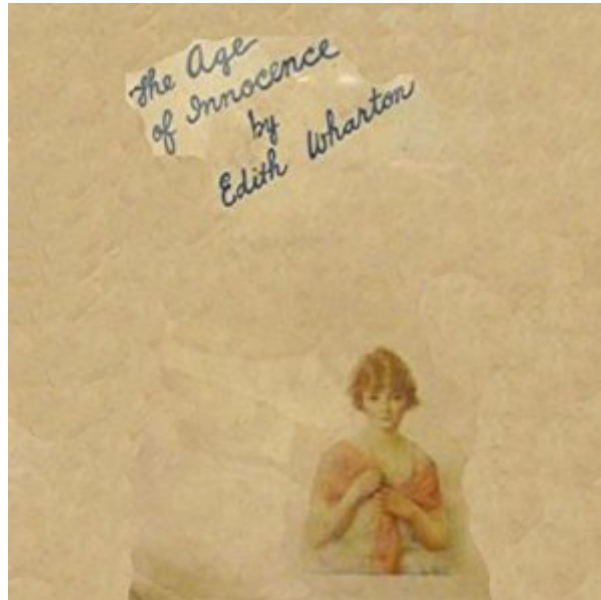




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The Age Of Innocence



Synopsis

Wharton's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel set in upper class New York City. 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, beautiful 30-year-old cousin, who has been living in Europe. This novel won the first ever Pulitzer awarded to a woman.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 8 hours and 48 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Trout Lake Media

Audible.com Release Date: January 30, 2013

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B00B8E6FSS

Best Sellers Rank: #106 in Books > Parenting & Relationships > Family Relationships > Divorce
#419 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Health, Mind & Body > Family & Relationships #517
in Books > Parenting & Relationships > Marriage & Adult Relationships

Customer Reviews

A few years ago I saw the movie version of "The Age of Innocence" and I loved it. However, I wanted more of the back story so I read the book. It didn't disappoint. While the movie introduces viewers to an earlier, elegant age and all of its hypocrisies, the book digs deeper. I got to view early, upscale New York through the eyes of Newland Archer, a young aristocrat who gradually becomes disillusioned, but not enough to prevent him from following the life path that his ancestors have carefully prescribed. Edith Wharton has a wonderful way of drawing the reader into the world she is describing, even as she dryly pokes a bit of well-mannered fun at it.

This novel reminded me somewhat of themes from *The Portrait of a Lady* and *Anna Karenina*. My only complaint about this story was that sometimes the details of family connections, societal expectations, details of dress and dinner parties etc became tedious to read. The author could've painted in broader strokes and the reader would've understood the point without being bogged down

in details. Newland Archer faces life with May who is exactly the sort of wife high society expects him to marry. Or he could break with everything he's been taught and run off with her cousin Ellen who represents unconventionality and everything society represses. In a brief afterward we learn what he chooses and I actually liked this ending. It leaves the reader to ponder if he made the right choice, his motives for his decision, and though this is set in a very different era the message is still very real. Do we conform or do we dare? Are we in love with the person/thing or just the idea of it?

The Age of Innocence is a library-sale book I've had about for a while, on the "no, really, I'm going to stop reading so much fluff and elevate my average" shelf. Yes, well, one day. I happened to pick up Innocence, literally in passing, and within a couple of pages was thinking "Where have you been all my life?" OK, it wasn't so much love at first sight - but it was surprised delight. My expectations? Stuffy, I guess; stiff; something you'd be forced to read in high school. Something a Merchant Ivory film would be made from (though the adaptation was actually directed by Martin Scorsese). And while the second two are true, the first two very much are not. It was beautifully written, with engaging characters, and it was ... I was going to say "funny", but while I think I did laugh out loud a couple of times, part of that was surprise. Its main goal was not to be funny; it was witty. It was kind of wonderful. I have more Whartons, and they have moved up on my to-read list.

One of those books that can be read and enjoyed by readers with a variety of interests and perspectives: family dynamics, women's issues, life in New York's so-called "Golden Age," the lives of the rich and titled, the conflict between individuals and the conventions of society, and so on. It's also a good story, and the more important characters reveal their individual natures gradually, like Salome with her veils. As in real life, the reader never gets behind the final veil, though. The author seems to respect the idea that we can never know another human being completely, and leaves her audience with a sense of wonder and a longing to know more.

A triumph! There are some works, in the affairs of human nature, that are simply destined to be of the highest classic order. This is one of them. And the equine references throughout the story put the novel in the same literary class as Secretariat and American Pharoah in the equine class. Never headed. There is mature sexual inference. We are talking about the lives of mature sexual adults in an age of knowledgeable propriety.

It is easy to see why The Age of Innocence has achieved the ranks of a classic -- the writing is

perfect and probes the themes of love, loyalty, passion and tradition with timeless clarity. The story is set in upper-class Old New York, with its strict codes of conduct concerning even the most mundane activities, its ceaseless preoccupation with the giving and attending of dinner parties, and its endless gossip about all the other members of its small, self-absorbed society. It is a world so far-removed from the 21st century that it is impossible to relate to, and seems ridiculous. Indeed, Wharton often seems to be poking subtle fun at this world in which she lived. Against this backdrop she tells the story of a man and woman who, against all conventions, fall in love with each other and who must make the choice between their desires and the rules of the society in which they live. Wharton probes and reveals their feelings, and those of the other main characters, with a deft and skillful touch. The Age of Innocence has what I consider one of the best endings in literature. Wharton gives her book a conclusion that is truly bittersweet (quite a bit more bitter than sweet, actually). And because she does not explicitly explain her characters' motives, it leaves the reader wondering, with plenty of room for speculation as to why her characters behaved the way they did. It is hard to imagine a conclusion more masterful than that. The narration of this audio version was very good. Although the narrator was a bit weak on some of the female voices (such as Mrs. Welland's lisp which I found a bit much), he did a particularly good job with Ellen Olenska's voice and overall it is an excellent performance.

I purchased the book for my granddaughter, a 9th grader who is enrolled in an honors English class. At first she was having difficulty reading the very long sentences, especially since the vocabulary harkened back to before her time. I had her read a chapter to me. Then she started reading aloud, even when she reads alone. I suggested that she look up words she doesn't know and cannot determine from the context. I believe she is at chapter 20, and she reports she is enjoying reading the book and that comprehension is great.

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