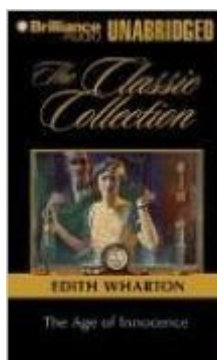


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The Age Of Innocence (The Classic Collection)



Synopsis

Edith Wharton's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Newland Archer* is a young lawyer, a member of New York's high society, and engaged to be married to May Welland. Countess Ellen Olenska is May's cousin, and wants a divorce from the Polish nobleman she married. Intelligent and beautiful, she comes back to New York where she tries to fit into the high society life she had before her marriage. Her family and former friends, however, are shocked by the idea of divorce within their social circle, and she finds herself snubbed by her own class. When Ellen and Newland fall in love, will they be able to choose between passion and conventions? This novel is part of Brilliance Audio's extensive Classic Collection, bringing you timeless masterpieces that you and your family are sure to love.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I find it interesting and in some ways disturbing how few (openly at least) female viewpoints are expressed among the reviews of this book. Indeed, some of reviews make it appear that there are quite a few males out there who believe females are a sexual "tabula rasa" on which they can write their judgements of what constitutes morally appropriate behavior. This book must be understood not simply as art, but as a psychological statement, namely that sexuality exists within each of us from infancy on and parents and society deny that at their own risk. When I was the age of the girls in this book there was no one with the courage to come forward and openly depict the flowering of female sexuality. I lived with confusion and shame about my body and my desires, hurtful feelings that lasted until I was well into my adulthood. I came across this book in a store one day while looking for something else. I spotted the title and I vaguely remembered a news story about some people

wanting to ban it, so I thought I would look at it out of curiosity. The images in it were so beautiful I almost started to cry right there, it was as though I found vindication for the very core of my being. After taking it home, I decided to share it with my nine-year old daughter with whom I had just recently had "The Talk". It was wonderful being able to show her how her body would change and how she would be beautiful even as she changed from a girl into a woman. It is true there are already books out there that are supposed to address the issue, but so often they take a clinical approach that is scary in its own right.

Newland Archer, the protagonist of this ironically entitled novel set in the late nineteenth century, is a proper New York gentleman, and part of a society which adheres to strict social codes, subordinating all aspects of life to doing what is expected, which is synonymous with doing what is right. As the author remarks early in the novel, "Few things were more awful than an offense against Taste." Newland meets and marries May Welland, an unimaginative, shallow young woman whose upbringing has made her the perfect, inoffensive wife, one who knows how to behave and how to adhere to the "rules" of the society in which they live. When Newland is reintroduced to May's cousin, Countess Ellen Olenska, who has left her husband in Europe and now wants a divorce, he finds himself utterly captivated by her independence and her willingness to risk all, socially, by flouting convention. Both Ellen and Newland are products of their upbringing and their culture, however, and they resist their feelings because of their separate social obligations. Various meetings between them suggest that their feelings are far stronger than what is obvious on the surface, and the question of whether they will finally state the obvious or act on their feelings constitutes the plot. Wharton creates an exceptionally realistic picture of New York in the post-Civil War era, a time in which aristocrats of inherited wealth found themselves competing socially with parvenus. Her ability to show the conflict between a person's need for social acceptance and the desire for personal freedom is striking.

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