

Jane Wu

Commentary on Iser

Anticipation and retrospection often happens when I read some piece more than once. It mainly comes from the fact that upon second reading, I'm already familiar with the plot and am able to focus on other aspects of the novel. For instance, the first time I read "Portrait of a Lady," I was shocked by the twist in the book (when it was revealed that Osmond's daughter was actually Madame Merle's). I was right there with the main character (Isabel) was. Upon a second read a few years later, I read the book again. On second reading, I picked up on hints in the novel that foreshadowed the twist. So when the twist occurred, I was no longer surprised by it, and at the same time, I felt less sorry for Isabel. It also made me reflect more on the motivation behind Madame Merle and Osmond Gilbert's behavior. In some ways, I was able to understand their motivations a lot more than before. In addition, I always get advanced retrospection, maybe even on a first read. Since I'm a very visual person, I always like to form vague ideas about what the characters look like. But whenever I see a movie version of that book, I'm always shocked by how different the character is from the one I had imagined.