

约克文学作品辅导丛书

YORK NOTES ON

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY

贵妇人的画像

Henry James

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Henry James

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY

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《约克文学作品辅导丛书》介绍

《约克文学作品辅导丛书》(York Notes)系 Longman 集团有限公司(英国)出版。本丛书覆盖了世界各国历代文学名著,原意是辅导英国中学生准备文学课的高级会考或供英国大学生自学参考。因此,它很适合我国高校英语专业学生研读文学作品时参考。

丛书由 A. N. Jeffares 和 S. Bushrui 两位教授任总编。每册的编写者大都是研究有关作家的专家学者,他们又都有在大学讲授文学的经验,比较了解学生理解上的难点。本丛书自问世以来,始终畅销不衰,被使用者普遍认为是英美出版的同类书中质量较高的一种。

丛书每一册都按统一格式对一部作品进行介绍和分析。每一册都有下列五个部分。

① 导言。主要介绍:作者生平,作品产生的社会、历史背景,有关的文学传统或文艺思潮等。

② 内容提要。一般分为两部分:a. 全书的内容概述;b. 每章的内容提要及难词、难句注释,如方言、典故、圣经或文学作品的引语、有关社会文化习俗等。注释恰到好处,对于读懂原作很有帮助。

③ 评论。结合作品的特点,对结构、人物塑造、叙述角度、语言风格、主题思想等进行分析和评论。论述深入浅出,分析力求客观,意在挖掘作品内涵和展示其艺术性。

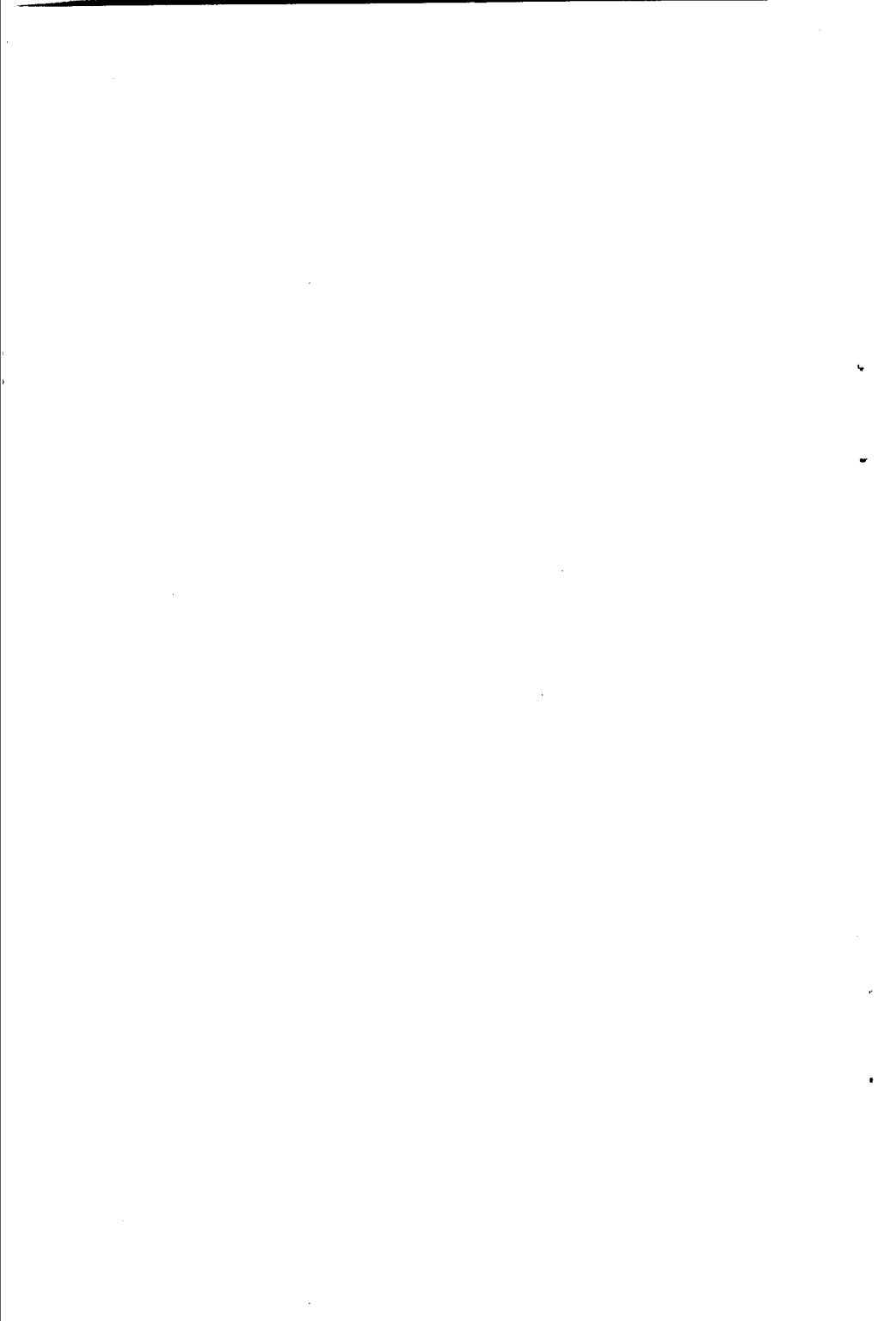
④ 学习提示。提出学习要点、重要引语和思考题(附参考答案或答案要点)。

⑤ 进一步研读指导。介绍该作品的最佳版本;版本中是否有重大改动;列出供进一步研读的参考书目(包括作者传记、研究有关作品的专著和评论文章等)。

总之,丛书既提供必要的背景知识,又注意启发学生思考;既重视在吃透作品的基础上进行分析,又对进一步研究提供具体指导;因此是一套理想的英语文学辅导材料。

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Part 1

Introduction

Henry James

Henry James was born in New York City on 15 April 1843, one year after his brother, William. Their grandfather had made enough money in business to free his descendants from the need to work for a living. Their father, Henry James Senior, was a cultured man with a keen interest in religion and philosophy. He travelled all over Europe, taking his family with him. The children were educated by private tutors in New York and given special schooling in England, Switzerland, France, and Germany.

The elder Henry James wanted his children to be, above all, aware of people, places, art, and ideas. With this background it is not surprising that both William and Henry James Junior became students of perception. Encouraged by their father to value their own perceptions of the world, they both spent their lives considering the ways in which people see things and how they react to what they see. William became a philosopher and a pioneer of psychology in the United States. Henry turned psychology into art in his fiction.

In 1858 the James family returned from Europe to America. Like William, Henry studied painting briefly and entered the famous Law School at Harvard University. He left without taking a degree, and began to write reviews and short stories. In 1875 he went to Paris where he met Turgenev, the Russian novelist, and came under the influence of the great French writers of the period, Flaubert, Maupassant, and Zola. Each of these writers had his own distinctive method and style, but they all believed that the art of fiction was a deeply serious activity whose purpose was to examine the ways in which people live. This became James's belief. The seriousness of his approach to the art of fiction is evident not only in his stories and novels, but also in the many essays he wrote about other writers and about the form and principles of the novel.

In 1877 Henry James settled permanently in England. Most of his works are set in Europe and many of them develop what became known as James's 'international theme', that is, they tell stories about Americans in Europe or, less often, Europeans in America. *The American* (1877) and *Daisy Miller* (1878) are about young Americans who make mistakes in France and Italy. In *Daisy Miller* the mistake is tragic and

the heroine dies. The American girl in *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) comes to wish for death as an escape from the mistake she makes in Europe. Instead of allowing Isabel Archer to die, James increases her awareness of life: as her perceptions become sharper, her consciousness expands.)

Henry James's career extended from the end of the American Civil War to the middle of the First World War. His output was vast. In addition to his twenty-two novels, he wrote over a hundred short stories, several volumes of essays, plays, books of travel, biography, autobiography, and thousands of letters. In all this there is no better place to begin than *The Portrait of a Lady*. The novel shows James in full command of his powers, but uses simpler language than later novels such as *The Wings of the Dove* (1902) and *The Ambassadors* (1903) in which he also employs the international theme.

In 1915 Henry James became a British citizen. He was angry with America for hesitating to come to Britain's aid during the First World War, and wished to declare his own feelings for the country he had adopted as his home. He was awarded the British Order of Merit shortly before his death on 28 February 1916.

Henry James and the novel

By the time Henry James began to write his early works, American literature had much to be proud of, especially in the novel. The 'Leatherstocking' novels (1823-41) of James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851) had created the hunter, Natty Bumppo, whose home was the American wilderness. Nathaniel Hawthorne's (1804-64) stories and novels—*The Scarlet Letter* (1850) chief among them—had dealt with the early Puritan culture of New England. Herman Melville (1819-91) had broken all the rules of fiction in *Moby Dick* (1851), his great epic of Captain Ahab and the white whale.

These books all contain their own vision of life, their own kind of truth, but they have one important thing in common: none of them is realistic. Natty Bumppo is an ideal of freedom; Hawthorne's New England belongs to the imagination; in Ahab and the whale Melville created the most powerful symbols in American literature.

As a young writer, James was encouraged by the American novelist William Dean Howells (1837-1920), best known today for *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885). Howells was fascinated not by ideals, allegories, or symbols, but by 'real life', and this became James's passion too.

The writers James met in France were, like Howells, concerned with the real world, but James felt that they sometimes concentrated too much on the surface of life. His own aim was to portray life from the inside. A novel by James is designed to give 'an air of reality' and to be a

'representation of life', but interest is focused on the minds of the characters. It is not photographic but psychological realism that we find in his work.

James uses symbols when they can help him to enlarge his meaning. In *The Portrait of a Lady* different houses symbolise different styles of life. He often makes images function as symbols to convey several meanings simultaneously; but the purpose of his novels is, above all, to explore the ways in which 'real' people see and relate to each other.)

The 'international theme'

During his own lifetime this was James's most famous subject—the meeting of America and Europe. Compared to Europe, America was still a new, innocent country. European subtleties of manners and morality, evolved over many centuries, baffled the visiting American who was accustomed to directness of behaviour and simple notions of right and wrong. The heroine of *Daisy Miller* does not understand that she cannot behave in Europe as she does in her home town of Schenectady, New York. Christopher Newman, hero of *The American*, thinks mistakenly that money can buy happiness in Europe as it does in America. In *The Portrait of a Lady* Isabel Archer is determined to be free. She fails because her American background has not prepared her for the evil that traps her in Europe.

An unusual feature of the international theme in *The Portrait of a Lady* is that, apart from two nuns who are minor characters, we do not meet any true Europeans face to face. Early readers of the novel would have expected the innocent American heroine to find herself up against an assortment of sophisticated and corrupt Europeans. Instead, Isabel Archer is deceived by corrupt Americans who live in Italy. James seems to suggest that people like Osmond, the villain, and his accomplice, Madame Merle, are more at home in Europe than in the brave new world of America.

Henry James's method

In the preface to *The American* which he wrote for the 'New York' edition of his novels (1907-9), James describes his method of telling Christopher Newman's story:

He was to be the lighted figure, the others . . . were to be the obscured; by which I should largely get the effect most to be invoked, that of a generous nature engaged with forces, with difficulties and dangers, that it but half understands.

There are two points to notice here. (1) There would be no doubt that

Newman, the one 'lighted' figure, was the central character of the story. (2) Only Newman's character was to be clearly shown. All other characters would remain to some extent dim, undefined, 'obscured', even to the reader. This would encourage the reader to identify with Newman's difficulty in understanding the strange people he meets in Europe.

This is James's method in *The Portrait of a Lady*. Isabel Archer is the one 'lighted figure' whose character is revealed to us from the beginning. All the other people in the novel are kept more or less 'obscured', mysterious, until we near the conclusion. Like Newman, Isabel possesses a 'generous nature' which is 'engaged with difficulties and dangers that it but half understands'.

In the preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* James says he had invented his heroine some time before he wrote the book. The image of a 'young feminine nature' was a 'treasure' which he wished to 'place right' (p.x), that is, he had a clear idea of Isabel but did not yet know what her story would be. He seemed to wake up one morning with all the ingredients he needed, all the characters who would themselves suggest to his imagination exactly how they would relate to Isabel, thereby creating the plot of the novel (p.xiv). As in *The American*, the focus is on the consciousness of the central figure who first suggested herself to James (p.xiii): the other characters are there to interact with her. Their function is to bring out her nature and provoke her mind to activity so that its qualities are revealed.

A note on the text

The Portrait of a Lady was first published in serial form in *Macmillan's Magazine* (London), XLII-XLV, and *Atlantic Monthly* (New York), XLVI-XLVIII, 1880-1. The first English edition of the book was published in three volumes by Macmillan, London, 1881, the first American edition by the Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1882.

James made extensive revisions of a selection of his works for the 'New York' edition of his *Novels and Tales* (1907-9), twenty-four volumes (two more were added posthumously) with new prefaces, published by Charles Scribner's Sons, New York. *The Portrait of a Lady* occupies Volumes 3 and 4.

The Novels and Stories of Henry James, based on the 'New York' edition, but including work James had omitted from his selection, was edited by Percy Lubbock and published in thirty-five volumes by Macmillan, London, 1921-3. *The Portrait of a Lady* occupies Volumes 6 and 7 of this edition.

These Notes are based on the edition of *The Portrait of a Lady* in the Penguin Modern Classics series, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1963, reprinted 1979. Page references are to this edition.

Part 2

Summaries

of THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY

A general summary

The 'lady' whose portrait is painted in the novel is Isabel Archer, an attractive and intelligent young woman from the town of Albany in the state of New York. Isabel's parents are dead, her sisters married. She is free to accept the invitation of her aunt, Mrs Touchett, to go with her to Europe.

The opening scene of the novel introduces us to Gardencourt, a country house near London where Isabel's uncle, Mr Touchett, his son, Ralph, and their friend, Lord Warburton, are discussing the expected arrival of Mrs Touchett and Isabel. At the beginning of Chapter 2 Isabel arrives. Her uncle and Ralph take an immediate liking to her and she is soon offered a proposal of marriage by Lord Warburton, which she refuses. Isabel is determined to keep her freedom and to see as much of life as possible before she chooses a husband. When an American businessman, Caspar Goodwood, comes to renew his earlier offer of marriage, he, too, is refused. This is much to the annoyance of Isabel's journalist friend, Henrietta Stackpole, who has encouraged Goodwood and believes that Isabel should remain true to her American origins.

At Gardencourt Isabel meets Madame Merle, a friend of Mrs Touchett's who seems a model of freedom and accomplishment.

By this time it is clear that Isabel has made a deep impression on her cousin, Ralph Touchett. Incurably ill, Ralph cannot become one of her suitors. Instead, he persuades the dying Mr Touchett to leave Isabel seventy thousand pounds in his will. (The equivalent in 1980 would approach one million pounds.) When Mr Touchett dies, this money frees Isabel from the limitations of her small income and enables her to explore life as she wishes.

After a short visit to Paris, Isabel goes with her aunt to Florence where Madame Merle introduces her to Gilbert Osmond, a widowed American connoisseur who has settled permanently in Italy and lives alone with his daughter, Pansy.

Both Warburton and Goodwood come to Italy and repeat their declarations of love for Isabel, but she is increasingly attracted by the manners and tastes of Gilbert Osmond.

After a year of travel with Madame Merle, Isabel marries Osmond and they go to live in Rome.

Three years later Isabel's marriage has become a misery to her, although she tries not to show this in public. Osmond, she realises, married her for her money. He is a bully who must have his own way, and it now becomes his ambition to marry Pansy to Lord Warburton. Isabel obediently encourages the marriage, until she realises that Pansy is firm in her loyalty to a young man called Edward Rosier, and that Warburton's love is still for herself.

Ralph sends Isabel word from Gardencourt that he is dying and would like to see her. Osmond opposes her going. Osmond's sister, the Countess Gemini, tells Isabel that Pansy is the illegitimate daughter of Osmond and Madame Merle. Isabel's marriage had been arranged to provide Osmond with money and Pansy with a substitute mother. Shocked, Isabel decides to go to Ralph but promises Pansy that she will return.

Isabel is met in London by Henrietta Stackpole, with whom she spends one night before going to Gardencourt.

At their last meeting Isabel and Ralph recognise their profound love for each other.

Goodwood appears and passionately entreats Isabel to leave Osmond and go away with him, but Isabel refuses once more. She returns to Rome, where Osmond and Pansy await her.

Detailed summaries

Chapter 1

It is summer 1871. The opening scene of the novel is set in the grounds of Gardencourt, an old English country house overlooking the river Thames about forty miles from London. The owner of the house is Mr Daniel Tracy Touchett, an ageing American banker now in poor health. He and his son, Ralph, who suffers from a lung disease, are contrasted with the vigorous and handsome Lord Warburton, an ideal example of the English aristocracy, who has come on horseback to visit them from his own estate nearby. As the three men take afternoon tea together, the Touchetts refer to their visitor's need of a wife. Lord Warburton shows little enthusiasm for marriage, but admits that an 'interesting' woman might have some effect on him.

The conversation turns to Mrs Touchett who is expected to arrive at Gardencourt. She has sent word that she is bringing a niece whom she has 'discovered' in America. Mr Touchett hopes the niece is not coming to England to look for a husband. He warns Lord Warburton not to fall in love with her.

COMMENTARY: The 'sense of leisure' (p.5) given by the unhurried talk over tea underlines the fact that this is a place where time is respected.

Henry James gives an account of the old Tudor house representing it as a symbol of English history. Each reference to the history of the house adds to the peculiarly English quality of the scene that awaits the arrival of James's peculiarly American heroine.

The lady whose portrait will be painted does not appear in this chapter, but the stage is set for her entry. Like the three men at Gardencourt, we, as readers, end this chapter wondering what Mrs Touchett's niece will be like.

NOTES AND GLOSSARY:

Edward the Sixth: King of England (1547-53)

the great Elizabeth: Queen of England (1558-1603)

Cromwell's wars: the English Civil Wars (1642-51), which led to the ascendancy of Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector of England (1653-8)

telegraph: telegram

Chapter 2

Isabel Archer arrives and is delighted by Gardencourt. When she is introduced to Lord Warburton she exclaims, 'It's just like a novel!' (p.17). Explaining how she comes to be there with her aunt, she is quick to assert her independence and dismisses Ralph's suggestion that Mrs Touchett has 'adopted' her. 'I'm not a candidate for adoption,' she says (p.21).

COMMENTARY: Isabel is impressed by Gardencourt but she is not overawed. She makes an even greater impression on the three men than they do on her. Mr Touchett finds her delightful, but her impact on Ralph makes him untypically 'awkward' (p.20). Lord Warburton keeps his 'excellent manner' (p.19) but Isabel does provoke him into saying to Ralph that she is his 'idea of an interesting woman' (p.21).

NOTES AND GLOSSARY:

Early Tudor: the Tudor period in English history refers to the years 1485-1603, when the Tudor family occupied the throne of England. Gardencourt cannot have been built before 1547 because of the reference to King Edward VI in Chapter 1. A distinctive style of architecture known as 'Late Perpendicular' is associated with this period

Chapter 3

Mrs Touchett lives in Florence, virtually separated from her husband. She usually spends one month of the year in London with him, and

makes regular trips to America. On her last trip she had found Isabel reading in the drab old house in Albany. The house was once Isabel's grandmother's and later her father's; but Isabel's parents are both dead and the house is to be sold.

Mrs Touchett was attracted to a young woman forthright enough to call her 'crazy Aunt Lydia' (p.26) and honest enough to admit that she would promise 'almost anything' (p.29) to go to Florence. (The key word here is 'almost'.) This was good enough for Mrs Touchett: she will take her niece to Europe.

COMMENTARY: This chapter establishes the young Isabel's 'romantic' disposition. As a child in the Albany house she never looked behind the green paper that covered the glass sidelights of the office door because she preferred to imagine what might be there rather than see the dull reality of the stoop and the pavement. When her aunt appears, Isabel, no longer a child, is reading a history of German thought to improve her 'vagabond' mind. Both as a fanciful child and as a self-disciplining young woman, Isabel is, above all, independent.

The dreariness of the Albany house and its outlook is in obvious contrast to the beauty of Gardencourt with its fine view of the Thames.

NOTES AND GLOSSARY:

Albany:	a small town, but the capital of New York State since 1797
sidelights:	small windows at the sides of doors
stoop:	small porch, platform or staircase

Chapter 4

This chapter centres on the stimulating but irregular education the Archer girls received from their father and on Isabel's 'immense curiosity about life' (p.35).

She has two sisters. Lilian (Mrs Ludlow) is 'practical' and plain; Edith (Mrs Keyes) is pretty. Isabel is pretty too, but is regarded as the 'intellectual' (p.30). Lilian thinks of her as a 'free greyhound' (p.30)—the independence theme again.

As Isabel sits recalling the past, a servant announces the arrival of Caspar Goodwood, a young suitor. At the end of the chapter it is implied that Mr Goodwood has unsuccessfully proposed to Isabel, but that he will try again.

COMMENTARY: Although Isabel thinks of her past as 'fortunate' and 'happy' (p.33), she is determined to progress from it into a fuller experience of the world, and not be like her sisters, locked in their marriages. So far her imagination has enabled her to live in terms of novels, literary

periodicals, music, poetry and grand events remote from her daily life. She longs now to participate in life instead of merely imagining it. She is, of course, likely to find the real world more complicated than anything she has read about. As Mr Touchett says in Chapter 6, 'I believe the novels have a great deal of ability, but I don't suppose they're very accurate' (p.57).

Isabel is to be given her freedom and, like a greyhound, will rush headlong into life. We have been warned that life may wound her, for her innocence makes her vulnerable.

NOTES AND GLOSSARY:

- Civil War:** the American Civil War (1861-5)
London Spectator: not to be confused with the famous eighteenth-century periodical, this *Spectator* was a weekly publication begun in 1828 as an organ of 'educated radicalism'
Gounod: French composer (1818-93)
Browning: English poet (1812-89)
George Eliot: pen name of Mary Ann Evans, English novelist (1819-80)

Chapter 5

After his education at Harvard University and the University of Oxford, Ralph Touchett travelled for two years before taking a position in his father's bank. Eighteen months later he contracted a disease of the lungs (presumably tuberculosis) and now spends his winters abroad. Ralph accepts that his health restricts him to observing life more than participating in it; he may love, but does not expect to be loved in return.

Mrs Touchett admits to Ralph that she has taken Isabel under her wing because she thinks Isabel will do her 'credit' (p.43), but denies that she wishes to shape Isabel's life. She recognises that Isabel 'will do everything she chooses' (p.44).

Lord Warburton visits Gardencourt but leaves before dinner. Isabel presses Ralph to show her the Touchett art collection. While they look at the pictures she asks him if the house conforms to her romantic idea of such a place by having a ghost. Ralph suggests that the ghost may be seen only by someone who has suffered. Isabel thinks people suffer too easily. She came to Europe 'to be as happy as possible' (p.49).

COMMENTARY: Ralph and Isabel are alike. Isabel, we know, values her independence highly, and Ralph has 'a mind that greatly enjoyed its independence'. The difference between them is emphasised at the end of the chapter. Isabel wants knowledge and happiness; Ralph understands that knowledge (seeing 'the ghost') involves suffering.

Chapter 6

Isabel thinks a great deal about the values of 'beauty, bravery and magnanimity'. She is to be admired for the 'nobleness' of her imagination, but her thoughts tend to be 'vague' and she is too ready to settle for a 'general impression of life'. She is aware that thousands of people are less fortunate than herself, but this does not affect her as much as it should.

She admires Henrietta Stackpole who is paying for her nieces' education out of her earnings as a journalist. Henrietta represents independence: she demonstrates that a woman can stand on her own feet without a man to support her.

The 'rich perfection' of Gardencourt is completely to Isabel's taste. She spends many hours in the company of her uncle. Mr Touchett's wisdom comes not from books but from observation of life: 'I just kept quiet,' he says, 'and took notes.'

COMMENTARY: James shows us the mixture of good and bad in Isabel's character. Her imagination, vitality and curiosity are attractive qualities, but her vagueness and complacency are such obvious faults that James warns the reader not simply to analyse his heroine ('she would be an easy victim of scientific criticism'), but to be 'tender' and 'expectant'. We must preserve our sympathy for Isabel and expect to be impressed by her.

Chapter 7

Mrs Touchett is very anti-British. Isabel defends the British way of life and objects that her aunt has no 'point of view', while her own is 'thoroughly American'. Mrs Touchett retorts that she does have a point of view: it is not American but 'personal'.

While Ralph teases Isabel for being so American, he realises that if he is not in love with his cousin he certainly finds her an intelligent, original and fascinating companion.

One evening Isabel wishes to sit up with Ralph and Lord Warburton after her aunt has gone to bed. Mrs Touchett insists that it is improper for a young girl to sit alone with gentlemen late at night. This is not Albany, but England. Isabel's anger fades and she tells her aunt that she wishes always to be told the right and wrong of a situation so that she may decide for herself.

COMMENTARY: Isabel realises that her aunt's 'personal point of view' is similar to her own way of making judgements. Independence is based on having one's own personal point of view and making decisions for oneself.