

**American Literature & Culture**  
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**Mod 01 Lecture Number 04**  
**Henry James: The Portrait of a Lady – Chapter 1 to 20 (Lecture 4)**

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(Professor – student conversation starts)

Professor: The theory that the wish to be quite by herself had caused her to dispense with her cousin's attendance, now what is the meaning, Sona? No book

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Professor: Ok, look at this, go through it. Look at the point of view, what are the keywords? She is an independent girl, she is an American girl, those things, those words would be

coming across very frequently in this book, in all Henry James, Ok. The fact that you are an American, I am an American, and that is extremely important, identity formation project ok

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Professor: So that evening an incident occurred which, had there been a critic to note it, would have taken all color from the theory that the, that the wish to be quite by herself had caused her to dispense with her cousin's attendance. Seated toward 9 o'clock in the dim illumination of Pratt's Hotel and trying with the aid of two tall candles to lose herself in a volume she had brought from Gardencourt, she succeeded only to the extent of reading other words than those printed on the page—words that Ralph had spoken to her that afternoon. Suddenly the well-muffled knuckle of the waiter was applied to the door, which presently gave way to his exhibition, even as a glorious trophy, of the card of a visitor.

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Professor: And who do we meet here? Caspar Goodwood. Have you read this? Yes, now tell me, so far what are your impressions? I mean I think I told you

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Professor: do chapters 1 to 30. Ok, now what are your impressions of whatever happened till now? This is chapter 5 for me.

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Professor: Of course the danger of a high spirit was the danger of inconsistency--the danger of keeping up the flag after the place has surrendered; a sort of behavior so crooked as to be almost a dishonor to the flag. But Isabel, who knew little of the sorts of artillery to which young women are exposed, flattered herself that such contradictions would never be noted in her own conduct. Her life should always be in harmony with the most pleasing impression she should produce; she would be what she appeared, and she would appear what she was.

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Professor: I am just giving you a reference from chapter 5. So this is important again to understand that in Henry James, characters appear what they are really are. She, this is important to retain her authenticity, to retain her true self Ok and not to present some other face. So she will appear what she is, and she is not going to change. Although she has never been exposed to the kind of artillery, now why this term artillery that young women are exposed to? Did you note that? Did you notice the word artillery? Why? What is this artillery that young women are exposed to, what sort of artillery?

Student: Barrage of suitors

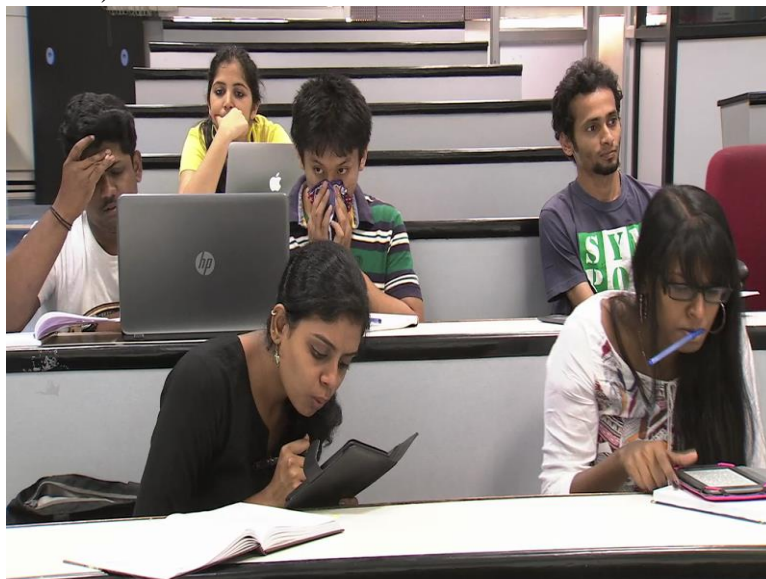
Professor: Ok, barrage of suitors, Ok even American girls may have barrage of suitors but she is very direct. She is very straightforward, she is very honest. So even a barrage of suitors perhaps, you know, they attack her Ok, and its metaphorical attack, not a literal attack, even if they attack her, she doesn't know how to handle these things except by being extremely straightforward. Any other young woman and the idea is any other young woman who is not an American, she will know how to handle very tactfully and diplomatically but that, that trait is altogether absent in an American and a young American woman definitely is not equipped with that sort of perhaps slyness to handle such kind of a situation. Isabel can only be very forthright, can be direct and straightforward just like any another American girl. This is important to know. Anything else you would like to comment on? Show some example that you have been reading.

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Professor: Azhar, did any reading happen?

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Professor: Let's go to chapter 11 now. Before we go to chapter 16, chapter 11, are you there?  
Ok. How many characters do you meet so far?

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Professor: Apart from the Touchetts, Ralph Touchett and his father, and you have Lord Warburton and of course you have your heroine Isabel Archer.

Student: Henrietta Stackpole

Professor: Who is Henrietta?

Student: She is a journalist, she is American

Professor: She is American, yeah

Student: This is James version of a feminist.

Professor: Exactly and having an independent woman who is a journalist, she is making her own living, and she is also travelling. Ok, don't you think, by the norms and by the standard practices of that particular century, that was pretty forward to have a character like this, a woman character like this who was actually able to travel and to record and to document things. And she is someone who is supportive of which of the suitors?

Student: Caspar

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Professor: Caspar Goodwood, Ok

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Professor: So, an American and she think is this is the right person for her.



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Professor: Now I am at chapter 11. Go to this particular section, how to take you, for me it is 104, page 104. It comes right after "I hope he'll hate me then.... You're not the girl you were a few short weeks ago, and Mr. Goodwood will see it." That is Henrietta talking. You find it, Ok.

To this observation our heroine made no return. She was absorbed in the alarm given her by Henrietta, Henrietta's intimation that Caspar Goodwood would present himself at Gardencourt. She pretended to herself, however, that she thought the event impossible, and, later, she communicated her disbelief to her friend. For the next 48 hours, nevertheless, she stood prepared to hear the young man's name announced. The feeling pressed upon her; it made the air sultry, as if there were to be a change of weather; and the weather, socially speaking, had been so agreeable during Isabel's stay at Gardencourt that any change would be for the worse.

Her suspense indeed was dissipated the second day. She had walked into the park in company with the sociable Bunchie, and after strolling about for some time, in a manner at once listless and restless, had seated herself on a garden-bench, within sight of the house, beneath a spreading beech, where, in a white dress ornamented with black ribbons, she formed among the flickering shadows a graceful and harmonious image. She entertained herself for some moments with talking to the little terrier.

Now the sudden change of weather, a cloud comes over her and

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Professor: this is because of the arrival of Caspar Goodwood and she sits on a bench. Now the idea is that this bench is a very significant symbol in the novel, Ok and this bench that faces the...the entire property belongs to the Touchetts, of course

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Professor: so she is sitting and just

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Professor: perhaps thinking about her future, her present. She is very uncertain. She sits on this bench and looks.

You can, almost it's like painting a picture, right a beautiful woman in a very pretty black and white dress sitting with her little terrier at her feet and looking at the beautiful mansion. Now, this image is, this image recurs at certain strategic points in this novel. Why is he trying to do that? Why would any writer try to recreate the same kind of image? It's like a verbal painting.

Student: A sort of return to a certain state

Professor: Good, Ok, so she is in a state of uncertainty now. Ok, but why would, my question is very general, not a specific to Isabel. Why would, why would a writer resort to, I am just trying to give, draw your attention to certain ways in which novel should be read. So why would a writer resort to such a practice?

Student: Make the reading (())

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Student: I don't know

Professor: Reading more, well...

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Student: To highlight important moments in a novel.

Professor: Good,

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Professor: Good, how do writers construct a sort of symmetry? What is a symmetry? We have an asymmetrical structure and we have a symmetrical structure. Yes, certain sections reflect what has happened here. So it is like bringing back those particular moments. Ok, so when, at the end of the novel, she is, perhaps you find her sitting on the same bench, all by herself. She is still confused, yeah. She has made up her mind about certain things but as we are told right now that the weather has changed for her because of the arrival of Caspar Goodwood. The weather changes again for her because of the arrival of Caspar Goodwood at the end and there she is again sitting on the same bench, Ok but then the whole life has

passed before her, Ok or by her. She has taken so many wrong decisions. She finds herself again at the crossroads sitting on the same bench and Caspar Goodwood arrives.

Student: When she meets Caspar Goodwood for the second time,

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Student: she is not uncertain. She is very sure that she doesn't want to marry him.

Professor: Yeah, I will come to that and that is at this point

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Professor: yeah. So there are several meetings between her and Caspar Goodwood. So I am talking of the very first meeting when he arrives from, newly arrives from America to England just to see her and to propose to her and he has been proposing, I mean there is some kind of a vague hint given to us

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Professor: that he has been proposing

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Professor: for quite a while. Is that the reason why she escapes? Is he the reason that she is, yeah, she flees America, yeah?

Student: It is more of a desire to see the world and the opportunity was presented to her by her aunt.

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Professor: Ok but isn't this one of the reasons?

Student: May be at the back of her mind...

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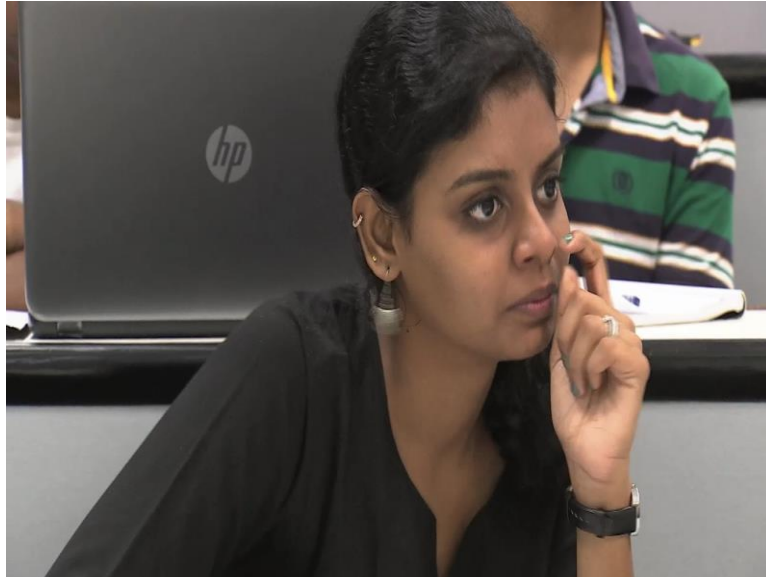
Professor: At the back of her mind, yes

Student: It was one of the reasons.

Professor: That's what. When you will read the novel you will realize



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Professor: this is also one of the contributing factors. Ok, she doesn't want to commit and again it's her independent American spirit. She wants to explore the world before she commits herself to anyone. Because he arrives, she feels that she is being pushed into a corner for an answer and therefore this certain gloom that descends on her. Therefore we are told so far the weather has been very pleasant, Ok, metaphorically as well as literally. But once he arrives, it is not like he is such a wrong man for her; it is just that she is just not ready for an answer to make a commitment that great.

So this, but when once we find her again sitting on the same bench, again with Caspar Goodwood in front of her, same situation but life has changed. Ok, so perhaps that is, this

was one moment of decision that she could have taken and her life would have gone some, a very different way, in a different way and but she takes some other decision and at the end when she finds herself all alone but things have gone too far now. So that's the idea, so symmetry and how Henry James, when you read Henry James or other masters as well; these are the clues that you should be sensitive to.

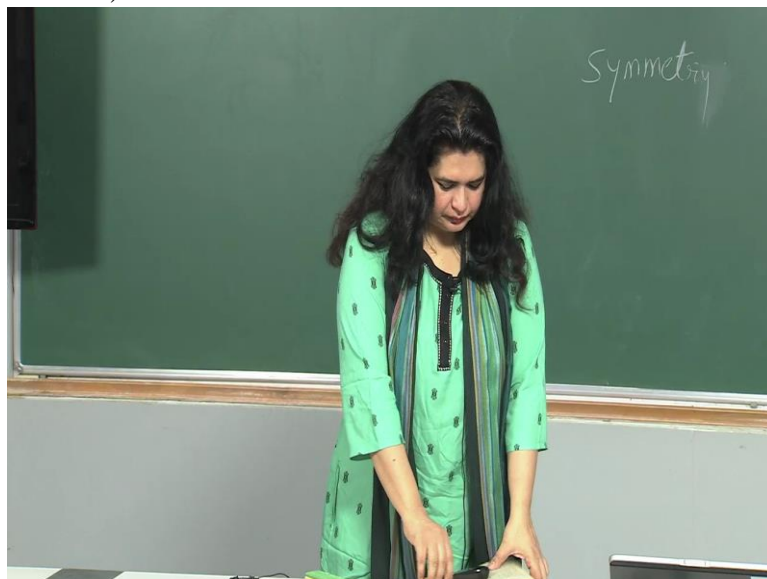
Ok, you can always read a novel without being sensitive to it, and just for your grades, that's another matter. Ok, but if you really want to enjoy a novel

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Professor: then these are the kind of clues that you should be looking at.

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Professor: Alright, now so chapter 16; Caspar Goodwood was accordingly the next moment shaking hands with her, but saying nothing till the servant had left the room. “Why didn’t you answer my letter?” he then asked in a quick, full, slightly peremptory tone--the tone of a man whose questions were habitually pointed and who was capable of much insistence.

Who played the role of Caspar Goodwood in a, in the movie? Are you aware that there is a movie?

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Professor: Or you are not? You are aware? Ok so who played the lady? Nicole Kidman, Nicole Kidman played the lady Isabel Archer and Caspar Goodwood was played by Viggo Mortensen, I don't know if you are aware of Viggo Mortensen, no? , well he is the leading man in The Lord of the Rings, yeah. The knight, what's his name? Aragorn Ok, there is also

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Professor: an interaction between Archer and Caspar Goodwood and which is very interestingly done and that's why I mention that it is almost like a battle of wit

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Professor: between you know, archer versus knight. So if he is the knight and she is the archer, so it is that kind of an exchange, both of them are literally attacking themselves, attacking each other. Ok so look at this.

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Professor: In the same chapter, but I don't know exactly which page you are on...

It wasn't certainly as if his nature had been soft, so that pin-pricks would draw blood from it; and from the first of her acquaintance with him, and of her having to defend herself against a certain air that he had of knowing better what was good for her than she knew herself, she had recognized the fact that perfect frankness was her best weapon. To attempt to spare his sensibility or to escape from him edgewise, as one might do from a man who had barred the

way less sturdily--this, in dealing with Caspar Goodwood, who would grasp at everything of every sort

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Professor: that one might give him, was wasted agility

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Professor: It was not that he had not susceptibilities, but his passive surface, as well as his active, was large and hard, and he might always be trusted to dress his wounds, so far as they required it, himself. She came back

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Professor: even for her measure of possible pangs and aches in him, to her old sense that he was naturally plated

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Professor: and steeled, armed essentially for aggression.

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Professor: Now what do these words mean, naturally plated armed aggression, what is happening here, Pragma?

Student: He is very hard and authoritative, like he won't show his like, for example like

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Student: if you take Lord Warburton, he is like, he would say if you don't agree I will die and all.



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Professor: Yeah, Ok, yes

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Student: He also likes her a lot but say as if to pity on him or something.

Professor: Yeah

Student: That's a kind of nature, like he is hard from outside like. On surface he is also, his description is he is aggressive also.

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Professor: Well, he is assertive. Definitely he is very assertive; he doesn't want to take a no for an answer. That's the quality of Caspar Goodwood. He is a real American, you know, a person who can take all the blows. He is not an aristocrat unlike Lord Warburton, so he is not given to painting pretty pictures as she pointed out. Ok, so he is not going to use poetic declarations to woo her. Ok, he is very direct and expects direct answers and she is direct as well. And the only difference between Warburton and Caspar Goodwood, although they intensely love her is that Lord Warburton is sensitive Ok, and he has no qualms in declaring or exhibiting his sensitiveness, sensitivity.

However with Caspar Goodwood, he is armed, he is naturally armed and plated just like a knight, so therefore archer versus knight. That's the, that's Jamesian terminology and analogy archer versus knight. She keeps on pricking him. She wants to draw blood but he is naturally armed and plated, Ok. He won't wither away. He will be hurt but he has the ability to dress his wounds. Now which wounds are those... the emotional wounds that she is going to inflict on him, alright?

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Professor: The last page, please go to the last page of this particular chapter 16, "I must leave you now," said Isabel; and she opened the door and passed into the other room. This apartment was dark". Now this is not an apartment as in different apartments,

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Professor: we are talking about the same, see language changes over period of century. So apartment is still the same part of the house or the hotel that she is staying but to the other part of the same hotel, the same room

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Professor: "This apartment was dark, but the darkness was tempered by a vague radiance sent up through the window from the court of the hotel, and Isabel could make out the masses of the furniture, the dim shining of the mirror and the looming of the big four-posted bed. She stood still a moment, listening, and at last she heard Caspar Goodwood walk out of the sitting-room and close the door behind him. She stood like; she stood still a little longer, and then, by an irresistible impulse, dropped on her knees before her bed and hid her face in her arms."

Now why this reaction?

Student: She was not sure about the decision she made, in the sense that she is not utterly convinced that it was a right thing to do but...

Student: She feels bad

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Student: And especially Henrietta has also kind of told her may be if you hadn't come here, you would still have liked him. If you stayed in America, him or the other people so, I am sure

Professor: Yeah

Student: She is not entirely (())

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Professor: She is not entirely convinced about her own decision, Ok. So look at the page before this one, exactly before this.

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Professor: One would think you were going to commit some atrocity!" "Perhaps I am. I wish to be free even to do that if the fancy takes me." "Well then," "I'll go home." And he put out his hand, trying to look contented and confident. Isabel's confidence in him, however, was greater than any he could feel in her. Not that he thought her capable of committing an atrocity; but, turn it over as he would, there was something ominous in the way she reserved her option.

As she took his hand she felt a great respect for him; she knew how much he cared for her and she thought him magnanimous. They stood so for a moment, looking at each other, united by a hand-clasp which was not merely passive on her side. "That's right. You'll lose nothing by being a reasonable man." "But I'll come back, wherever you are, two years hence".

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Professor: She has asked for two years, Ok, I am not yet ready but I need two years to make up my mind. Ok and that's a long time I mean they are talking about a different epoch in history to ask a man to wait for her for two years, it is almost like refusing him, turning him down. But he says I will come back and he does. Ok, that's the....so do you think now at this point if I ask you an interesting question, how important are names in this book, in this novel, names?

She is an archer; archer is associated with a symbol, with the bow and arrow, Ok. And he is Caspar Goodwood, now what sort of a name would that be? You can trust, dependable, reliable,

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Professor: it's like solid, standing there like a rock, like an oak wood;

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Professor: yeah you can depend on this person. So that is there so names mirror the characters. Sometimes these things also, writers do think of these strategies also, giving characters extremely appropriate names that fit in the nature. Any comment that you...so I am just presuming that most of you have read so far all this, at least till chapter 30, alright.

Ok, now we go on to Madame Merle. Have we met Madame Merle so far? We have, to some extent, Ok and literally it means a black bird and she is most of the time clad in black dress, black clothes. When we first meet her, it is a very dramatic introduction, with her back to the door playing the piano. We have already seen, that you know, this book can also be read as a bildungsroman and what a formative influence Madame Merle proves to be on Isabel's character.



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Professor: At one point she says I think I know my Europe.

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Professor: She is a friend of whom?

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Student: Isabel's aunt

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Professor: Isabel's aunt, Mrs. Touchett yeah, so that's there because the implication is that Isabel's aunt, she spends so much time abroad, Ok, she comes in touch with these Europeans. Otherwise there was no way that; Isabel's uncle for example would be entertaining such sorts. So the idea is that Europe contaminates people. So Madame Merle, I know my Europe and then the entire idea of Madame Merle is new America and old Europe.

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Student: "I'm an old friend of your aunt's. I've lived much in Florence. I'm Madame Merle."  
She made this last announcement as if she were referring to a person of tolerably distinct identity.

Professor: Ok, yes

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Professor: So you know, these identities are important for, where they live and where they come from. Now in the age of globalization, identities may have blurred. This concept of the place you come from, may have blurred or may not have blurred, Ok but you know we are again living in those confused times. We are not too sure. But those are the times when people were very certain of who they are, their backgrounds, their identities and where they came from. That was important. So, to be European was important because you have also to act European. It is not just enough that you are European. You have to have that kind of the baggage of culture about you; and nowhere is it more prominent than in Edith Wharton and Henry James.

So it was quite a star-studded movie. You even had a young Christian Bale, yes you have Isabel Archer's step-daughter, I think Pearl, her name is Pearl and she comes later in the novel and that young man is her suitor. That role was played by Christian Bale when he was not, you know who, when he was not the Dark Knight,

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Professor: Ok, very young and unrecognizable.

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Professor: Ok

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Professor: And then Madame Merle and her reaction to Isabel's fortune, have we come to that point? You must have read it, yeah. Now how does she come into this great fortune?

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Student: Ralph asked his father to leave the fortune for her.

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Professor: To give his share

Student: yeah

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Professor: to Isabel. Now what is the theory behind giving this large amount in inheritance to Isabel?

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Professor: Yes, please go

Student: He wants to enable her to



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Student: have her own independence so that she doesn't have to be dependent on another man  
Professor: And don't you think that like that, by allowing her access to such a huge fortune he, in a way turns her life around? Because whatever wrong decisions or whatever wrong turns his life takes her life takes after that is because of this inheritance otherwise she would have gone back to America because she didn't have much of a choice.

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Professor: But because now, because of this vast immense wealth, doors are open to her and therefore she decides to travel to Europe. Ok and that's where all her troubles begin.

So, Madame Merle and her reaction to her fortune

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Professor: “A fortune!” Madame Merle softly repeated. Oh, 20, chapter 20, quite early in chapter 20. “Isabel steps into something like 70000 pounds.” Madame Merle’s hands were clasped in her lap; at this she raised them, still clasped, and held them a moment against her bosom while her eyes, a little dilated, fixed themselves on those of her friend. “Ah,” she cried, “the clever creature!”

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Professor: Now you see, in Madame Merle's universe, this kind of wealth can come to you only if you have manipulated it. She hasn't. She hasn't. Do you think that Isabel had any sort of role to play in getting this kind of inheritance?

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Professor: It is Ralph who gets slightly

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Professor: enamored of her and then he feels why not? And Ralph is not in a very good health, we are aware of that. His father is dying too. So Ralph knows that soon this vast estate will just remain, you know, go into some undeserving hands and why not take a chance. She can go any way; she can go either way with this money. She can turn her life around for better or worse, that is the idea and Madame's, Madame Merle's first reaction, what a clever creature. Ok.

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Professor: Mrs. Touchett gave her a quick look. “What do you mean by that?” For an instant Madame Merle’s color rose and she dropped her eyes. “It certainly is clever to achieve such results--without an effort!”

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Professor: That's cleverer in Madame Merle's world. She didn't even have to make an effort to achieve or attain this kind of wealth. How clever could you be? Usually people make efforts to gain this kind of money. She didn't even have to make an effort that means that her cleverness, her cunningness surpasses all expectations. Indeed, but it is Madame Merle who is the real manipulator in the entire scheme of things.

Ok, so now architectural image that we have been talking about Henry James and his inclinations towards spaces, cities and settings. And settings and architectures, I have been talking about, this is not a digression but some of you may be interested in noting it down perhaps for the term paper. You will be writing the term paper for this course, right? Ok, so a good topic would be literary spaces and homes. Ok.

So Gardencourt is an important setting. Likewise in literature you can come across several homes, literary homes I mean you have Wuthering Heights in Wuthering Heights, right, you have Threshfield Grange in Jane Eyre, you have Darcy's Pemberley yes, Ok and in Daphne du Maurier's Rebecca you have Manderley, Ok so literary homes, so Gardencourt and its relevance, Ok and significance in, because the house is extremely important in this novel. It is not just a house, Ok.

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Student: Henry James talks about places of having a almost personified, he personifies Italy Venice and Florence in the preface because he talks how he was writing part of the novel when he was in Venice and how it impacted him so deeply and he personifies it like it's a ((

Professor: it's a character

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Professor: it's a character. You get affected by the places that you live in and isn't that true? Places are, and what are places? After all, the climate of the place, the people of the place, the architecture of that place, Ok all these are contributory or contributory factors on shaping one's personalities, just like people. Just like people influence people, places also shape our characters. That's the idea. So again we have been talking about Gardencourt is a historical and cultural site, and not just a house.

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Professor: As Isabel looks around and I am on page 15 first chapter, very first chapter She had been looking all around, all round her again--at the lawn, the great trees, the reedy, silvery Thames, the beautiful old house; and while engaged in this survey she had made room in it for her companions; a comprehensiveness of observation easily conceivable on the part

of a young woman who was evidently both intelligent and excited. She had seated herself and had put away the little dog; her white hands, in her lap, were folded upon her black dress; her head was erect, her eye lighted, her flexible figure turned itself easily this way and that, in sympathy with the alertness with which she evidently caught impressions.

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Professor: Ok, so house is important. From the beginning she makes a big, you know, Henry James makes a big deal of the house that she is in this house, she is excited and she soaks in the environment. So this is the house and this is the and again Warburton's Lockleigh offers a sense of stability. So when you look at Warburton and his house and the way he describes his house, she visits his house once, Ok and it gives a sense of stability. This house has roots, this house has history. Gardencourt has history, Ok. So house is as characters.

Now Henry James in *The Portrait*, since some of you have read the preface, again I come back to it, imagery of the novel as a house. The novel has to be as carefully constructed as a house according to Henry James. And he makes a reference to that. So if you go through the preface, you will come across certain clues, where he talks about where he makes similarities, draws parallel between a house and constructing a novel, brick by brick, stone by stone and that's how important a structure is.

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Student: In the center, that is how (())

Professor: Yes, yeah

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Professor: and then again atmosphere of a house and James as we were talking about earlier was immensely influenced by George Eliot's novels of interiority and he reviewed Middlemarch, he gave it a very positive, almost paid a tribute to Middlemarch that is by George Eliot and where he calls the novel the great dramatic chiaroscuro.

Now what do you understand by the term chiaroscuro? This is of cinematic term almost. We talked about chiaroscuro when we were discussing film Nova, Ok so what is chiaroscuro? It is a term, interplay of light and shades. Ok so everything is brightly lit up what does it



suggest? All is good. If it is all darkness then the suggestion is that it is a Gothic kind of a novel, everything is shrouded in mystery, suspense et cetera. But chiaroscuro, interplay of light and shades in gray, you are not too sure what to make out of characters and situations, so shades of black and white, yeah not totally white, not totally dark, any comment here? Alright, we have already discussed the novel as bildungsroman.

There is another term called picaresque. Picaresque is something else, or the novel is, what we are doing is more like a Bildungsroman. Picaresque has certain other connotations attached to it. Picaresque is a roguish figure which definitely our heroine is not. Picaresque is also a traveler and an explorer and an adventurer, so you have a person like Don Quixote or Don Quixote who you can call a picaresque character, a picaresque novel. He is a Picaresque .There is a point where Ralph Touchett regards her with great amusement, so she can be; she is a comic figure to him. Ok he is amused by her. In his dreary life; she arrives like an amusing character, exciting character.

Student: Interesting

Professor: Yes because she is excited. She, unlike a typical British woman she is not given to restraining her emotions and controlling her passions, Ok. So this, this is something that appeals to all men who come in contact with her. Now London, this is important, because why London? Henry James himself, Ok he lived in London for several years before becoming, he was an American but he had lived in England for several years before becoming a full British citizen and for him London is on the whole, the most possible form of life.

It is the biggest aggregation of human life, the most complete compendium of the world. So these are his impressions of England. He was fascinated by London's hustle bustle and manners and this is his reason for choosing, he regarded himself as an aesthete, as a realist and felt that no other country, no other place offers such interesting variety of people as London and for this you have to read The Notebooks of Henry James published posthumously in 1947, yeah?

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Student: It is surprising to see that, as you said, in most of his novels, he has painted Europe in a very...

Professor: I will come to that, you see. It is a very good question.

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Professor: The point is that, England being an English speaking country is more akin to America. Also for most people England doesn't represent a typical European country. Now European country is, although geographically, I see your point, geographically England is in Europe, however culturally it is more similar to America. Ok, you also see who were the earlier inhabitants of America? Yeah, so there are lots of similarities between those two countries but that's not the case with other European countries, Ok so those two people are different, they are not English, Ok. The English themselves regard themselves as some other

kind of, you know, an island cut away from the rest of the Europe but otherwise those people are very similar to each other, not the English people, that's the idea. Alright, so we meet tomorrow at 12.

(Professor – student conversation ends)