

25449

*Unique Literary Series*

**HENRY JAMES**

**The Portrait of a Lady**

*(A Critical Evaluation)*



*Dr. S. Sen*



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### University Questions

1. "Despite her deeply repressed sexuality, Isabel remains among the most complex, the most fully realised, and the most humanely fascinating of James's characters". Discuss the statement.
2. "Though Isabel Archer is one of the most significant and appealing of heroines, she has some glaring faults." Discuss.
3. ".....a woman apparently made for nothing but happiness condemns herself to a life which cannot be happy, because she has been made aware of 'what people must know and suffer...'. Comment the implications of this remark in connection with character of Isabel Archer.
4. Write a short note on James's art of characterization with special reference to Isabel.

(2) Gilbert Osmond

**University Questions**

75

1. "Do you agree with the view that Gilbert Osmond is a villain?" Bring out the essential characteristics of his personality.

(3) Ralph Touchett

**University Questions**

79

1. "Ralph Touchett is the directing intelligence of the novel". Elucidate.
2. Write an essay on the character of Ralph Touchett.

(4) Madame Merle

82

**University Questions**

1. Write an essay on Madame Merle's character.
2. "Madame Merle is one of the earliest and fascinating of James's bad heroines". Discuss.

(5) Lord Warburton

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(6) Caspar Goodwood

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(7) Henrietta Stackpole

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(8) Pansy Osmond

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(9) Countess Gemini

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(10) Mrs. Touchett

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(11) Mr. Touchett

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6. The Title of "The Portrait of a Lady"

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**University Questions**

1. The title, *The Portrait of a Lady* is a deeply suggestive one and it underlines a serious theme." Discuss this statement and explain what serious theme is suggested by the novel.
  2. Write a critical note on the title of the novel.
7. A critical assessment of "The Preface" to "The Portrait of a Lady"

98

**8. The International Theme of "The Portrait of a Lady"**

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**University Questions**

1. "James was drawn to the international setting by temperament and training as well as by what he judged to be the particular aesthetic requirements of the novel." Discuss this statement and critically examine the real character of the international situation in *The Portrait of a Lady*.
2. "James dramatically and symbolically embodies the American and European values, holding them in poised suspension in our international dialectic that never vulgarly collapses into mere national commitment". Discuss.
3. Examine James's treatment of the problem of the 'emigree' American in *The Portrait of a Lady*.
4. How does James work on his theme of American—European differences?
5. "James saw his Americans largely as innocents confronting the vast civilisation of the west and usually triumphing over the more cultivated but also more corrupt Europeans." Discuss.
6. Write a critical note on James's handling of the international theme in *The Portrait of a Lady*.
7. Attempt an analysis of *The Portrait of a Lady* in the light of the statement that this novel reveals James's "profound pondering of the nature of civilized society and of the possibility of imagining a finer civilization than any he knew."

**9. The Ending of "The Portrait of a Lady"**

108

**University Questions**

1. State the controversy about the ending of the novel and express your own views on the matter.
2. Why does Isabel return to Osmond at the end of the novel? Is this a satisfactory ending for the novel?

3. The ending of *The Portrait of a Lady* has been hotly debated by the major Jamesian critics. Examine some of the leading criticism to highlight its significance.
4. a) "Isabel's return to Rome, the house of life in which she has encountered her other self, is emblematically consistent, although it may seem to the reader of the novel to depend too much on an exaggerated idea of marriage, or an exaggerated estimate of Isabel's ability to help Pansy Osmond, who, as the novel presents, is in a hopeless position." (Quentin Anderson)  
 b) "As the novel stands, the conclusion seems a romantically conceived unhappy ending, an almost heroic renunciation, but a renunciation that appears unjustified" (Marion Montgomery)  
 Which of the above two views do you find more convincing? Give reasons for your answer.
5. How far does Isabel's growth depend on her decision to return to Osmond?
6. What new facts of Isabel's character are uncovered by her decision to leave Gardencourt at the end of the novel?
7. Write a critical note on the ending of the novel in connection with the view that "no simple explanation of Isabel's rejection of Warburton and Goodwood and her acceptance of Osmond will suffice. Her actions involve complex motivation."

## 10. The Structure of "The Portrait of a Lady"

115

### University Questions

1. What did Henry James think of the structure of *The Portrait of a Lady*? Give your comments on its structure.
2. Henry James was undoubtedly a meticulous artist. What evidence of his structural skill do you find in *The Portrait of a Lady*?
3. "Such is the aspect that to day *The Portrait* has for me : a structure reared with an architectural

competence, as Turgeneff would have said." Elaborate.

4. How far do you agree with James's own appraisal of the *The Portrait of a Lady* as "the most proportioned of his productions" ?

#### 11. Symbolism in "The Portrait of a Lady"

120

##### University Questions

1. Write a note on symbolism in *The Portrait of a Lady*.
2. How do the materials of art (paintings bric-a-brac, architecture etc.) function in *The Portrait of a Lady* ?
3. How do different symbols in the novel add to its 'unity' and 'coherence' ?

#### 12. Imagery and Metaphor in "The Portrait of a Lady"

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##### University Questions

1. *The Portrait of a Lady* is replete with metaphors, especially the metaphors drawn from the house." Discuss this statement and bring out the effectiveness of the use of the metaphors.
2. Write a critical note on the use of imagery and metaphor in *The Portrait of a Lady*.

#### 13. James's Art of Characterization in "The Portrait of a Lady"

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##### University Questions

1. Write a critical note on James's art of characterization in *The Portrait of a Lady*.
2. "Despite her deeply repressed sexuality, Isabel remains among the most complex, the most fully realised and the most humanly fascinating of James's characters." Discuss this statement.

3. How far is James an innovator in the field of characterization ?

14. Isabel : from 'Innocence' to 'Experience'

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#### University Questions

1. "Fall from innocence is an important aspect of the theme of *The Portrait of a Lady*". Do you agree with this view ?
2. Does Isabel's rejection of Lord Warburton and Caspar Goodwood and acceptance of Osmond equip her better to face and understand life than she was when she came to Europe ?

15. Is "The Portrait of a Lady" a Tragedy ?

140

#### University Questions

1. *The Portrait of a Lady* presents a strange admixture of the elements of tragedy and comedy." Discuss this statement.
2. Is it true to say that *The Portrait of a Lady* is a tragic novel ?

16. Themes in "The Portrait of a Lady"

145

Or

'A Modern Classic' of American Fiction

#### University Questions

1. "*The Portrait of a Lady* is one of the greatest novel about human isolation". Discuss.
2. Write a short note on the treatment of sex in *The Portrait of a Lady*.
3. What is modernity about *The Portrait of a Lady* ? Elucidate it with reference to some of the under-current themes.

17. Role of Pansy in "The Portrait of a Lady"

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### University Questions

1. "Pansy symbolises the relationship existing between the main characters of the novel." Elucidate.
2. Discuss the role of Pansy in *The Portrait of a Lady*.

18. Moral-Aesthetic Values of "The Portrait of a Lady" 154

### University Questions

1. Express in your own words the relationship of moral-aesthetic values in *The Portrait of a Lady*.

19. "The Portrait of a Lady" : an American Novel 159

### University Questions

1. Discuss *The Portrait of a Lady* as an American novel.
2. What strengths and weaknesses of the American character are revealed by Isabel ?
3. What criticism of the American character do you find in the portrayal of Henrietta Stackpole, Caspar Goodwood and Mrs. Touchett ?

20. 'Sense of Place' in "The Portrait of a Lady" 163

### University Questions

1. Write a critical note on James's sense of place in *The Portrait of a Lady*.

21. Psychic Realisation in "The Portrait of a Lady" 167

### University Questions

1. What do you think of the psychic realisation in



22. Miltonic Echo in "The Portrait of a Lady"

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**University Questions**

1. "The echo of Miltonic sentence is coincidental in 'The Portrait of a Lady'". Discuss.

23. Miscellaneous Topics

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24. Select Literary Criticism

1. Sister Corona Sharp on Confidantes in *The Portrait of a Lady*
2. F. H. Dupee on Escape from Innocence in *The Portrait of a Lady*
3. R. W. Stallman on Illusion and Reality in *The Portrait of a Lady*
4. Richard Poirier on Death in *The Portrait of a Lady*
5. David Galloway on Failure of Communication in *The Portrait of a Lady*
6. David Galloway on Alienation in *The Portrait of a Lady*
7. David Galloway on Quest for Meaning in *The Portrait of a Lady*
8. The Preface to the Novel and Tales : Henry James in *The Portrait of a Lady*
9. Arnold Kettle on self-indulgence in *The Portrait of a Lady*

10. F. O. Matthiessen on Free Will and Determinism in *The Portrait of a Lady*
11. Stephen Reid on Isabel and the spoken pledge in *The Portrait of a Lady*
12. Pelham Edgar on Isabel's Tragedy in *The Portrait of a Lady*
13. Walter F. Wright on Isabel and Puritanism in *The Portrait of a Lady*
14. Chritof Wegelin on Isabel versus Osmond in *The Portrait of a Lady*

**25. Select University Questions with Answers**

1. What did Henry James think of the structure of *The Portrait of a Lady*? Give your comments on its structure.

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Or

What evidence of Henry James's skill as meticulous structure artist do you find in *The Portrait of a Lady*?

Or

'Such is the aspect that today *The Portrait* has for me : a structure reared with an architectural competence, as Turgenieff would have said'. Elaborate this comment by Henry James.

Or

Henry James called *The Portrait of a Lady* 'the most proportioned of his productions'. How far do you agree with this assessment?

2. Write a short note on Henry James as a 'master of the of novel' with reference to *The Portrait of a Lady*.

180

Or

Critically examine the technique that Henry James employs in *The Portrait of a Lady*.

3. Give a critical analysis of Chapter 42 of *The Portrait of a Lady*—the chapter that James considered as 'obviously the best thing in the book'.

192

Or

Do you consider Chapter 42 of *The Portrait of a Lady* to be 'a supreme illustration of the general plan'?

4. Write a short note on the ending of *The Portrait of a Lady*. 193
- Or
- How far is the return of Isabel to Rome at the end of *The Portrait of a Lady* justifiable?
5. Consider *The Portrait of a Lady* as a tragic novel. 194
6. '...a woman apparently made for nothing but happiness condemns herself to a life which cannot be happy because she has been made aware of what people must know and suffer'. Write on the implications of this remark on the character of Isabel Archer. 196
- Or
- Write a brief critical note on Henry James's art of characterization with special reference to Isabel Archer.
- Or
- Do you consider Isabel Archer as a 'tragic' character? Give reasons for your answer.
7. Discuss Isabel's relations with Madame Merle and Osmond. 198
- Or
- Evil exercises its sway in an indirect and subtle style. Its face wears an elegant mask, and its form 'partakes of the forms of civilization'. Consider the relevance of this comment to the relationship of Isabel to Madame Merle and Osmond in *The Portrait of a Lady*.
8. Comment on the nature of Isabel Archer's 'innocence' and 'knowledge' in *The Portrait of a Lady*. 200
9. Examine James's description of the subject of *The Portrait of a Lady* as the conception of 'a certain young lady affronting her density'. 200
10. Bring out the moral significance of the word 'portrait' in the title of the novel *The Portrait of a Lady*. 201
11. 'It is very easy to laugh at her but it is not easy to be as brave as she'. How does Isabel's comment illuminate the character and role of Henrietta in *The Portrait of a Lady*? 201
- Or

- Describe the character of Henrietta Stackpole and describe the role she plays in *The Portrait of a Lady*.
12. Discuss *The Portrait of a Lady* as a depiction of the uncertainties and complexities of the moral life. 203
- Or
- Write on the moral concern of Henry James in *The Portrait of a Lady*
13. Elaborate the view that in *The Portrait of a Lady* James's use of metaphor and symbolism raise the novel to the poetic and tragic level. 206
- Or
- How do the materials of art (paintings, bric-a-brac, architecture, etc.) function in *The Portrait of a Lady*?
14. James 'gave up what he considered clap-trap of romance without giving up its mystery and beauty'. Discuss with reference to *The Portrait of a Lady*. 206
15. How does James work in his theme of American-European differences into *The Portrait of a Lady*. 207
- Or
- Would you say that 'the international situation' is a preoccupation in Henry James?
- Or
- In what way is *The Portrait of a Lady* a study in the international theme?
16. Examine James's treatment of the problem of the 'emigre' American in *The Portrait of a Lady*. 209
- Or
- 'James saw his Americans largely as innocents confronting the vast civilization of the West and usually triumphing over the more cultivated but also more corrupt Europeans.' Discuss.
17. 'No, good novel will ever proceed from a superficial mind...'. How far does this apply to *The Portrait of a Lady*. 212
18. Write a note on realism in *The Portrait of a Lady*. 213