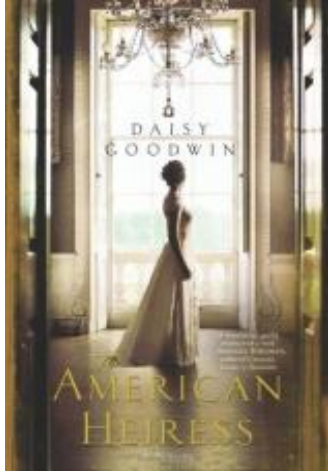


The American Heiress

by Daisy Goodwin



About the Book

Be careful what you wish for. Traveling abroad with her mother at the turn of the 20th century to seek a titled husband, beautiful, vivacious Cora Cash, whose family mansion in Newport dwarfs the Vanderbilts', suddenly finds herself Duchess of Wareham, married to Ivo, the most eligible bachelor in England. Nothing is quite as it seems, however: Ivo is withdrawn and secretive, and the English social scene is full of traps and betrayals. Money, Cora soon learns, cannot buy everything, as she must decide what is truly worth the price in her life and her marriage.

Witty, moving, and brilliantly entertaining, Cora's story marks the debut of a glorious storyteller who brings a fresh new spirit to the world of Edith Wharton and Henry James.

"For daughters of the new American billionaires of the 19th century, it was the ultimate deal: marriage to a cash-strapped British Aristocrat in return for a title and social status. But money didn't always buy them happiness." --- Daisy Goodwin in *The Daily Mail*

The American Heiress was originally sold and distributed in the UK as **My Last Duchess**.

Discussion Guide

1. What is your initial impression of Cora Cash? How does she develop as a person in the course of the novel?
2. In America, Cora is clearly at the top of society, while Bertha is very near the bottom. In what ways do their circumstances change when they move to England?

3. What role do the mothers in the story --- Mrs. Cash, Mrs. Van Der Leyden, and the Double Duchess --- play in the central characters' lives?
4. Cora is always aware that "no one was unaffected by the money." How does the money affect Cora herself? What are the pleasures and perils of great wealth?
5. What is your opinion of Teddy and the Duke? What about Charlotte?
6. What do you think about Cora's decision at the end of the book? Would you have made the same choice? (The author has said she was of two minds up until the last chapter.)
7. What are the differences between the Old World and the New in the novel? Do both worlds seem remote in the 21st century, or do you see parallels to contemporary society?
8. When she was Chair of the Orange Prize for Fiction in 2010, Daisy Goodwin wrote a controversial essay lamenting the "unrelenting grimness" of so many of the novels and pointing out that "generally great fiction contains light and shade": not only misery but joy and humor. What do you think about Daisy's argument that "it is time for publishers to stop treating literary fiction as the novelistic equivalent of cod liver oil: if it's nasty it must be good for you"?
9. *Kirkus Reviews* called the novel "a shrewd, spirited historical romance with flavors of Edith Wharton, Daphne du Maurier, Jane Austen"; other critics have also seen echoes of Henry James. If you have read any of these earlier novelists, what parallels and differences do you see in Daisy's work?

Author Bio

Daisy Goodwin is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *THE AMERICAN HEIRESS*, *THE FORTUNE HUNTER*, *VICTORIA* and *DIVA*. She attended Columbia University's film school as a Harkness scholar after earning a degree in history at Cambridge University, and was Chair of the judging panel of the 2010 Orange Prize for Fiction. She is the screenwriter and executive producer of the PBS/Masterpiece drama "Victoria." She lives in London.

Critical Praise

"Anyone suffering Downton Abbey withdrawal symptoms (who isn't?) will find an instant tonic in Daisy Goodwin's *The American Heiress*. The story of Cora Cash, an American heiress in the 1890s who bags an English duke, this is a deliciously evocative first novel that lingers in the mind."

--- Allison Pearson, *New York Times* bestselling author of *I DON'T KNOW HOW SHE DOES IT* and *I THINK I LOVE YOU*

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