

## *The Fiction of Edith Wharton and F. Scott Fitzgerald*

Tuesdays from 10 AM - 2 PM on March 12, 19, 26, April 2, and 9, 2024

Location: Rubel Room at the Poetry Center

Audience: Hybrid (In Person and Online)

After Fitzgerald sent a copy of *The Great Gatsby* to Wharton, she wrote him back, saying that his was the fiction of the future, hers “the literary equivalent of gas chandeliers.” Although Wharton saw herself as an American Victorian as opposed to Fitzgerald the “Modernist,” they connected as writers in more ways than one. According to Wharton’s biographer, Fitzgerald “revered” Wharton because she anticipated so many of his own themes about money, class and time (the past as a surprise)

Wharton’s *The Age of Innocence* and Fitzgerald’s *This Side of Paradise* were both published in 1920. Fitzgerald’s novel would make him the voice of the Jazz Age and rebellious youth, whereas Wharton’s novel would win her the Pulitzer because of its presentation of “the wholesome atmosphere of American life.” Yet the darker side of “American life” in Wharton’s novel would find its way into *The Great Gatsby* (1925), as would Wharton’s other brilliant novel, *The House of Mirth* (1905).

Scribner would publish a collection of Fitzgerald’s short stories in 1920 entitled *Flappers and Philosophers* to cash in on the popularity of *This Side of Paradise*, to be followed in 1922 by *Tales of the Jazz Age*. I have chosen to focus on his short stories, from these volumes and other sources, because not only was Fitzgerald a brilliant short story writer but I believe they tell us more about his literary relationship to Edith Wharton than does his popular novel *This Side of Paradise*.

### Syllabus:

March 12: Edith Wharton: short stories: “Roman Fever” and “Autres Temps”

F. Scott Fitzgerald: “Winter Dreams,” “Babylon Revisited,” “Absolution,” and “The Long Way Out.”

March 19: Edith Wharton: *The House of Mirth*

F. Scott Fitzgerald: “The Rich Boy”

March 26: Edith Wharton: *The Age of Innocence*

F. Scott Fitzgerald: “Crazy Sunday”

April 2: Edith Wharton: *Ethan Frome*

F. Scott Fitzgerald: “A Diamond as Big as the Ritz,” “The Ice Palace,” and “The Curious Case of Benjamin Button” (online)

April 9: F. Scott Fitzgerald: *The Great Gatsby* and “May Day”

Texts: Wharton: *Roman Fever and Other Stories*, Scribner

-----: *The House of Mirth* (1905)

-----: *Ethan Frome* (1911)

-----: *The Age of Innocence* (1920)

Fitzgerald: *Babylon Revisited and Other Stories*, Scribner.

-----: *The Great Gatsby* (1925)

There are two excellent biographies of our two authors: R. E. B. Lewis, *Edith Wharton, a Biography* and Matthew J. Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur: The Life of F. Scott Fitzgerald*.

If you wish to read additional stories by Fitzgerald, a more expansive collection than the one I have chosen is Matthew J. Bruccoli, ed. *The Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald*.

There are many editions of both *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence*. I'll leave it up to you to choose which edition you want, via Amazon Prime if you wish, or a bookstore like Bookmans or The Book Stop in Tucson. And of course there is always the public library. I would prefer you use the original 1925 Scribner edition of *The Great Gatsby*.

I realize I am asking a lot of you to read both *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence* in a week each, but I am hoping you will get a head start of these two brilliant novels before the course begins.

I am really looking forward to teaching this course and engaging you in a discourse on these wonderful texts by two great American writers.