care for her. Afraid of falling in love with Ellen, Newland begs May to accelerate their wedding date, but she refuses. Newland tells Ellen he loves her; Ellen corresponds, but is horrified that their love will aggrieve May. She agrees to remain in America, separated but still married to Count Olenski, only if they do not sexually consummate their love. Newland receives May's telegram agreeing to wed sooner. Newland and May marry. He tries unsuccessfully to forget Ellen. His society marriage is mediocre, and the social life he once found absorbing has become empty and joyless. Though Ellen lives in Washington and has remained distant, he is unable to cease loving her. Their paths cross while he and May are in Newport, Rhode Island. Newland discovers that Count Olenski wishes Ellen to return to him, but she has refused, although her family wants her to reconcile with her husband and return to Europe. Frustrated by her independence, the family has cut off her money, as the count had already done. Newland desperately seeks a way to leave May and be with Ellen, obsessed with how to finally possess her. Despairing of ever making Ellen his wife, he urges her to become his mistress. Then Ellen is recalled to New York City to care for her sick grandmother, who accepts her decision to remain separated and agrees to reinstate her allowance.

age of innocence by edith wharton: *The Age of Innocence* Edith Wharton, 1993 Set in the insular upper-class society of New York City in the 1870's, this book tells the story of Newland Archer, a young lawyer who plans to marry the beautiful debutante May Welland. On the eve of their engagement, he meets May's cousin, Countess Ellen Olenska, who has fled Europe and an unhappy marriage. Ellen's charm and worldliness stir in Archer a longing for life beyond his restrictive upper-class existence. He cannot think of leaving May, yet he continues to pursue Ellen.

age of innocence by edith wharton: *The Age of Innocence, 1920 (Pulitzer Prize Winner).*
Novel By: Edith Wharton Edith Wharton, 2017-01-07 *The Age of Innocence* is Edith Wharton's twelfth novel, initially serialized in four parts in the *Pictorial Review* magazine in 1920, and later released by D. Appleton and Company as a book in New York and in London. It won the 1921

Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, making Wharton the first woman to win the prize.[1] Though the committee agreed to award the prize to Sinclair Lewis, the judges rejected his *Main Street* on political grounds and established Wharton as the American 'First Lady of Letters', the irony being that the committee had awarded *The Age of Innocence* the prize on grounds that negated Wharton's own blatant and subtle ironies, which constitute and make the book so worthy of attention.[2] The story is set in upper-class New York City in the 1870s, during the Gilded Age. Wharton wrote the book in her 50s, after she had established herself as a strong author with publishers clamoring for her work. PLOT*Newland Archer, gentleman lawyer and heir to one of New York City's best families, is happily anticipating a highly desirable marriage to the sheltered and beautiful May Welland. Yet he finds reason to doubt his choice of bride after the appearance of Countess Ellen Olenska, May's exotic and beautiful 30-year-old cousin. Ellen has returned to New York from Europe after scandalously separating herself (per rumor) from a bad marriage to a Polish count. At first, Ellen's arrival and its potential taint on the reputation of his bride-to-be's family disturb Newland, but he becomes intrigued by the worldly Ellen, who flouts New York society's fastidious rules. As Newland's admiration for the countess grows, so does his doubt about marrying May, a perfect product of Old New York society; his match with May no longer seems the ideal fate he had imagined. Ellen's decision to divorce Count Olenski causes a social crisis for the other members of her family, who are terrified of scandal and disgrace. Living apart can be tolerated, but divorce is unacceptable. To save the Welland family's reputation, a law partner of Newland asks him to dissuade Countess Olenska from divorcing the count. He succeeds, but in the process comes to care for her; afraid of falling in love with Ellen, Newland begs May to accelerate their wedding date, but she refuses. Newland tells Ellen he loves her; Ellen corresponds, but is horrified that their love will aggrieve May. She agrees to remain in America, separated but still married to Count Olenski, only if they do not sexually consummate their love. Newland receives May's telegram agreeing to wed sooner. Newland and May marry. He tries unsuccessfully to forget Ellen. His society marriage is loveless, and the social life he once found absorbing has become empty and joyless. Though Ellen lives in Washington and has remained distant, he is unable to cease loving her. Their paths cross while he and May are in Newport, Rhode Island. Newland discovers that Count Olenski wishes Ellen to return to him, but she has refused, although her family wants her to reconcile with her husband and return to Europe. Frustrated by her independence, the family has cut off her money, as the count had already done..... Edith Wharton (born Edith Newbold Jones; January 24, 1862 - August 11, 1937) was a Pulitzer Prize-winning American novelist, short story writer, and designer. She was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1927, 1928 and 1930. Wharton combined her insider's view of America's privileged classes with a brilliant, natural wit to write humorous, incisive novels and short stories of social and psychological insight. She was well acquainted with many of her era's other literary and public figures, including Theodore Roosevelt.

age of innocence by edith wharton: The Age of Innocence Annotated Edith Wharton, 2021-02-21 *The Age of Innocence* is a novel by Edith Wharton, published to widespread acclaim in 1920. Set in the late 19th century among the monied upper class in America during the gilded age, it recreates the setting and cultural details with exceptional realism while contrasting the elegant and mannered facade of the upper classes with their grasping and cruel schemes. The story opens at a performance of *Faust* at the old Academy of Music. A man named Newland Archer is in attendance, and revels in his success and prospects. The scion of one of the wealthiest and most socially important New York families, he is a successful lawyer and is set to marry the young, beautiful, and sheltered May Welland. May is an ideal social match for Newland, and he anticipates the perfection of their marriage in terms of the parties and connections opening up before him. Newland meets May's cousin, Countess Ellen Olenska. Thirty years old and beautiful, Ellen is independent and shows her scorn for the social niceties of wealthy society. Ellen is cultured and intelligent, but has caused scandal by leaving her husband, Count Olenski. Newland finds himself powerfully attracted to Ellen, and suddenly sees May as a dull and provincial girl. When Ellen announces her intention to divorce her husband--an act that would ruin the Welland family name--one of Newland's law partners

asks that he intervene with Ellen and convince her not to. Newland begins calling on the Countess in order to convince her that she should simply remain living separately from her husband. Newland and Ellen begin corresponding via letters, and come to know each other very well as a result. Newland enjoys Ellen's intelligence and her willingness to question society's rules and her role in them, where May's willingness to play by those rules and conform to her family's wishes seems increasingly unattractive. Ellen agrees not to divorce her husband. His admiration and attraction to Ellen grows during this period. Alarmed at his feelings for Ellen, Newland travels to Florida to visit with May and her family and asks May to move up their wedding date because he can sense his resolve crumbling. May refuses, horrified at upsetting the careful balance of society rules. She accuses Newland of having second thoughts about her appropriateness to be his wife, and Newland insists he still loves her. Newland confesses his love to Ellen, who is shocked. She agrees to remain in America only if Newland promises they will merely be platonic friends, which he does. May relents and sends a telegram agreeing to accelerate the wedding plans, hinting that she understands better than Newland what is happening. Newland and May marry. Their marriage is one of convenience; there is no love or passion and Newland finds May dull. He also finds his old life of parties and social events dull, and thinks constantly of Ellen. Ellen has moved to Washington, D.C., and their correspondence has ended, but Newland finds himself thinking of her constantly. He meets Ellen by chance in Newport, Rhode Island and finds her circumstances have changed: The family has cut off her allowance because Count Olenska wishes her to return to him and she refuses. He tells her he wishes her to become his mistress, since divorce would be impossible for both of them. Ellen initially refuses, and returns to New York to care for her grandmother in order to have her allowance reinstated. Newland, with renewed access to Ellen, becomes determined to seize his chance at happiness and keeps pushing Ellen to become his mistress. When Ellen tells Newland she will consummate their relationship, Newland is ecstatic--but then Ellen informs him suddenly that she is returning to Europe, without explanation. Newland decides to leave May and accompany Ellen there. May announces to Newland that she is pregnant, however--and furthermore tells him she had confessed as much to Ellen earlier. Newland understands that Ellen decided...

age of innocence by edith wharton: Edith Wharton, the Age of Innocence Edith Wharton, 2018-08-18 Newland Archer, the ambivalent protagonist, represents the apogee of good breeding. He is the ultimate insider in post-Civil War New York society. Although engaged to May Welland, a beautiful and proper fellow member of elite society, he is attracted to the free-spirited Countess Ellen Olenska, May's cousin and a former member of their circle who has been living in Europe but has left her husband, a cruel Polish nobleman, under mysterious circumstances and returned to her family's New York milieu. His upcoming marriage to the young socialite will unite two of New York's oldest families, but from the novel's opening pages, Olenska imports a passionate intensity and mysterious Old World eccentricity that disrupt the conventional world of order-obsessed New York. Ellen's hopes of being set free from her past are dashed when she is forced to choose between conformity and exile, while Newland's appointment by the Welland family as Ellen's legal consultant begins an emotional entanglement the force of which he could never have imagined.

age of innocence by edith wharton: The Age of Innocence by Edith Wharton Edith Wharton, 2020-11-09 This is Newland Archer's world as he prepares to marry the beautiful but conventional May Welland. But when the mysterious Countess Ellen Olenska returns to New York after a disastrous marriage, Archer falls deeply in love with her. Torn between duty and passion, Archer struggles to make a decision that will either courageously define his life--or mercilessly destroy it. Winner of the 1921 Pulitzer Prize, *The Age of Innocence* is Edith Wharton's masterful portrait of desire and betrayal during the sumptuous Golden Age of Old New York.

age of innocence by edith wharton: Zeit der Unschuld Edith Wharton, 2023-04-26 *The Age of Innocence*, Roman der amerikanischen Schriftstellerin Edith Wharton, wurde 1921 mit dem Pulitzer-Preis für Belletristik ausgezeichnet, womit Wharton die erste Frau war, die den Preis gewann. Die Geschichte spielt in den 1870er Jahren im New York der Oberschicht des Goldenen Zeitalters: Newland Archer, Gentleman-Anwalt und Erbe einer der berühmtesten Familien von New

York City, freut sich auf seine heiß ersehnte Heirat mit der behüteten und schönen May Welland. Doch nach dem Auftauchen von Gräfin Ellen Olenska, Mays exotischer und schöner Cousine, hat er Grund, an seiner Brautwahl zu zweifeln. Olenska wirkt auf Archer wie das Gegenteil der unschuldigen und unwissenden May Welland. Ellen ist aus Europa nach New York zurückgekehrt, nachdem sie sich (Gerüchten zufolge) in skandalöser Weise von einer katastrophalen Ehe mit einem polnischen Grafen getrennt hat. Zunächst ist Newland von Ellens Ankunft und dem möglichen Schaden für den Ruf der Familie seiner zukünftigen Braut beunruhigt, aber er wird von der weltgewandten Ellen fasziniert, die sich schamlos über die anspruchsvollen Regeln der New Yorker Gesellschaft hinwegsetzt. Je mehr Newland die Gräfin bewundert, desto mehr zweifelt er daran, May, ein perfektes Produkt der alten New Yorker Gesellschaft, zu heiraten; die Verbindung mit May scheint nicht mehr das ideale Schicksal zu sein, das er sich vorgestellt hat. Ellens Entscheidung, sich von Graf Olenski scheiden zu lassen, führt zu einer sozialen Krise für die anderen Mitglieder ihrer Familie, die Angst vor Skandalen und Schande haben. Das Getrenntleben kann toleriert werden, aber eine Scheidung ist inakzeptabel. Um den Ruf der Familie Welland zu retten, bittet ein Anwaltspartner Newlands ihn, die Gräfin Olenska von der Scheidung abzubringen. Es gelingt ihm, aber dabei beginnt er, sich für sie zu interessieren. Aus Angst, sich in Ellen zu verlieben, bittet Newland May, mit ihm durchzubrennen und den Hochzeitstermin vorzuziehen, doch sie weigert sich. Einige Wochen später sagt Newland Ellen, dass er sie liebt; Ellen stimmt ihm zu, ist aber entsetzt, dass ihre Liebe May verletzen wird, und will daher nicht, dass er May für sie verlässt. Newland erhält ein Telegramm von May, in dem sie sich bereit erklärt, früher zu heiraten. Newland und May heiraten. Er versucht erfolglos, Ellen zu vergessen. Seine Society-Ehe ist mittelmäßig, und das gesellschaftliche Leben, das ihn einst fesselte, ist leer und freudlos geworden. Obwohl Ellen in Washington lebt und auf Distanz geblieben ist, kann er nicht aufhören, sie zu lieben. Ihre Wege kreuzen sich, als er und May in Newport, Rhode Island, sind. Newland erfährt, dass Graf Olenski möchte, dass Ellen zu ihm zurückkehrt, aber sie hat sich geweigert, obwohl ihre Familie möchte, dass sie sich mit ihrem Mann versöhnt und nach Europa zurückkehrt. Aus Frustration über ihre Unabhängigkeit hat die Familie ihr den Geldhahn zugekehrt, wie es der Graf bereits getan hatte. Newland sucht verzweifelt nach einer Möglichkeit, May zu verlassen und mit Ellen zusammen zu sein, und ist besessen von der Frage, wie er endlich mit ihr zusammen sein kann. Da er verzweifelt ist, Ellen jemals zu seiner Frau zu machen, drängt er sie, mit ihm durchzubrennen, aber sie weigert sich. Dann wird Ellen nach New York City zurückgerufen, um ihre kranke Großmutter zu pflegen, die ihre Entscheidung, getrennt zu bleiben, akzeptiert und zustimmt, ihr das Taschengeld wieder zu gewähren. Zurück in New York und unter dem erneuten Druck von Newland lenkt Ellen ein und willigt ein, sich heimlich mit ihm zu treffen, um ihre Beziehung zu vollenden. Kurz nach ihrem Gespräch erfährt Newland jedoch, dass Ellen stattdessen beschlossen hat, nach Europa zurückzukehren. Als May ankündigt, dass sie und Newland eine Abschiedsparty für Ellen veranstalten, entschließt sich Newland, May zu verlassen ...

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that world and had seen it change dramatically by the end of World War I. The title is an ironic comment on the polished outward manners of New York society when compared to its inward machinations. It is believed to have been drawn from the popular painting *A Little Girl* by Sir Joshua Reynolds that later became known as *The Age of Innocence* and was widely reproduced as the commercial face of childhood in the later half of the 18th century. The title, while ironic, was not as caustic as the title of the story featured in *The House of Mirth*, which Wharton had published in 1905.

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