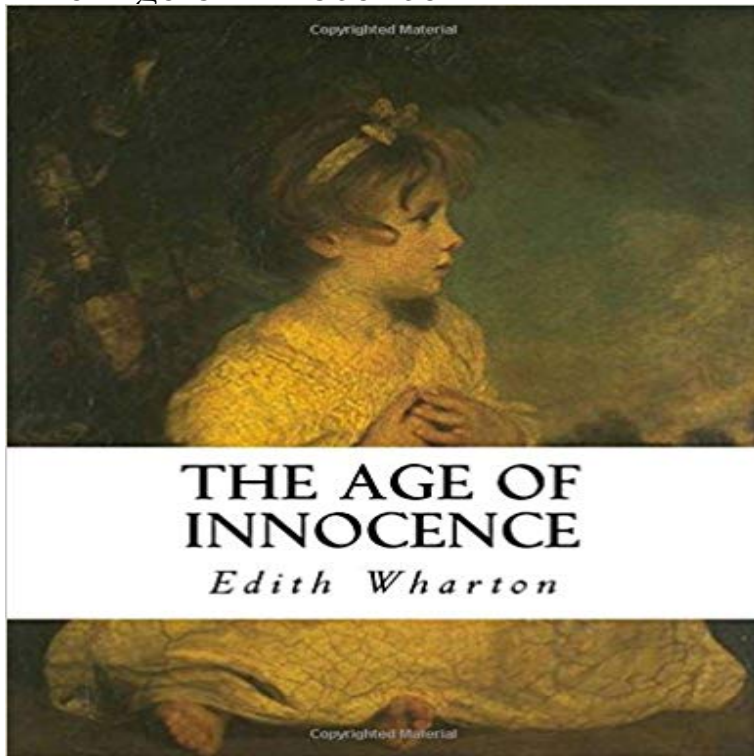


The Age of Innocence



The Age of Innocence by Edith Wharton
The Age of Innocence was a softer and more gentle work than *The House of Mirth*, set in the time of her childhood. Wharton wrote, I found a momentary escape in going back to my childish memories of a long-vanished America... it was growing more and more evident that the world I had grown up in and been formed by had been destroyed in 1914. Scholars and readers alike agree that *The Age of Innocence* is fundamentally a story which struggles to reconcile the old with the new. Wharton was raised in that old world of rigid and proper New York society which features in the story. She spent her middle years, including the first World War in Europe where the devastation of new mechanized warfare was felt most deeply. As explained by Millicent Bell in the Cambridge companion to Wharton, *The Age of Innocence* was composed and first read in the aftermath of Roosevelt's death and in the immediate wake of World War I. We frame the ending remembering the multiple losses not only the loss of Roosevelt but the destruction of the prewar world and all that Wharton valued in it. With the first World War, a definitive line was crossed. There would be no return to the New York of old from which Wharton was raised. And for all that can be condemned in that, there is a certain tenderness with which she crafts the world, as if she had forgotten nothing. This intones the title word innocence, as the novel seems to connect personal innocence with that of national innocence. To Robert Martin, *The Age of Innocence*, was fundamentally about America and its failure to fulfill its own possibilities.

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