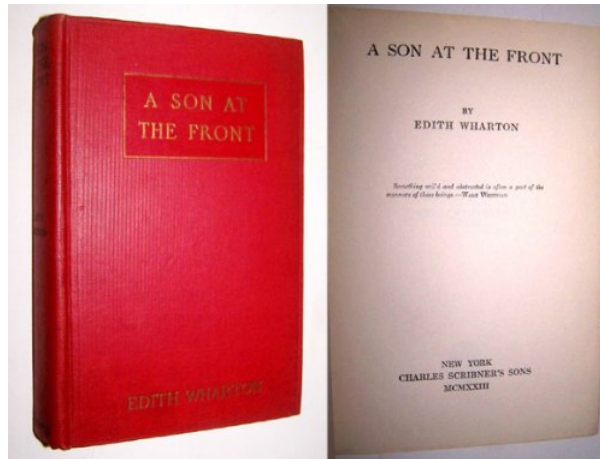
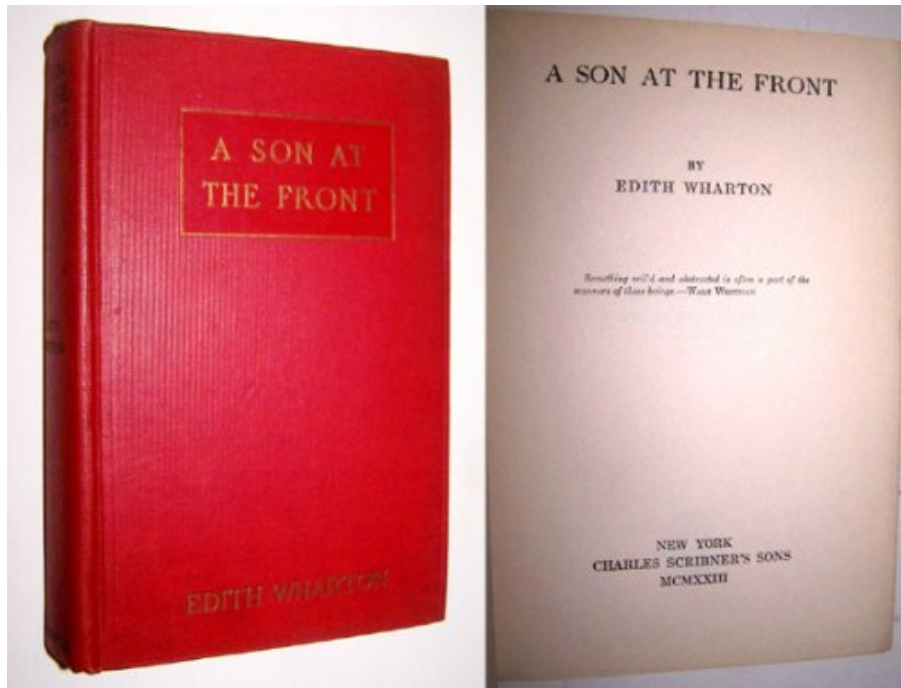


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0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Three Stars

By Ellen Davidson

She's one of my favorite writers, but for some reason this one didn't do it for me.

10 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

War and the family

By Michael J. Mazza

"A Son at the Front," a novel by Edith Wharton, has been republished with an introduction by Shari Benstock. Benstock notes that the novel was serialized from 1922 to 1923 and that an edition was published by Charles Scribner's Sons in 1923. The novel tells the story of John Campton, an American portrait painter who lives in France. Campton's son George, because he was born in France, is subject to mobilization in the French army for World War I. As the story unfolds we see the war's impact on father and son, as well as on George's mother (from whom Campton is divorced) and her current husband, and on other individuals.

Wharton poignantly portrays the anguish and challenges faced by the families of soldiers during wartime. She shows how the horror and violence of war touches even those who are far from the front lines. Yes, I felt that the story briefly dragged at times and that some of the minor characters could have been better drawn, but the novel is overall interesting and at times profoundly moving. I was particularly intrigued by the fact that George is the child not of a happy, saccharine couple, but of a divorced couple who are forced to come together over their common concern in time of war. It is in the drama involving George's parents and stepfather where the book often has its most powerful edge.

This book offers an interesting look at the role of soldier's families, and also of the arts community, during wartime. Also significant is Wharton's look at the importance of personal letters as a communication medium during war. More than eighty years after its initial publication, and with the United States once more at war, "A Son at the Front" remains a relevant work of literature by one of America's most noteworthy novelists.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Real people in fiction (contains spoilers)

By M. Hughes

I had read some of Wharton's short stories before, but none of her novels, and since I have had three sons at "the front" at one time or other, the title of this one appealed to me. Set during World War I, the story is about a youngster just out of college who, in spite of all his parents' attempts to keep him safe, joins the

French army and goes to war.

I can't say it was fun or enjoyable reading this book, because it isn't that kind of book. But it was a satisfying read, one that, when you put it down, you can't quite go, "boy, it's nice to be back in 2016 again." You have to bring yourself back a little at a time, because you've been thoroughly sucked into the time period. From the descriptions of Paris, the field hospitals, the battlefield, and the final little convalescent hospital at the end, the atmosphere is real and thick and wraps itself around you. Wharton's characters are not entirely likable, but they are sympathetic, and even when they're being unreasonable or fearful or selfish, you can understand why they do what they do. This is what I love, when characters are finely drawn and REAL, so that whether you end up liking them or not, you understand them and sympathize. They may be fictional people, but you meet a dozen people just like them every week (more if you go out in public a lot). So fictitious or not, they're real. The parents are divorced; the mother has remarried, this time to a powerful banker, but even his clout can't save George. The mother is on numerous committees and always hosting some sort of war benefit, but she can't benefit George. The father is a renowned artist who always worries about losing his muse...and ultimately finds it in his son.

There's a ring of inevitability about the book, too, The "son at the front" (George) is going to die; you can tell that almost from the time you pick up the book, although things go back and forth so much that you find yourself swimming against the current and hoping against hope that he'll fool you and survive. But when he does die, it's still a surprise, although you've seen it coming all along. I felt like I did watching my mother die of cancer or my brother of liver failure; I knew they were going to die, but it was still a surprise when it happened. And the people involved react realistically--no histrionics, just pain so strong that the reader feels it, past tears and past hurt, just a roundly twisted gut and the unending, never-to-be-answered "why?"

I don't know if I'll read this book again or not, and that's the only reason I won't give it five stars. But even that isn't the book's fault; it's mine. I generally provide a five-star rating to a book I know I'll come back to and read again. Well, the writing in this book is good enough for me to read it again, but I honestly don't know if I could hold up through the pain a second time. It's like watching Schindler's List, not something you do because the only alternative is a baseball game. It's a book you read because you want to ponder the unthinkable. As someone who only had two of her three sons return from the front, I've already pondered that, so maybe this book hits a little too close to the bone. And again, that's not the book's fault; it's mine.

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