

Edith Wharton, 2008, Hermione Lee, 0099763516, 9780099763512, Vintage, 2008

A rich and powerful new life of the great novelist. It overturns the accepted view, displaying her as a tough, erotically brave, startlingly modern writer. The name Edith Wharton conjures up Gilded Age New York in all its snobbery and ruthlessness вЂ” the world of *The Age of Innocence* and *The House of Mirth*. But this definitive biography by Hermione Lee overturns the stereotype. Her Edith Wharton is not the genteel, nostalgic chronicler of a vanished age but a fiercely modern woman, writing of sex and incest, love and war вЂ” a woman of passionate conviction and conflicting ambitions. Born in 1862, Wharton broke away from her wealthy background. She travelled adventurously in Europe, eventually settling in France, her вЂ”second countryвЂ” until her death in 1937. She created fabulous homes in New England and in France, and her life was filled with remarkable friends, including Henry James, Bernard Berenson, Aldous Huxley and Kenneth Clark. She ran her professional life with fierce energy, but she also had her secrets, including a passionate mid-life love affair, recorded in a coded diary. Unhappily married, childless and divorced, she knew loneliness and anguish. Her brilliant and disturbing fiction shows her deep understanding of the longing and struggle in womenвЂ™s lives. In this masterly new biography, Hermione Lee shifts the emphasis to Europe, placing Wharton in her social context and history. It shows in fascinating detail how she worked and what lies at the heart of her magnificent books.

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