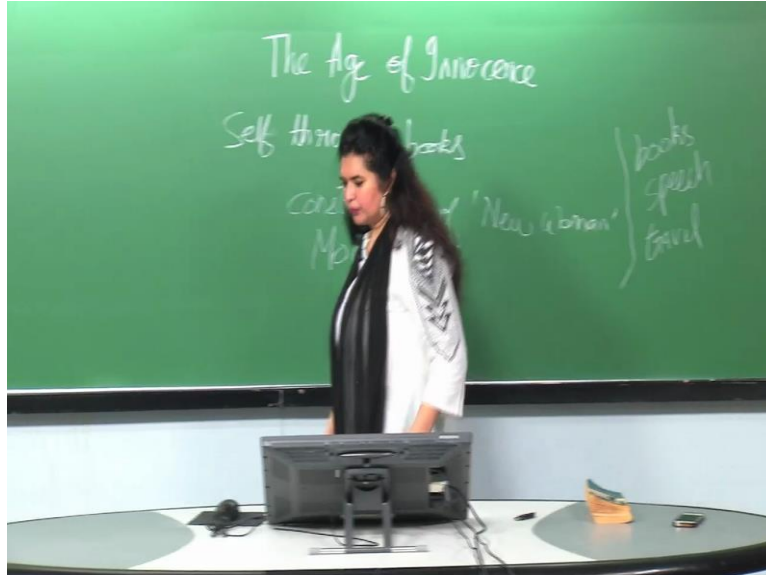


American Literature & Culture
Prof. Aysha Iqbal Vishwamohan
Department of Humanities and Social Science
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras
Mod 11 Lecture Number 43
Edith Wharton The Age of Innocence (Lecture 37)

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(Professor – student conversation starts)

Professor: So we will be, this is our last class on The Age of Innocence. So I am going to refer to some of the common themes that struck me as very unique and one is looking at one's own self through books. Books are very frequently occurring objects in the book and also, I am also interested in collusion of Victorian period and modernity and how the two periods merge in order to construct something new in The Age of Innocence and the most importantly construction of new woman.

In Edith Wharton's time, it was the period and especially, the early twentieth century and the first couple of decades of the twentieth century when culturally people started talking of emergence of the so-called new woman, a modern woman so who was this modern woman? You know F. Scott Fitzgerald also and he is also known for his depiction of modern women, especially not very prominent in The Great Gatsby but definitely it's there in Tender is the Night and some of The Beautiful and the Damned, so those kinds of work, so modern and you have also seen of course, how can you forget who is that lady in Hemingway, we had done

Student: Lady Brett Ashley

Professor: Yeah so Lady Brett Ashley so if she is not a new woman for those times then we don't know who it is. So that is the construction of new woman and remember, all these works came around the same time, *The Sun also Rises*, Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*, *The Age of Innocence*, *The Great Gatsby*, so all of them, these belong to the, almost the same period. And construction of modern woman and then I talk about the construction of new woman in *The Age of Innocence* in particular, I am going to refer to the books, the kind of speech women used and also travelled. We have already referred to something about cosmopolitanism in Edith Wharton, cosmopolitanism in *Daisy Miller*; we are going to continue in the same vein.

Now, before we begin this was her twelfth novel, just giving you trivia, however in one of my initial classes I had asked you this question that what is the reference or what is the meaning of the title? Ok now I want you to go back to the same question with which we started the class and it takes its title from an eighteenth century painting by someone called Joshua Reynolds and it is called *The Age of Innocence*. Now the painting is a, print of those painting are easily, freely available on the net and this is how it looks like. Joshua Reynolds painting of 1785, *The Age of Innocence*, would anybody like to comment on it? What is it? How does it, I mean just look at the picture and tell me. Give me whatever; it is a free interpretation, what comes to your mind?

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Student: It is not a very relaxed pose (()) staring at you.

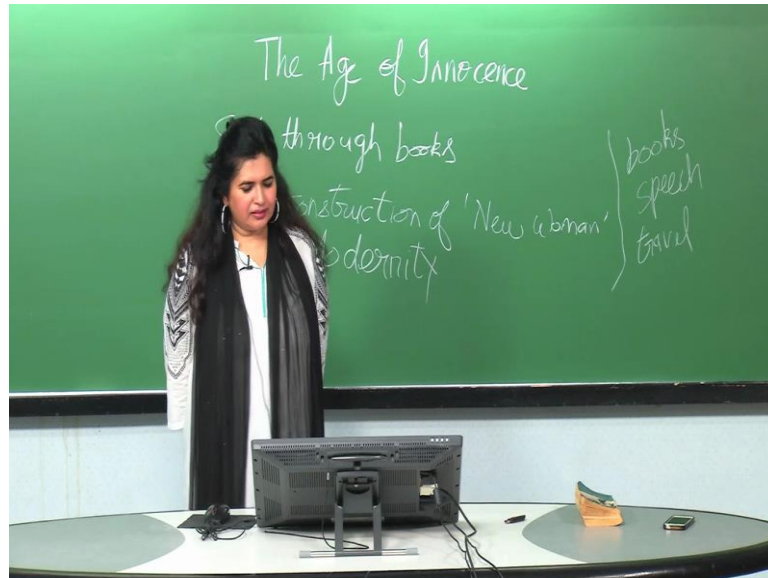
Student: Something is approaching but from a distance

Professor: Ok, alright

Student: Use of the color

Professor: Is there a smile on the child's face?

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Professor: Very faint smile, a very faint smile, Ok so I wouldn't really agree that the child is frightened of anything but yes definitely and holding her hands, clasping her hands on bosom, that is a very common kind of a posture specially in paintings of that period. So what else, I mean look at her clothes, the color of her clothes, the little bow in her hair, what, what do all these things signify? It is very pastoral. Ok setting is quite pastoral or even if it's someone's own garden, then it is something there, a place which has lot of open spaces, lots of greenery, all these things we signify to, with, all these things are signifiers of what? Naturalness, yeah what else, back to innocence, the color white, she is dressed in all white, again reference to innocence and also the way her hair is done, so all these things, the little bow in it, almost like giving the child a very cherubic, a very fairy tale kind of appearance. Now, why do you think that Edith Wharton was interested in this kind of painting and giving this kind of a title to her novel? Cherubic, innocent, pastoral,

Student: That's the facade

Professor: That's the façade, so the novel is not actually not about the age of innocence, but it is very ironic take on, as I said, an ironic take on the title.

Student: Even in The House of Mirth, the painting is being presented by Lily Bart in the TABLEAU

Professor: Yes

Student: There is a comment

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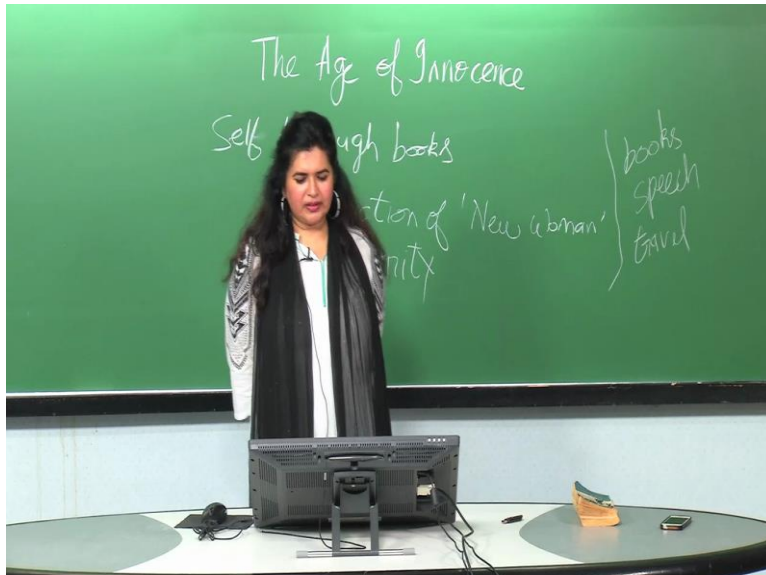
Student: about her

Professor: Nymph and yes, spring and Nymph yes,

Student: There also idea is that, the presentation that, it gives out, it gives out the, it reveals the anatomy of the body which generally not allowed in that kind of a society and the men think that, particular ball, I think, they make a comment I think, these people, they have figures, but then it is sad that they are not allowed to reveal it. It is a comment on them.

Professor: Yes, so we are talking about

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Professor: the hypocrisies of a particular set, social set. Hypocrisies of a dual, the double standards of a society; so that's what is, so it is, she was a fan of Joshua Reynolds. She grew up in a house full of books about painting. Her father was a huge admirer of John Ruskin.

Ruskin is a painter, writer, philosopher, British painter, yeah so Ruskin has written several books several books on the art of painting and Edith Wharton's own house was full of books by Ruskin and at one point, even Newland Archer reads Ruskin. We are told, and what do his sister and his mother read? There are certain books that they also read. It's important in context of what we are doing right now. What kind of women are Newland's mother and sister; and also May's mother?

The old conventional, traditional New York upper crust ladies who know that it is their duty to uphold the sanctity of certain values, and they want, they don't want the world around to change. Although the world around them is changing, the center cannot hold, it is changing so fast, so rapidly but they don't want to accept that so it's reflected in everything that they do, the kind of rituals they follow. So, therefore very tellingly the novel starts with an opera setting. These are the rituals that the rich and powerful in New York follow. No one has to say anything. Countess Olenska shouldn't be here. She gets the hint. Therefore she doesn't appear at the Beaufort ball. She has been silenced, Ok, by the looks of people.

Ok why are we talking about The Age of Innocence, the title because Joshua Reynolds must have meant a feminine kind of innocence in a very different way in this painting but Edith Wharton has a different take on innocence. It's very ironic. She questions that kind of innocence. So it is, The Age of Innocence is not a declarative statement, it is an ironic statement. Was it an age of innocence? So look at her and look at May, there are so many, I mean this is the way May must have been as a child. May Welland, she is perennially dressed in pastels carrying that lily of the valley bouquet and with a smile, with a faint smile on her face.

She doesn't say much because, why doesn't she say, talk too much? Countess Olenska has so many points of view. She has comments on New York society, you remember at one point, she says Ok, so these great Van der Luydens, they have so much of influence because they make themselves so rare. She punctures and Archer laughs, that he sacrifices them. After all, they are not so great. It is a very carefully constructed image. They have made themselves rare therefore they are revered so much, they are so important.

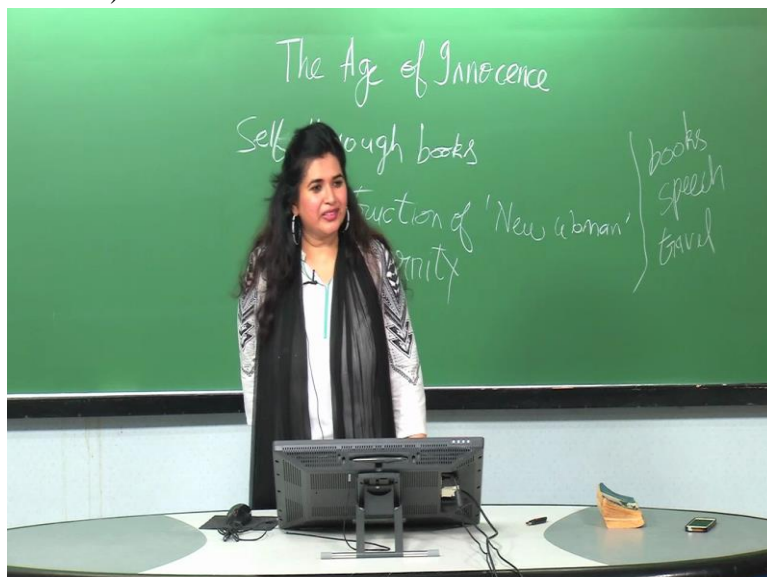
She says things like this, OK. At the ball also, at the opening scene also, she says, yes, yes, I remember all these men in their pantaloons and their knickerboxers and what kind, and your cousin who kissed, I was in love with but once you kissed me behind the door, she says all these things, I mean these things must have happened to several other girls as well but they don't voice aloud these. So what I am talking about, the emergence of a new woman; is she innocent? She is seen as the scarlet woman. May is a stark opposite but is Ellen Olenska innocent? Why?

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Student: She is unable to comprehend the whole (()) by them and she realizes too late. And we see her perplexed in a lot of points throughout the, but you never see that feeling of puzzled like image, she is very certain of her surroundings.

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Professor: Yes, Ok, so who is real innocent here? Is it May or is it Ellen Olenska? So again something to discuss over; now there is a concept of fin de siècle which literally means end of the century. It is, this term is associated with, I think you can use it for your competitive exams, JRF kind of exams so these things appear, so what was the fin de siècle kind of literature, this was the movement which was inaugurated by the French writers, end of the century, which century, nineteenth century. Ok and this kind of literature marked, signposted the late nineteenth century interest in escapism, world weariness and despair. Before that things were quite central. People, we were just doing modernism.

So we knew that things have a centrality to them, a stability to them, Ok and we were also talking of realism and how realism was a slice of life. But here they started showing, this kind of literature started reflecting weariness, world weariness and also despair with the kind of society people were living in. So in Newland Archer's character, in personality, you find these things. He is world weary already. He is despairing already. Even before he falls in love with Ellen, don't you think that there are hints and traces of his weariness? Can you give me some example?

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Professor: fin de siècle is also related to aestheticism in England,

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Professor: Aestheticism was a movement, particularly you will associate it with the works of Oscar Wilde and others so, but if I ask you that how, do you think that, how do we substantiate that Newland Archer was world-weary and despairing even before he met Countess Olenska, or not met, but before he fell in love with her?

Student: He is very aware of

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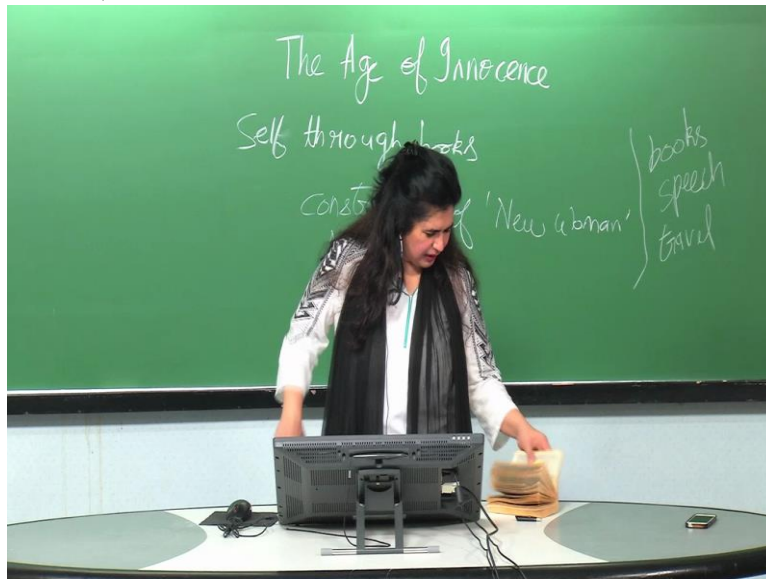
Student: the facade and hypocrisy around her. There is one part where he wonders when nice girls learn to ever speak their mind

Professor: Good

Student: That's (())

Professor: Ok,

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Professor: on page 42, if you have text with you, this is Chapter 6 when he says Newland Archer was too imaginative not to feel that, in his case and May's, the tie might gall for reasons far less gross and palpable. What could he and she really know of each other, since it was his duty, as a "decent" fellow, decent in inverted commas, to conceal his past from her, and hers, as a marriageable girl, to have no past to conceal?

So the dichotomy is always, they are not equals. They have lot to conceal, and May has nothing to conceal because she is portrayed as such a bland and vacuous character, the word vacuous comes repeatedly in relation to May. When he chases her, runs after her, even to St. Augustine where she is holidaying with her family, there also he feels that how boyish and how vacuous she is. There is a vacuity in her eyes. Ok she really never comprehends who he is, except the codes and conventions that she has been brought up with.

What if, for some one of the subtler reasons that would tell with both of them, they should tire of each other, misunderstand or irritate each other? He reviewed his friends' marriages--the supposedly happy ones--and saw none that answered, even remotely, to the passionate and tender comradeship which he pictured as his permanent relation with May Welland. He perceived that such a picture presupposed, on her part, the experience, the versatility, the freedom of judgment, which she had been carefully trained not to possess; and with a shiver of foreboding he saw his marriage becoming what most of the other marriages about him

were: a dull association of material and social interests held together by ignorance on the one side and hypocrisy on the other.

Hypocrisy on Newland Archer's side and ignorance on May and what does he want? He knows that in order to have that kind of passionate relationship that he really dreams of, that he has read in novels and watched in plays, what kind of woman should that be, with whom he can have that sort of a fulfilling marriage? What kind of a woman can be that? A woman who has Ok, who has past some experience versatility, freedom of judgment

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Professor: This is what he dreams of. This is his fantasy but how would May with her training and her upbringing be able to bring about experience and freedom of judgment and passion to this marriage, and he being such an intelligent person, he already knows that the marriage is doomed from the beginning and he has not even fallen in love with Ellen Olenska at this point. Now what does it tell you about new woman? We were talking about new woman. So what makes a new woman then?

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Student: She is world weary

Professor: She is world weary, yes

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Professor: She has freedom of judgment. She has experience. She has some kind of an, he is attracted towards Ellen Olenska because of that. So that makes. Now again we are interested in Edith Wharton's own time, that what could have been new woman in her times? So what was she reading? Now she has, I was referring to her autobiography, A Backward Glance which was published in 1934 and as a child, interestingly, she was forbidden to read novels. Now what do novels do? If someone reads novels, what happens?

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Student : (()) fiction were considered corrupting influence.

Professor: Corrupting influence and you read about love and passion

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Professor: and romances, Ok, even in the most literary or the most commonplace novel, you are going, bound to find these elements. And she was forbidden to read novels. And she says I have often sighed looking back at my childhood, how pitiful a provision was made for the life of the imagination behind those uniform Brownstone facade. So we know what are Brownstones now? Those are the kinds of houses Newland Archer and May live in and these are the kind of houses Edith Wharton herself grew up in Ok but behind these facade, we are trained to be entirely unimaginative. I also gave you an example.

As a child she started writing and one of the stories had an untidy drawing room. Her mother was so critical. Drawing rooms are never tidy, are never untidy sorry and she said that her mother's scathing attack on her writing; it put her off creative writing for nearly 30 years. So she wrote but she never published. Therefore that explains why her first novel came so late. Her own mother discouraged from pursuing what she wanted to do. Because see good girls don't write. That was the idea.

Because writing suggests that you have a voice, a freedom of judgment. So all those things are important in order to understand what was a new woman for those times. Ok, I keep referring to Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, Ok so that is also important. Now this is George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* which was published in 1876. This is a TV movie, I think with Hugh Dancy in it, it is a very good version of the novel and this was one of the first novels she remembers reading. So George Eliot, if you remember when I was discussing Henry James with you I said George Eliot's brand of psychological realism was an influence on Henry James also.

So George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* is about unrequited love of the heroine for the intellectual and ever-questioning and questioning hero Daniel Deronda. So that was one of the foremost influences on Edith Wharton. That was the first book she ever wrote. And remember, and she famously remarked, she was a very witty critic also. So she says the thoughts with which it overflows are wonderfully clever and I don't think as ill of the hero as most people do. To be sure he is a parcel of theories, loosely tied up, a puppet so badly stuffed that the saw dust shows but the content of the parcel and the doll, the theories of sawdust, they are good.

That's what, that's where she took her first inspiration from, a hero filled with full of contradictory theories and if you look at Newland Archer's own, yeah so many contradictions. At one point if you remember he says, that why can't women be as free as men? Do you remember? When does he say that; when Countess Olenska's divorce is being discussed. Sillerton Jackson and other people and why can't, women should be as free as men. And immediately he bites his stand. It is all easy, very well to say these things but must be so difficult to implement in order to maintain the domestic harmony. So the contradictions that existed in the hero's own mind.

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Professor: For Archer and his love of books, this is a lengthy quotation but I just thought I will refer to this. He says

Little by little it became the scene of his real life, and of his only rational activities; thither he brought the books he read, the ideas and feelings which nourished him, his judgments and his visions. Outside it, in the scene of his actual life, he moved with a growing sense of unreality and insufficiency, blundering against familiar prejudices and traditional points of view as an absent-minded man goes on bumping into the furniture of his own room.

So, beautifully constructed passage, he had to live with that, the only way, the only outlet for him was the books he would read and therefore when you read, when you look at Archer's

character, the other day we were talking about what do you think of the scene where he bends down to kiss the tip of Countess Olenska's satin shoe. Ok why does he do that? It is very theatrical, very melodramatic but then we have to understand that he has been watching too many melodramatic plays.

There is a scene, parting scene on the stage in that particular opera where the hero takes a very silent leave from his beloved, just kisses the tip of her ribbon and leaves without she even realizing that he is leaving. She doesn't turn around yeah. Those are the scenes that he takes away with him. He lives his life through the books and other cultural phenomenon because his own personal life is so empty. It is full of prejudices and tradition beliefs. Now where do you place Countess Olenska amidst all this? Is she, as her life so dull? Why do you say so; because you never get to see her point of view?

Student: He says she is different

Professor: He says she was different. At the end he tells his children, his son that she was different, Ok but why was she so different?

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Student: She crossed the class barrier. She went to those parties with people who wrote and painters with whom she was not supposed to go.

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Professor: Women who modeled. There is a woman Mrs. Struthers, she was a model for shoe polish and women, she is universally looked upon, looked down upon as because she has been doing modeling. Her face has appeared on posters. Mrs. Archer is scandalized. How can you socialize with a woman like that? She has jet black hair and she models for a particular brand of shoe polish, and why not? But she is not fit to be a part of this society because she is a woman who has exposed herself to male scrutiny therefore she is but Countess Olenska does not have any such prejudices and she attends a party where she, that woman is also invited and of course it has to be Julius Beaufort's party which she attends along with the Duke. So we are told that the Duke was scot-free. Because for, he is a man, he is a Duke but she is a woman and she is also very vulnerable and penniless woman. So what he, he can get away with it, because it's a, Oh he is a foreigner, he is an Englishman; we do not look at these foreigners. They have very peculiar viewpoints and, but she is a New Yorker, she should have known better.

So we will also talk, we were talking how Archer creates or recreates himself or his self through books. Now very interestingly because Edith Wharton was such a follower of Henry James and in *A Portrait of a Lady*, the heroine is called Isabel Archer. This may not have too much subtext but perhaps it is a nod at her master. So his one of the, his monumental novel and her monumental novel and you have the protagonists with the same second name. There is a point where he seeks, we are told that before his marriage when he knows that he is already in love with the Countess and he is going to lose her forever. He seeks solace in books and I am on page 132.

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Professor: in my book. This is chapter 15 for you.

That evening he unpacked his books from London. The box was full of things he had been waiting for impatiently; a new volume of Herbert Spencer, another collection of the prolific Alphonse Daudet's brilliant tales, and a novel called "Middlemarch,"

Novel called Middlemarch by

Student: George Eliot

Professor: George Elliot,

as to which there had lately been interesting things said in the reviews.

So he reads the reviews, then buys the books like most of us.

He had declined three dinner invitations in favor of this feast; feast of books. His appetite is fed on books and not on dinner and invitations and parties.

but though he turned the pages with the sensuous joy of the book-lover, he did not know what he was reading, and one book after another dropped from his hand. Suddenly, among them, he lit on a small volume of verse which he had ordered because the name had attracted him: "The House of Life." He took it up, and found himself plunged in an atmosphere unlike any he had ever breathed in books; so warm, so rich, and yet so ineffably tender, that it gave a new and haunting beauty to the most elementary of human passions. All through the night he

pursued through those enchanted pages the vision of a woman who had the face of Ellen Olenska; but when he woke the next morning, and looked out at the brownstone houses across the street so on.

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Professor: Ok so it is important that what are the books that he is reading and he is forming or forging his own personality. So Daudet was naturalistic writer and Edith Wharton was highly interested in this movement, Naturalism, Spencer who was, Herbert Spencer who was a British anthropologist and philosopher and of course you know The House of Life, which is that thin volume of poems that he liked, he loved so much. It is by Dante Gabriel Rossetti who is an aesthesisist and one of the Pre-Raphaelites.

So that again mirrors Archer's and Edith Wharton's own life. He forms himself through his books. So this is a verse from Rossetti's The House of Life and you can see this is, this must have been, I am just guessing, this must have been the passage that he reads, the verses that he reads when he thinks of Countess Olenska. And there is a reference to this mysterious lady. And he gives Countess Olenska's face to this lady, the lady's lips and hands and eyes, through these she yields the life that vivifies.

he also refers to Middlemarch 18, which was published around 1871, and 72 and what is the setting of the novel; early 1870. So look at the coincidence. The novel is published in 1920 but is set in 1870 and the book was published in, Middlemarch was published in 1871-72 and this, the plot is also about a misguided and unhappy marriage between two people who are

actually right for each other but end up marrying very wrong people; so novel about psychological insights and moral ambiguities. And we were talking of the construction of the new woman so let's see how important.

So from books we will move on to conversation and the power of silences in Edith Wharton. So Archer asks May when he follows her to St. Augustine in Florida, tell me what you do every day. And what does she do every day? What does May do every day?

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Professor: Tell me, I am on page 136 and this is chapter 16 for us.

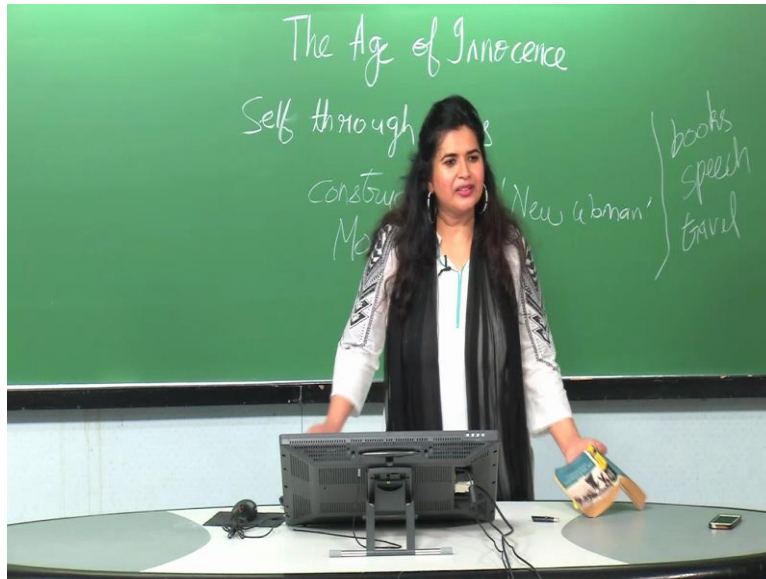
Tell me what you do all day, he said crossing his arms under his tilted backhead to let her talk about familiar and simple things was the easiest way of carrying on his own independent train of thought;

If she keeps on jabbering about her familiar things, because if you want, you try her to get into deeper things of life, she wouldn't be able to handle that but ask her what do you do every day and when she talks he has the liberty to get distracted and he can think about what he wants to think.

and he sat listening to her simple chronicle of swimming, sailing and riding, varied by an occasional dance at the primitive inn where a man-of-war came in. A few pleasant people from Philadelphia and Baltimore were picnicking at the inn, and the Selfridge Merrys had come down for three weeks because Kate Merry had had bronchitis. They were planning to

lay out a lawn tennis court on the sands; but no one but Kate and May had racquets, and most of the people had not even heard of the game.

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Professor: So that is her conversation. Now what kind of conversation is this; very basic and very elementary. What do you do? I cook and I walk and I swim and I am also now learning to play tennis, and I have my own racquets and I am among friends and there are people from Baltimore and Philadelphia, of course people who are like us. And I talk of every day usual things. She is happy talking about those things. But when he asks; he has habit of sending her books and she says that you know, really I didn't have much time to look at the books and at their honeymoon, all his plans that he is going to read out to her or educate her; those are just put to rest.

So we also know that how adapt, some point later in the novel, at silencing and this is what we are told repeatedly about May, resolute determination to carry to its utmost limit that ritual of ignoring the "unpleasant". Now this is something very important. That these people should ignore the unpleasant and what is so unpleasant in their life? From the beginning we are told Ellen Olenska's presence is unpleasant for them. Even talking about her is unpleasant, even the fact that she shouldn't be attending Beaufort's ball is unpleasant. So what does she say when he asks where is Countess Olenska?

What is the excuse that is given? She thought that her dress wasn't smart enough, Ok so she left. Was that the real reason; not at all. She could sense that she is not wanted but they both knew we are not supposed to discuss that because that is unpleasant. So the idea of self-

ensorship, so when we talk of construction of new woman in Edith Wharton, on one hand you have someone like Ellen Olenska who never minces words, who is never on guard, on the other hand you have May who appears very simple but is always conscious to avoid speaking the unpleasant because that is what her training has been and also the concept of self censorship in women, that is important.

Men can talk when they are having cigars, after dinner cigars, in their libraries; they can talk about Beaufort's bastards and things like that and the kinds of women who can be enjoyed. So things are discussed among men but women are not even to supposed to talk about these things. So they have to remain pure and blissfully ignorant, so that is important; so self censorship is important. At one point he says, untrained human nature was not frank and innocent. That's what he thinks of May. She is untrained. It's not frank and innocent. It was full of the twists and defenses of an instinctive guile. So how does he describe this?

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Professor: On page 43, Chapter 6 he says again I have already discussed this passage, the hieroglyphic world where everything is represented by a set of arbitrary signs. So as when Mrs. Welland who knew exactly why Archer had pressed her to announce her daughter's engagement at the Beaufort ball (and had indeed expected him to do no less), yet felt obliged to simulate reluctance, and the air of having had her hand forced, quite as, in the books on Primitive Man that people of advanced culture were beginning to read, the savage bride is dragged with shrieks from her parents' tent.

So parents should not be so eager

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Professor: to give their daughters away. It should always look like they are reluctant to give their daughter away although she is most keen to have this engagement announced but still Mrs. Welland will go through the essential proprieties, Ok and this is another code and convention, so the older kind of woman and the newer kind of woman. I mean it wouldn't matter to Ellen at all. Now what does Ellen say? Why not make one's own fashion, she at one point says that in the novel and in the film if you remember and she says subversive things that topple the hegemony, that challenge the hegemony of, so new woman toppling the, yeah she is the woman who enjoys living alone.

She is the kind of woman who enjoys travelling alone. She is the kind of woman who likes to say what or speak out her mind, so therefore this kind of a woman is always dangerous. We are told that even as a child, she, she is a precocious child we are being told and she came out like a gypsy child with red cheeks and she used to wear beads and she was allowed to come out in black at her debut ball, all the things are unconventional. But the question is why not, if she likes that. Ok, and at one point Newland says, at what age nice women speak for themselves? Nice women are never supposed to speak for themselves. That's what society tells us to.

Nice women are supposed to endure and that's what, or in May's case when May supposedly fights to save her marriage, does she do that on her own? Yeah, she has the support of the entire tribe, Ok therefore she is, she otherwise on her own, woman with no past and no

judgement and no imagination, she wouldn't have been but she needed the support of more widely experienced clever women in order to get what she wants.

So again and also I am interested in May's lie which eventually drives Ellen Olenska away. Ok, so on one hand we are talking about speaking women, silencing women and then we also talk about the lying women who get, who lie to get what they want. So that is another part or an aspect of a character, I mean a person like Ellen Olenska wouldn't perhaps resort to a blatant lie like this but May doesn't think twice before lying and perhaps she is condoned for that lie, because after all she is justified in trying to save her marriage.

Ok so we are talking about the new woman and the novel was written at the cusp of Victorian morality and forces of modernity and he says women ought to be free, as free as we are. But several times he questions this statement of his own. That he may say this, but does he actually believe in this? You can refer to Chapter 5. Now again we also look at, the novel is important because it looks at women, silenced women and speaking women and new women through a male center of consciousness. Why do you think she had to give a male protagonist for this kind of a novel? After all, much of this before she had written *The House of Mirth* where you have entirely woman's point of view; why do we need a male perspective here?

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Student: (()) He can span a more wide range of spaces because as a man, he would have more access

Professor: Even to the man's world

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Professor: which Lily Bart would never have, Ok, in *The House of Mirth* but here because he is a man, Newland can meet Lefferts and Sillerton Jackson on one hand, and see, get a first hand impression of what they think of women and Julius Beaufort. At the same time he has access to the woman he loves and the woman he marries and their private world as well. And at the bottom it is about the tragic consequences of evasion and again we talk about evasiveness of speech and words. And we have to, yeah, so this we have already been through, that how she defies several kind of protocol and Ellen when she moves from one man in order to seek the company of another, she is a woman who constantly defies protocol and perhaps in Edith Wharton's time; today see, today these things may not mean much but we are talking about those times when women were supposed to be and speak and act in a certain way. So yeah, to wind up the entire thing, this is passage; this is an extract from *A Backward Glance* where she says

Words and cadences haunted it like song-birds in a magic wood, and I wanted to be able to steal away and listen when they called.

So how important words are and how dangerous silences can be! Ok this is Edith Wharton's take on language, any comments or any questions?

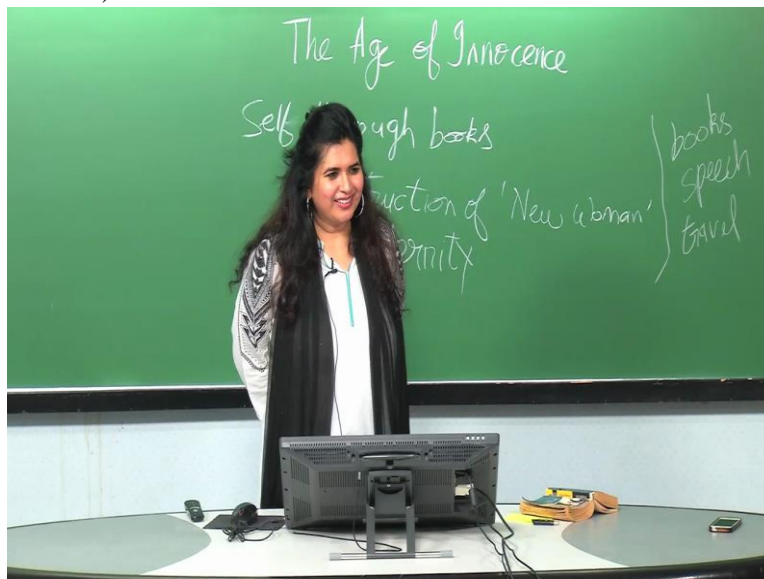
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Student: Archer's son comes in and we see that he is very flipping upon Countess Olenska's affair, that is 80% of the book has been about how subtle he has been in the way he puts it, (()) out there

Professor: She was your fanny

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Professor: he says, yeah, he has his fanny and she has, Countess Olenska was your fanny and he is taken aback, My fanny! Ok, he never gave, the concept of having a girlfriend was just not there but concept of having a mistress was there. Yeah, she sends, this something, suddenly struck me, at one point he sends her a key. This is like when she finally relents and she says would it be Ok for you if I go away forever but come to you once? You know why, that come to you once means. Ok so one encounter with you, Ok because it is all about

repressed physical and emotional desire so one encounter and then I will be gone and he says Ok, you come to me once. And he sends her a key to a flat, or to hotel room? If you remember, yes

Student: It's a hotel room.

Professor: To hotel room, yeah, to a place which she eventually returns. The key to his escape is finally returned to him, the narrator tells us but it is very interesting that he gives, he says they have this rendezvous and all, and then he comes out, goes out of the carriage and starts walking on the street and he ponders over it, whether she will come or not. And do you know how that scene ends? Edith Wharton clearly says he thinks she will come. He thought contemptuously.

Now why does she have to use the word contemptuously? You use the word contempt for someone you look down upon, right? Not for the woman you have put on the pedestal. Throughout we are told he has put her on the pedestal but she will come for this kind of rendezvous? The moment she is willing to give herself to him, she becomes one of those women and now she has started having, beginning the feelings of contempt for her; interesting. How many of you are familiar with the play by Christopher Hampton called Dangerous Liaisons?

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Professor: Dangerous Liaisons

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Professor: it is a French novel and it was translated in, yeah some John Malkovich movie with Michelle Pfeiffer and Glenn Close, yeah. So what is the entire plot about? It is a brilliant novel by this French author. It's an epistolary novel, it's, entire novel is written in letters. It's about this playboy who has a bet with a particular woman, a very high society woman that I am going to have an affair with this very virtuous woman. She has never let any man, breath of any man touch her all through her life except her husband. She is a married woman now and she is known for her virtues and chastity.

If I am a playboy of certain repute, then it is my duty to debase her. Ok he is not in love but it's a, it's a wager and she says, that society woman played by Glenn Close, she says that Ok, fine you can, if you can have her then you can have me also. Ok that is the kind of bet they have and he has her. And once, and how does he have her; by putting her up on a pedestal. He keeps on writing her verses and letters that I have so much of respect for you. I adore you. I think because of you, I am undergoing this kind of transformation. Love has transformed me. If you don't love me back, I don't think I will be able to redeem myself or atone from my past sins and all, she gives him. And at the end, he drops her mercilessly. He just trashes her like anything and she dies. It's very, yes interesting and again we were talking about, Newland refers to this in highly complex western European societies, these kinds of affairs are well-known but not in America. I think it is interesting to have a comparison of such kinds of texts. Ok, thank you very much.

(Professor – student conversation ends)