

American Literature & Culture
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Edith Wharton The Age of Innocence (Lecture 35)

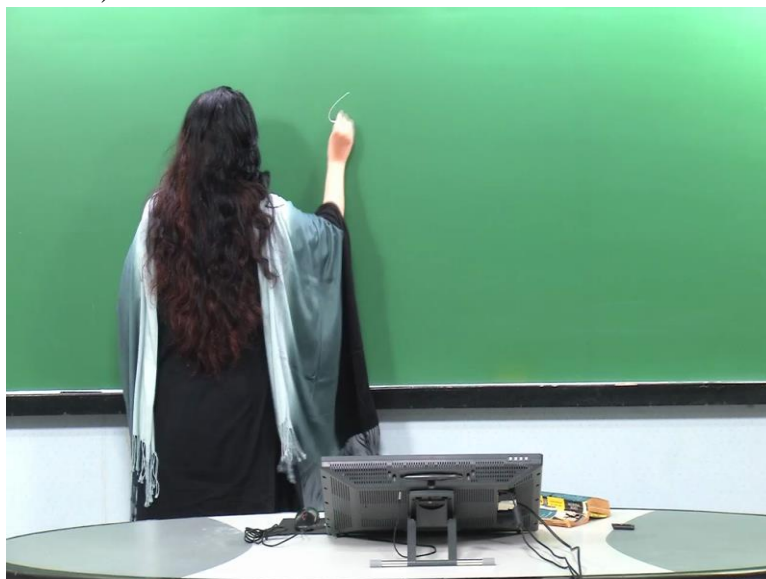
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(Professor – student conversation starts)

Professor: So we were talking about the theme of repression and longing and also that how that world, the turn of the century New York aristocratic world, it operated through a set of codes

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Professor: codes in terms of behavior, there were behavioral patterns. It is almost like an anthropological study. If you read the Age of Innocence, it reads like an anthropological study. So behavioral codes, you have codes of speech, how people should speak and when they should be silent. So there are lot of things that remain unsaid but they are understood

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Professor: because people belonged to the same set of society. So if you know that these things should not, should be left best left unuttered or unsaid, then they would do that. They wouldn't spell out those words, so, and but at the same time, because of so much of codification of behavior and speech and acts, society became very repressed. So repression is a recurring motif in the works of both, Henry James and Edith Wharton. Many people consider Edith Wharton as a much superior writer because of her relative accessibility. Henry James, you have already seen, Ok he indulges in obscurantism, Ok. Here you will find, you will find, she says a lot; but all closed in irony and sarcasm, so that makes it a little bit more accessible to an average reader. Now I am on chapter 3, and for me this is page 17 and I will just read out a small section and then we will discuss this.

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Professor: It invariably happened in the same way.

Mrs. Julius Beaufort, on the night of her annual ball, never failed to appear at the Opera; indeed, she always gave her ball on an Opera night in order to emphasize her complete superiority to household cares, and her possession of a staff of servants competent to organize every detail of the entertainment in her absence.

The Beauforts' house was one of the few in New York that possessed a ball-room (it antedated even Mrs. Manson Mingott's and the Headly Chiverses'); and at a time when it was beginning to be thought "provincial" to put a "crash" over the drawing-room floor and move the furniture upstairs, the possession of a ball-room that was used for no other purpose, and left for three-hundred-and-sixty-four days of the year to shuttered darkness, with its gilt edged gilt chairs stacked in a corner and its chandelier in a bag; this undoubted superiority was felt to compensate for whatever was regrettable in the Beaufort past.

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Professor: So money compensates a lot of things, what is she saying here? What is Edith Wharton telling us? Represses of Mrs. Julius Beaufort, her first name is Regina, Regina Dallas. So she is the aristocrat. Julius Beaufort who arrives from nowhere, Ok one fine day under very mysterious conditions he arrives from England with a letter of recommendation that is given to him by Mrs. Mingott's son who is in England, or Mrs. Mingott's son-in-law rather who is in England, who is the banker in England. He arrives with the letter of recommendation and he is initiated in the society and he marries one of the most renowned, the girl from the most renowned families of America, of New York society, of upper class society.

Now what does this little passage about Regina Beaufort's presence at a ball on the night, at an Opera on the night of a ball, what does it indicate? She is present there at the Opera; you know which Opera I am talking about; the Opera where Christine Nilsson is singing Faust, where New York society, the entire society is gathered there. They have arrived there in their in their Brown Coupes and landaus and their broughams and they are there, Ok and this provides a lot of, this provides a setting for getting introduced to the major characters in the novel, Ok and how they behave and the coded secret behavior that is part of the accepted norms. Now the presence of Mrs. Julius Beaufort at a night, at the night of a ball in her own house, what does this signify?

Student: It's Beaufort brand of Decadence

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Student: so that it keeps them both attractive and also repulsive to the other people.

Professor: Ok

Student: They have very peculiar relations with the Beauforts.

Professor: It is a love-hate relationship.

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Professor: They don't want them but at the same time, they are fascinated by the presence of such exceptionally superior, such exceptionally wealthy people and who are so much superior to them in terms of wealth and monetary status. Where that money comes from, no one is very certain, no one is very clear but the very fact that Mrs. Julius Beaufort is able to attend an Opera where entire society has assembled, at the same time she can also organize a ball at her home. Ok ball is a big party; you know what a ball means. So at the same, so the hostess

being at an Opera at a time within 30 minutes, her ball is going to start and she is still attending in the opera.

Why, because she is signifying her superiority over domestic matters. She is so much in control, that is what we are told that, even if she is away from home, the ball will be operated, conducted very smoothly. She doesn't have to fuss around the home. There are people, she has retinue of staff who will take care of all these things and that sort of gives her an edge over the rest of the New York's society and also the description of their house somewhere which has the distinction, unique distinction of having its own ball room, Ok which is only a ball room and not a big living room; rest of the New York society, that is what they had.

They had large living room which would also double up as, which would double as a ball room whenever need arises but here in this house, they had an exclusive ball room Ok, and this also, this is the final touch of superiority, the financial superiority. So this is the kind of society that we are talking about. Now Henry James and Edith Wharton and some of the other major works by Edith Wharton, see we were already talking about how she started her career rather late. She started publishing rather late but once she started, she became very prolific and then she published *Glimpses of the Moon* in 1923, *The Children* in 1928 and then one of her most famous, one of her most beloved works is *Ethan Frome*, which was published in 1911. *The Reef* is another story about suppressed longings and repressed behavior which was published in 1912.

Now from here we will move on to talk about the concept of The Novel of Manners. The other day I asked you what is Novel of Manners. And I just gave you example, an excerpt, an extract from *The Age of Innocence*, ball room, OK, attending operas, throwing big parties; this is all a part, a convention of a particular section of a society. So, Novel of Manners, , relates to or suggests a kind of novels we create a social world conveying the finely detailed observations of the customs, values and modes of a highly developed and complex society, in and New York's society in late nineteenth century and early twentieth century and also in British society for several centuries it remained a highly developed and highly complex kind of society.

And a novel that describes the codes, behavior and conventions of this society becomes a novel of manners. Ok so we talk about the codified behaviors and patterns. We talk about acceptable forms of speech and such kind of conventions dominate the story. , now if you have read the novel in the earlier sections, do you come across any part where you feel that people also are very guarded when they talk? Can you give me an example, any example? People are very guarded when they talk. You have grown up with the same set of people but you are very careful about what, you say to the person sitting next to you. My page 21 and still chapter 3, Newland Archer enters the Beaufort ballroom.

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Professor: Wandering on to the bouton d'or drawing-room (where Beaufort had had the audacity to hang "Love Victorious," the much-discussed nude of Bouguereau) Archer found Mrs. Welland and her daughter standing near the ball-room door. Couples were already gliding over the floor beyond: the light of the wax candles fell on revolving tulle skirts, on girlish heads wreathed with modest blossoms, on the dashing aigrettes and ornaments of the young married women's coiffures, and on the glitter of highly glazed shirt-fronts and fresh glaze gloves.

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Professor: The other day, we were talking about clothes and how clothes make people. Now this society is known for these. How are young women dressed? I think someone made a reference to Daisy Miller and we were talking about the problem in Daisy Miller, she is that, the girl is a non-conformist and that is reflected even through the way she dresses up and she comes out for a ball in which color? In scarlet color which is not the accepted color for a young unmarried woman. They are supposed to be more modest because red is a scarlet after all, Ok and scarlet, you know the implications that the color carries. So one has to be very careful about how one is dressed.

So Countess Olenska when we first meet her at the ball, how is she dressed? She is wearing something called the Josephine look, because she comes from Europe and Josephine look was getting very popular in Europe. Napoleon's wife, Ok, so she used to wear a certain kind of design, a certain kind of plain, plainish gown and with a head band, a tiara like band with diamonds. So she was in that but that's not what New York accepted. They wanted something more filly and flouncy and because French customs had yet to enter the, the kind of clothes that she would, she preferred, they were yet to enter the New York society so she was not stylish enough for them; so that also is a, yeah. Anyone else, anyone is going to say anything?

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Student: They also park their clothes. Later on in the novel, they want to, I mean, all of them are not, they all have clothes from Paris, such a very new and they all have in their wardrobe but they store for 2 years before they can wear them, because that is the custom.

Professor: The custom is that,

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Professor: you shouldn't wear Parisian garments immediately, the moment something becomes fashionable. for example a Palazzo, we have that fashion of Palazzo. So when did it start? 2 years ago, 3 years ago but immediately if you start, you would come wearing a Palazzo, then you would come across as some kind of wannabe who really is trying a way too hard to get, to become fashionable. So that's the way fashion works. So give it some time, yeah let it, or asymmetrical dresses, it takes some time and once it's established then one can wear it. That was the custom of New York society.

We don't wear whatever is in vogue, right away. That's the idea. Ok so clothes matter a lot and why do you think that when Beaufort had had the audacity to hang the much discussed nude right in the corridor, what's the implication of this? We are talking of the famous painting nude by someone called Bouguereau who is very well-known French painter and to hang the nude here? Well not where the ladies can look at it, this is not the way, so we don't have it or hang such kinds of paintings in your corridor where people are entering the ball-room, Ok.

It has to be more discrete, yeah, more modestly placed somewhere else but not where everyone can see it, right at the entrance. So this is the part of the famous audacity of Beaufort, Ok Beaufort's famous audacity. He, throughout the novel, that is the way he behaves. So there are a couple of non-conformist characters in this novel. Beaufort leaves the bandwagon. We also have Catherine Mingott, the old grandmother and of course our heroine Ellen Olenska, Ok. Is Newland Archer a non-conformist? Yes or no?

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Student: Yes, the way he thinks, because it is (()), he is something like Hamlet. He is thinking, but he will never act on it.

Professor: Ok

Student: So

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Professor: What does he actually do? In the entire novel, what does Newland Archer actually do?

Student: (())

Professor: What is his profession?

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Student: He is a lawyer

Professor: He is a lawyer but you know lawyer was like

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Professor: very euphemistic profession for these well-heeled aristocrats because you need to give some semblance of occupation. So they would go and attach themselves, it was given that some big law firm will automatically take them. You have read *The Bonfire of the Vanities*. And you know that how certain kind of old world lawyers would automatically include the younger set; because your father was also with us once upon a time. So it is the same kind of society. Newland, he goes there, works and reads the newspapers, he always hangs around, smokes a cigar, comes back, Ok.

They had, they were so wealthy and they had so much of property from where they could earn their money, they didn't have to earn their living. They earned their income which was also taken care by banks and their managers. They didn't really do work. They didn't actually do, perform any activity. They were supposed to be the important members of the (()) society. Again we are talking about novel of manners. After all, you can relate it to the theater of manners for example, Oscar Wilde, yeah. What does that famous play, *Importance of Being Earnest*, what do those characters do? What do they do?

Student: They drink tea

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Professor: They drink tea, they have sandwiches, they have cucumber, they have discussions

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Professor: over cheese sandwiches, butter sandwiches, cucumber sandwiches. Here too, characters talk a lot about food. Ok, what kind of food, there so much of gossip takes place over the dinner table. Sillerton Jackson, the old Sillerton Jackson who is also a member of this old New York society, he is invited to various people, why? Because he is an expert on history, family history of the Old New York, he knows everything about everyone. The way Larry Lefferts is expert on? Larry Lefferts is an expert on? She uses a word repeatedly

Student: Form and

Professor: Good, form. He is the only one in New York who knows whether, on which occasion you should wear loafers or patent Oxford leather, Ok. His authority goes

unchallenged over such matters and Edith Wharton is very sarcastic when she says all these things. She is not taking them seriously. Although she is, has the insider's view on all these things. So this is novel, this is what I mean when we talk about novel of manners, Ok, very anthropological. Ok also we have to, another salient feature is that characters are differentiated by the degree to which they measure up to or fall below the uniform standard or ideal of behavior.

And naturally when the , the novelist's concern was only a particular section of society, the range or scope always remains very limited. They do not talk about any other strata of society, they do not talk about the working class people. Ok, they do not, although Edith Wharton did try her hand at representing the poor people also, especially in *Ethan Frome* and *The House of Mirth* but otherwise, more or less, these are novels, especially those written by people like Henry James, Jane Austen and also Edith Wharton, they have limited range but they excel within their limited range.

Now we come to another important person in both Edith Wharton and Henry James' life. This is a person called Morton Fullerton and therefore we need to know why he is so important when we do *The Age of Innocence*. Now he was a playboy, an American journalist who travelled widely, a socialite and he had an affair with the person who was the model for Lord Henry in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, so the real life person Lord Ronald Gower. Ok so this was the charismatic, a playboy Morton Fullerton. Now James had drawn, Henry James he was a friend of Henry James and he introduced Morton Fullerton to Edith Wharton also.

And James had drawn on Morton for the journalist Merton Densher's character in *The Wings of the Dove* and the hero is described as who looked vague without looking weak, idle without looking empty and that was Morton Fullerton. Now interestingly, because there is lot of controversy about Henry James' personal life also and he never married and it was widely believed that he was bisexual. So there may not be any concrete evidence but it is believed that he was very much in love with Morton Fullerton at some point. Now this is Morton Fullerton who is considered a very stylish and fashionable gentleman of their times, of their time.

Now, James as we know, he corresponded a lot. He was a voracious letter-writer and he wrote to Fullerton at one point and this is , preserved letter. There is no doubt about its authenticity. You are dazzling, you are beautiful, you are more than tactful, you are tenderly, magically tactile but you are not kind. There it is, you are not kind. Now whatever you want to derive from this, why he is unkind. You absolutely add to my wish and to my need to live the life of whatever we call it, my genius and I shall feel somehow while there is a rag left of me largely thanks to you. Ok, now why would a man write a letter of this kind to another man?

One explanation, very simple explanation could be that men those days were less guarded about these things. You have done lot of masculinity and theories of masculinity. So you know that male bonding was not merely always associated with homosexuality at a certain time in history. It is not, I mean if you write a letter like this in today's time, world, today's time then the other implications attached to it. So we are not too sure about their exact relationship. However, Fullerton and Edith Wharton did have a very public affair Ok while she was still married to her husband Teddy Wharton and we have already seen that she was not too happy with her marriage.

So Fullerton travelled to America with a letter of introduction to Edith Wharton from Henry James. Edith Wharton was 45 and she fell passionately and madly in love for the first time in her life. Ok because she married quite young and she never loved passionately. She never loved her husband passionately, Ok. She did not have too many affairs, although there are some kind of gossip around her life but this was the first time she felt, she, you know, the raging fire of love, and this was the first time she felt and interestingly The Age of Innocence comes after all this. Ok, after her roaring affair with Fullerton ended. He ditched her. And she was shattered.

This is Edith Wharton's house, The Mount. If you have seen, if you just look it up on the Youtube, Ok there are documentaries on The Mount. So this is the famous house that Edith Wharton built. Also much of it was inherited; much of the land was inherited. We are told that it extends into some thousands of acres of land. There are forests, there are waterfalls, and yeah, she was a very wealthy woman. Money was never a concern. And on the top of it, she earned a lot of money from her, through her writings also.

During her own lifetime, some of her own novels were bought by Hollywood for adaptation, for film adaptation. So she was a very wealthy woman and she was one of the first people in America to own a luxurious car. This is her sanctuary. She called it a sanctuary, a retreat so this is what a retreat should be. All of us should have a retreat like this. This is the inside of her house and this is her library. She was very fond of getting photographed in her library. Many of her pictures appeared sitting and writing at her study table.

Do remember that Virginia Woolf tells us something about, what is it, a woman should have her

Student: Room of her own

Professor: Yeah, so it is very important that when a woman writes, she should have a place, a table and chair and a fan and a room of her own where she shouldn't be disturbed. Ok, there shouldn't be any outside intervention when she writes. Why did she say that? What outside interventions are those?

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Student: In her times, women were not allowed that kind of space.

Professor: Women were not allowed,

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Professor: that writing is not a woman's job. Yeah it is a scandalous job. So why, why do women need to write at all, that was the popular perception and if, and unless and until you have a space to write, how would you write and they were denied that space. So they wrote wherever it was possible. So Virginia Woolf when she first comes out with this famous lengthy room of her own, then she, this is what she means that women need a space and also solitude and also freedom from the day-to-day worries, how to run the, well managing the household, running the house, taking care of everyone.

Ok, you need some kind of a break from all those matters. So remember you as women of today, how lucky you are! Always, so make the most of your time and room of your own. Ok, this is a, really a privilege and luxury. Whenever I look back on these women, I think how hard they have succeeded for us to enable to do whatever work we do today. Ok, so we are, so it is not our own work but it is somebody else's labor that you know, today we are reaping the fruits of. Now this is, yeah, I showed you The Mount and Edith Wharton's interest in house interior designing and she also wrote a famous, very well-recognized book called Italian Villas and Their Gardens. So she was also extremely interested in landscaping, gardening and interior decoration. This, I think I have already referred to the other day.

How many of you have seen a movie called Becoming Jane? Becoming Jane

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Professor: whose movie is it? Yeah it is about Jane Austen

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Professor: and it is a fictionalized recount of her, account of her affair with Tom Lefroy, yeah; so this, in the movie, it is like you know, just giving you some kind of imagined story of the circumstances that led to Jane Austen's writing of *Pride and Prejudice*. When the movie opens we see Anne Hathaway, beautifully dressed and sitting at her table and looking out of the window and it is a beautiful pretty room and she is looking out of the window and there is a view of a beautiful garden out there. So what are we supposed to understand here; that Jane Austen had a place of her own where she would write all those magnificent novels while looking out of the window and what did she see there, she would see all those beautiful landscaped gardens, Ok right? Wrong.

Because she never had that kind of privilege. She lived in a house which was so crammed up and full of sisters and relatives and whatever writing she did, it was on bits and pieces of papers sitting amidst the huge chattering family. Ok she never had a room of her own. This is a romanticized representation. She never had a room of her own. Historians had challenged *Becoming Jane* that this is, you know, you are representing a very wrong account of Jane Austen's work. She never had a place or room of her own. Ok she wrote what, therefore her range was so limited. What else could she have written about? They say there is no reference to major historical events, no reference to the decline and fall of the Great Napoleon. How could she have? She didn't have access to everything that was happening around the world. Ok, she didn't have enough space to sit and read. She had to contribute towards household activities. Therefore it was just not possible for her to write the way it is shown in the movie.

Alright, so Edith Wharton in love and she, her letters to Fullerton, so you have already seen Henry James' letters to, lovelorn heartrending letters to Fullerton and this is Henry, Wharton. She says you hurt me, you disillusioned me and when you left me I was more deeply yours. This could as well be Newland Archer writing to Ellen Olenska. Ok and she was shattered because he ditched her and the very first and great love of her life, so late in life and Henry James' advice was just live through it. Ok, you live through it because something valuable will come out of this pain and dejection because she was a woman who had led such a privileged life.

How would she know anything about pain? You need to suffer, that is what we are told in *Rockstar*, right? That philosophy of *Rockstar*, that unless you suffer, so he goes to all those crazy lanes to suffer. You need to suffer in order to produce real art which is very true, Ok. The idea is not that all of us turn to masochistic characters but yeah, if such an experience like this comes along, try to make the best of it, that's what Henry James' advice was. Something good will come out of it and what came out of it, *The Age of Innocence* which is about thwarted love, yeah, a love which is not reciprocated in full measures, obsession Ok, a kind of passion that never re-attains consummation, so that kind of love, so she had gone through all this before, she could come up with that.

So if you read the novel and passages are of such great beauty Ok that you will realize what the author must have gone through. And this is a fictionalized representation of this Edith Wharton and Fullerton affair. It is called the Age of Desire. It's a 2012 novel by Jennie Fields and you see Edith Wharton's, supposedly Edith Wharton's back looking out at the Parisian house, the kind of house that Edith Wharton lived in during the last days of her life in Paris. The Age of Desire, look on the play on the title.

She has also written because the last years of her life, actually several years of her life were spent in France and Paris and she had written a book called French Ways and Their Meaning in 1919. So if you read this book, if you are interested I would recommend, she talks a lot about the Parisian way of life, the cultural scene in Paris during that time and much of it finds resonance in The Age of Innocence.

She says that in France, one could truly exist as a self, an identity, a person regardless of the way in which that person meshed or failed to mesh with society. So what is the idea? In America you don't. In America you don't, women don't get, especially people, women who live alone on their own, they cannot attain self actualization. So this is very important in Edith Wharton; the idea of women attaining

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Professor: self-actualization, gaining an identity. How many of you have read the end of the novel?

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Professor: Ok so you tell me Bhargavi, how does it end?

Student: Newland wants to leave his wife and Ok it is slightly before the end.

Professor: Yeah, tell me the end.

Student: So he wants to go and meet her again (()) days and he

Professor: At what age?

Student: 40 years age

Professor: He is 57 then, exactly yeah

Student: And he waits outside her house, whether to go or not and finally he decides not

Professor: Not to go and visit her after all. That's the way the novel ends.

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Professor: He ends up marrying May Welland. He never finds complete, it is not a passionate relationship, partnership that he had envisioned for himself. That's not, but he knows that, with Ellen there could have been something deeper, something more honest and he never attains that. At one point, he wants to leave his wife and escape with Ellen but then certain circumstances that, once we start doing the novel then we will talk about those also but novel ends when May is already dead and he is 57 and Countess is living all by herself in Paris.

And he goes there, he goes to Paris and he sits on a bench looking up at the house where she lives, one of those top floor houses and he just waits and waits and waits; waits for what? Just like Hamlet, for what? She is not going to come to the window, yeah but he just sits there. He sends his son up there, his son who is now in his 20s or so but he waits down and Countess is expecting him. We are told that she is waiting inside. But he never goes up there. And when the evening closes, he returns. He goes back to his hotel, Ok. Why does he do that?

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Student: What we see, he tries to make a move, make a decision and he fails and end is also final failure, he refuses (()) because all the structures around him prevent him from doing so.

Professor: Yeah, this is a man

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Professor: who is a product of his society, Ok he is a very passive man but then very interestingly the entire story is told to us through a very restricted point of view, the man's perspective and this is another accomplishment for Edith Wharton, being a woman in the nineteenth century America, she could, this novel was written in twentieth century of course, so then she could probe into the psyche of a man so deeply. Ok, she understands the male psychology so well so he is unable to take decisions at every crucial moments of his life where as for women it is not a problem. They know what they want, both of them.

Women emerge, much more stronger than Newland Archer although he thinks he is taking most of the decision but it is not. He remains a passive character. Things happen to him. He does not make anything. He is another Clyde Griffiths' character. Ok, things happen to him. Yeah, women come, they sit next to him. They, I mean, things are done for him. He never does anything. The only thing is he actually does is getting married to May, that also because it has the entire social sanctions associated with that. But on his own there is nothing that is, but in his mind we see a lot of conflict happening all the time, he questions a lot but at the same time, he accepts everything. He learns to live with that.

So Edith Wharton, why do I talk about the ending of the novel at all? Edith Wharton, very interestingly had written 3 drafts of the novel. In one, in the first draft they do get married. He leaves May and marries Ellen, Countess Olenska and they get married. She gets bored with him, yeah. Why does she get bored with him and she leaves him. She says I am going to go

back to Europe. Yeah so, that is one of the endings. Ok, you can look up the net and there is another I think yeah, they, one is they live happily after.

One is, then they don't, they get married and they don't live happily after and one is there, he marries May and then he never leaves May. May dies but even when he is free, he doesn't want to be with, he cannot bring himself to go to Olenska once more. Ok, so now what are we looking at? We are looking at a kind of a man who is not able to take certain, very decisions which are life-changing. Ok, but a woman is. Ok so the woman for Edith Wharton was always the agency that could bring about certain changes. This is what she felt about America.

She didn't have much too great an opinion about the American cultural or intellectual scene and she says America dominated by requisites of social class and mandates of what it is to be a good citizen and that is what she didn't want to. In Paris, in Europe you get some freedom to exercise your own self, your choices, your identity Ok you can be, but in America you are forced to become a model citizen in the society in which she existed. And the idea of the single woman existing, it was just not possible. One has to have a man. So that is what she felt, that in France you have that sense of loose collection of free spirits coming together and actually promoting self-realization, self-actualization.

This is Edith's home in Paris and if you look at, if you watch the movies, Scorsese's film this is so much like the house where Ellen Olenska passes the remaining of her day and this is where, Newland Archer sitting on the bench looking up to this house. This is the locality where Edith Wharton was staying in France, it is a locality of Faubourg Saint-Germain and then we will also talk about the cosmopolitanism in her works. So Edith Wharton herself was a very cosmopolitan person.

Self educated, the other day we were talking about that she didn't really receive any kind of formal kind of education but her education came mainly through foreign travels just like Ellen Olenska's, just like Newland Archer's. Of course he is a trained lawyer but then he was a man and she was a woman in the nineteenth century; so look at the similarities between Olenska and Archer on one hand, and Edith Wharton on the other. So both and all of them

self educated, mainly through foreign travels, instructed in foreign languages, there is lot of Italian and French throughout the novel.

That's what Edith Wharton was proficient in, she was highly interested in European languages, interest in the best artistic world, there are several references to paintings, housekeeping, gardening, flowers what is Newland's flower? There is always a flower which he keeps in his button hole, gardenia, white gardenia, Ok and did you notice that when we are first introduced to May Welland, where is she? She is sitting in the box, the Mingott box with her aunt and Countess Olenska and she is wearing a modest white, modesty is always the very recurring, frequently recurring adjective with good young girls.

So they are modest. And she is wearing a modest white gown and everything held together, clasp at her bosom with a white gardenia so the man is having a gardenia in his buttonhole and the girl, his betrothed is having a gardenia at her, you know somewhere in the dress tucked away somewhere in her dress, and she has in her hands, what? She is holding a bouquet of white lilies, lilies of the valley and this is a bouquet that has been sent to her by Newland Archer, Ok. This was the custom and everything in white because white suggests, everything in white, yeah so white suggests purity, chastity, virginity, modesty.

Ok so white girl playing with flowers, lily of the valley flowers in a bouquet given to her by her fiancé who is also having a gardenia, white gardenia so this is, you know, sort of signifier at work; they are one, they are the same kinds of taste and she is playing with her bouquet, eyes lowered and all, so this is a way modest girl should sit and he looks at her, the first time he looks at her, he sees her holding a bouquet that he had just sent to her and she is playing with the lilies of the valley, white flowers and he draws in a breath which is full of vanity and self satisfaction, Ok. Why vanity and self satisfaction, he takes great pride in her. See I am so lucky that I have snatched a woman like that.

Ok she is the cynosure of every eye but there is a stain there. There is a smudge there, what is that? Countess Olenska's presence in Josephine style gown, no she is wearing blue, she is wearing blue. She came out and that is another mark against her, cross against her, they had these coming out seasons. So when she came out in society, that's a debut ball. She was

allowed to wear black. Ok she was allowed to wear black and black is not something that a good girl should be seen wearing, a good unmarried girl.

So colors, clothes signify a lot in this. So this is something that is referred to throughout the novel that, what else can you expect from a girl whose upbringing was so unconventional that she wore a black gown at her coming-out ball. See this class of women would have these balls that was called, they were the debutantes, they come out, they are formally introduced to society that now this girl is in the marriage market, she is ready for the masculine attention. So when she is presented to society in black gown, that means something is terribly wrong with her upbringing.

She should have worn something more becoming, like a pale or lavender, or something, or white is the safest choice of course for unmarried women and of course their love for literature so much of novel is full of what they read. They live their lives through books. They are what they read. Newland's ideas are all informed by his books, the books he reads so much till he comes face to face with a woman like Countess Olenska, who is a real woman of, you know, who has so much of passion and fire in her Ok, but till then all his, whatever he knows of love and deep desires, he has learnt only through books, Ok. Alright, so we will continue this in the next class. Thank you.

(Professor – student conversation ends)