



Henry James
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and An International Episode

OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS

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DAISY MILLER
AND
AN INTERNATIONAL EPISODE

HENRY JAMES was born in New York in 1843 of ancestry both Irish and Scottish. He received a remarkably cosmopolitan education in New York, London, Paris, and Geneva, and entered law school at Harvard in 1862. After 1869 he lived mostly in Europe, at first writing critical articles, reviews, and short stories for American periodicals. He lived in London for more than twenty years, and in 1898 moved to Rye, where his later novels were written. Under the influence of an ardent sympathy for the British cause in the First World War, Henry James was in 1915 naturalized a British subject. He died in 1916.

In his early novels, which include *Roderick Hudson* (1875), *The American* (1877), and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), he was chiefly concerned with the impact of the older civilization of Europe upon American life. He analysed English character with extreme subtlety in such novels as *What Maisie Knew* (1897) and *The Awkward Age* (1899). In his last three great novels, *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903), and *The Golden Bowl* (1904), he returned to the 'international' theme of the contrast of American and European character.

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INTRODUCTION

IN Daisy Miller James created, or recognized, a new kind of American princess. She is beautiful, bold, wealthy, and extraordinarily well dressed. She is also ill-mannered, reckless, vulgar, ignorant, and in some sense 'innocent'. In what sense, exactly? Is she truly, in the root sense of the word 'innocent', harmless? What harm could she inflict or incur? To her fellow characters this is not a theoretical question but a practical or even a pragmatic one. How are you supposed to behave towards this person? What do you say? What do you *do*? For Daisy puts everyone on the spot, not least the serious and cautious young man with the ill-omened name of Winterbourne, who is attracted and repelled in unpredictably varying measure.

'Daisy Miller: A Study' (as it was first known)¹ provided her author with a popular success he never repeated. It remains the fiction by which James is best known to readers who know little else of him. Why? Like his other most resonant fictions, it draws on a myth of beauty, innocence, grace, and promise menaced by predatory worldliness. This fable goes back to the Garden of Eden and popular folk tale, but it was particularly congenial to the imagination that produced Milton's *Comus* and winged Puritans to America in the seventeenth century. Two centuries later its vitality had become troubled, both for Nathaniel Hawthorne before the American Civil War and his successor Henry James after it, by modern forms of scepticism, resistance, and outright hostility towards such hoary anachronisms. What did such ancient superstitions about 'virtue' and 'vice' have to do with a contemporary world? And yet, for better or worse, they still exerted a pressure and answered a need requiring new kinds of explanation, such as Freud and others would shortly provide. James does not disown the force of a fable in which a young American woman embodies values that the Old World threatens to maim, distort,

¹ James reflects on his decision to drop the subtitle in his Preface to the New York edition: see Appendix 1, p. 150.

degrade, and destroy. But he does hold it up for inspection and subject it to 'complication'.

'Complication' is a word that becomes important in the second tale reprinted here, 'An International Episode'. James conceived it as a 'counterpart' to 'Daisy Miller', and wrote it while 'Daisy' was enjoying its first serial run in the *Cornhill Magazine*, June–July 1878. The two tales owe much to the moment of their first writing, both for their author, in his mid-30s, establishing himself in London as more than a promising young man of letters, and also for the wider Anglo-American audience he was addressing on both sides of the Atlantic, in the wake of the centenary of American independence in 1876.² Both tales are deeply interested in what it means to generalize—about Americans, Englishmen, Italians, young women, young men, the Old World, the New World, class, money, and status. In his non-fictional writings James enters with zest into the adventure of categorizing and typing, a popular activity in the later nineteenth century as older forms of collective identity broke down, became blurred and indeed complicated by social mobility, migration, and intermarriage.³

In October 1878, between the first appearance of 'Daisy Miller' and 'An International Episode', an American journal published an essay of James's entitled 'Americans Abroad'.⁴ 'Americans in Europe are *outsiders*,' James insisted; 'to be known in Europe as an American is to enjoy an imperfect reciprocity. . . . The great innocence of the usual American tourist is perhaps his most general quality'. Americans have little idea of the impression they make on sophisticated Europeans, to whom they simply appear 'very vulgar'. Nevertheless there were distinctions to be drawn between 'the conscious and the unconscious' American, between the expatriate resident and the tourist. There were different forms and degrees of being an 'outsider'. What is more, and this is

² See Millicent Bell, *Meaning in Henry James*, and Adeline R. Tintner, "'An International Episode'". Unless noted otherwise, full details of references in this Introduction may be found in the Select Bibliography.

³ See Sara Blair, *Henry James and the Writing of Race and Nation*, esp. ch. 1, 'First Impressions: "Questions of Ethnography" and the Art of Travel', and Kendall Johnson, *Henry James and the Visual*.

⁴ 'Appendix III', in *The Tales of Henry James*, iii, ed. Aziz, 518–22.

typical of the way James's mind turns from one 'point of view' to its opposite, the ignorance of Americans about Europe was nothing in comparison to the ignorance of Europeans about America:

it is hardly too much to say that as a general thing, as regards this subject, the European mind is a perfect blank. A great many Americans are very ignorant of Europe, but in default of knowledge it may be said that they have a certain amount of imagination. In respect to the United States the European imagination is motionless; . . .

Not only do Americans exercise their imagination about Europe, they actually come in some numbers, for better or worse, to see for themselves.

The same month that 'Americans Abroad' appeared, another tale of James's was finishing its serial run. In *The Europeans* James imagined what might have happened, back in the innocence of pre-war New England, if a brother and sister had travelled west across the Atlantic. Two months later 'An International Episode' sent two upper-class Englishmen on a first visit to New York and Newport, and exposed their motionless imagination to modern American manners. The more eligible of the two, Lord Lambeth, is bewildered by the generalizations his attractive talkative hostess, Mrs Westgate, brandishes with such confidence.

Lord Lambeth listened to her with, it must be confessed, a rather ineffectual attention, though he summoned to his aid such a show as he might of discriminating motions and murmurs. He had no great faculty for apprehending generalisations. There were some three or four indeed which, in the play of his own intelligence, he had originated and which had sometimes appeared to meet the case—any case; yet he felt he had never known such a case as Mrs Westgate or as her presentation of *her* cases. But at the present time he could hardly have been said to follow this exponent as she darted fish-like through the sea of speculation. (p. 90)

Her more available sister asks him if he has come to study American manners. But alas he hasn't yet risen, and never will, to such a level of curiosity. No wonder he's at the mercy of American hyperbole, when she extols her brother-in-law as a perfect husband.

“But all Americans are that,” she confidently continued. “Really!” Lord Lambeth exclaimed again; and wondered whether all American ladies had such a passion for generalising as these two’ (p. 91). This is innocence indeed, to match Daisy Miller’s.

‘Daisy Miller’ also rebukes the inertness of the European imagination about the fluidity, diversity, and potential of the new ‘America’, but it does so less directly by exposing the negotiations between Americans themselves about individual and collective identity. In ‘Americans Abroad’ James noticed the urgency of this debate in the wake of the centennial, a debate that at the time—for history has dramatically intervened since then—James claims would have been inconceivable for the English, the French, or the Germans, confident in their boundaries and sense of national identity.

But travel essays or critical reviews are one thing and novels and tales are another. Fiction provided James with the chance to test and contest the generalizations in which his non-fictional writings indulge through the uniqueness of a particular ‘case’. This is the word associated with Mrs Westgate and Lord Lambeth’s perplexities. It is quietly important in the ‘case’ of Daisy Miller (‘a terrible case of the *perniciosa*’), as it would be a few years later in the title of his friend Robert Louis Stevenson’s ‘Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde’. Another significant word is the subtitle that qualified ‘Daisy Miller’ on its first appearances: ‘A Study’. This promises a preparatory sketch rather than a finished portrait, such as Isabel Archer would enjoy two years later in *The Portrait of a Lady* (1880–1). But it also suggests the analytic attitude assumed by the main male character through whom we view Daisy, the studious Winterbourne. An affair of the head then, in the way the tale views her, rather than of the heart? For the head generalizes and abstracts, it perceives forms and invents formulae, while the heart seeks the particular.

Daisy Miller

Daisy Miller is a problematic princess, drifting across Europe with her wealth and her beauty, her ribbons and parasol, not to

mention her helpless mother and resentful young brother. She is an easy target for scorn, a recalcitrant object of desire, a puzzling case of neediness. The scorn is readily supplied by the matriarchs in charge of the manners and morals of polite society in New York (Winterbourne's aunt, Mrs Costello) and in Rome (the resident hostess, Mrs Walker). Daisy breaks all the rules governing relations with the other sex, about whom you speak to, where you can go, under whose supervision. For good and ill Daisy has grown up entirely unchecked; so too has her brother, the 9-year-old Randolph, one of James's most incisive cameos. In a telling revision to the tale's ending, we are told that 'she did what she liked' (p. 65). This echoes a phrase made famous by Matthew Arnold in his time, epitomizing a deplorable idea of personal liberty (see note to p. 65). As for the desire, this is naturally excited in the men around her, her Europeanized compatriot Winterbourne and his rival, the flamboyant Italian Giovanelli. And then there is the question of Daisy's neediness.

One of the things she needs is to look and be looked at. The other women look at her 'hard', as we say, constantly appraising her looks, her dress, and her conduct; it is only susceptible men who look soft. One of the tale's subjects is all this looking, gazing, surveillance. Daisy's good looks come by nature, as do her good instincts for how best to dress them and frame them, but the clothes themselves and all her accessories, including the settings she chooses, are matters of money and art. And it's these that get everyone round her excited. How artful or artless is she? Everyone sees money in the way Daisy looks and behaves, the expensive clothes and the lifestyle. And yet what provokes and troubles above all else is the ease and directness with which Daisy looks at others and receives their gaze, her confidence.

A decade earlier James had reflected on the new American girl striding into view after the end of the Civil War in 1865. 'She has . . . great composure and impenetrability of aspect. She practises a sort of half-cynical indifference to the beholder (we speak of the extreme cases). Accustomed to walk alone in the streets of a great city, and to be looked at by all sorts of people, she has

acquired an unshrinking directness of gaze.⁵ Daisy doesn't shrink from looking or being looked at. She does not appear to be artful in the ways conventionally sanctioned for well-bred women, for ladies. When she flirts with Winterbourne, if that is the right word for it—he is always struggling to find the right words for her—she does it so openly that it seems more natural than artful. She rarely seems to stand still or sit in one place—except at the Colosseum, fatally, the last time we see her. She prefers to be in constant motion, walking out and about, taking trips, tripping up and down stairways. Even when she stands in one spot, she's usually fiddling with ribbons or twirling her parasol. And talking, talking, talking. This is *not* the portrait of a 'lady'. Could she be more of a contrast to the ideal of a still and silent maiden modestly averting her gaze from spectators?

Daisy is surrounded by other more or less wealthy Americans living lives of expensive leisure. Where does the money come from? James is notoriously vague about how money gets made but he is all the more precise about how it gets used and displayed, how it 'shows'. Like many of the fathers and husbands in his tales (Mr Westgate in 'An International Episode' is a partial exception), Mr Miller remains invisible back in 'the better place' championed by his instinctively patriotic son, the aggrieved young Randolph, labouring to sustain the lifestyle to which his womenfolk have become accustomed. Meanwhile the Millers drift round Europe, with the vaguest sense of what they are looking at, let alone looking for. They typify the 'unconscious' Americans in Europe James describes in 'Americans Abroad'. They have no idea why they're in Europe at all, except that all that money has to get spent somehow. Mrs Miller would be happier back in Schenectady sharing her ailments with Dr Davis; so too would Randolph, stuffing himself with American candy. The young James wrote that to be an American was a great preparation for culture, but the culture of old Europe holds no real appeal for the Millers.

Yet Daisy is curious about the *people*, and she has an obscure

⁵ 'Modern Women', *Literary Criticism*, i. 23. In the early version of 'Daisy Miller' her glance is described as 'perfectly direct and unshrinking' (for the revised text, see Appendix 3, p. 160).

sense of mission. She says that she's in search of 'society'—something to replicate what she's known in New York: 'I'm very fond of society' (p. 12). There is none in Vevey, but she's happy enough in Rome, her mother affirms: 'It's on account of the society—the society's splendid' (p. 35). 'The society's extremely select', declares Daisy. She has a naïve but genuine idea of hospitality—'I never saw anything so hospitable' (p. 39). Her sad cautionary tale touches deep instinctual beliefs we all have about the mutual obligations of hosts and guests, the promise and danger of strangers, the welcome and rebuff accorded outsiders, topics to which anthropology, a discipline concerting itself at the time James was writing, has alerted us all. T. S. Eliot memorably described James as 'possessed by the vision of an ideal society'.⁶ Poor Daisy is possessed by nothing so grand, nor does she readily minister to the idea of 'some eventual sublime consensus of the educated', to which James confesses in one of his Prefaces (reprinted here, Appendix 1, p. 153). Yet in her restless, impatient, innocuous way she does express the instinct and desire for sociability. Thinking of the 'manners' of James's own writing style—the little courtesies and qualifications and circumlocutions—Mary Ann O'Farrell writes suggestively of their 'meaning (sometimes) nothing, but speaking and bespeaking something really huge: the felt need for sociability itself'.⁷ In her tenuous well-meaning way Daisy mimics her author in expressing 'the felt need for sociability itself'.

Daisy flouts the conventions with such abandon that someone needs to 'save' her. Otherwise, so the matriarchs contend, she will be 'ruined', an outcast, a social pariah. For Winterbourne's aunt, accustomed as she is to the 'minutely hierarchical' world of New York, Daisy is already beyond the pale. In Rome Mrs Walker initially tries to save her for the 'good society' over which she presides, to educate Daisy about the boundary lines she must not cross, such as walking unchaperoned in the Pincio gardens with

⁶ 'A Prediction in Regard to Three English Authors', *Vanity Fair* (Feb. 1924); partially repr. in *Henry James: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Leon Edel (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1963), 56.

⁷ O'Farrell, 'Manners', 198.

an almost certainly unscrupulous Italian. But it is Winterbourne who has the best chance of proving her saviour, or at least her protector, and to whom she appeals. Could he be like one of George Eliot's upright 'monitors', like Daniel Deronda in the recently published novel of that name, who shows the vain Gwendolen Harleth how she might liberate herself from the prison of egoism? This is never going to work for Daisy. She does look to Winterbourne for something, but it is neither a stern moral lesson nor 'lawless passion'. These are precisely the black and white alternatives that Winterbourne's dichotomous personality has been trained to think in. And out of which Daisy might tempt him.

For there is another less obvious possible story in which Daisy rescues Winterbourne. In another context James writes of 'the possible other case',⁸ and a possible other case for Daisy and Winterbourne can be found in the dramatic version James composed a few years later, *Daisy Miller: A Comedy* (1883: see Appendix 2). In the play the chains that enthrall young Winterbourne clank much more loudly. They partly take the form of the older worldly woman who remains a mere hint in the tale, the 'very clever foreign lady' in Geneva. On stage she materializes as a wealthy, weary, glamorous Russian princess named Madame de Katkoff. She is being blackmailed by the Millers' courier, Eugenio, who plans to get his hands on their money. When this villain suggests that Winterbourne's family may set out from America to rescue him from her clutches, we suddenly glimpse the premise of one of James's later masterpieces, *The Ambassadors*, in which Chad Newsome's apparent infatuation with a Parisian femme fatale excites just such a plot. Daisy's mission to save Winterbourne succeeds with assistance at a critical moment from Madame de Katkoff herself, and the play ends on a classic note of comedic resolution. The younger generation—there is a secondary couple, introduced to eke out the symmetries—triumph over their elders, both the obvious dangers represented by

⁸ James is talking in the Preface to vol. xv of the New York Edition about 'operative irony. . . the possible other case, the case rich and edifying where the actuality is pretentious and vain' (*Literary Criticism*, ii. 1229).

Madame de Katkoff (sex) and Eugenio (money), and their puritanically repressive complements, the Mrs Costellos and Walkers (Mrs Miller herself never appears). Eugenio is probably the play's best role.⁹

James's tale is infinitely more subtle than this. But in its very overttness the play helps us recognize what in the tale is so largely repressed, especially by Winterbourne himself: the possibility that Daisy might save him, not so much from the erotic clutches of the Genevan charmer as from the whole imprisoning mindset to which he has largely surrendered. Winterbourne is almost but not quite a lost cause. If only he and Daisy could make *common* cause and unite several aspects of America's potential identity—the material wealth, the desire for culture, the instinct for sociability. If only they could 'confide' in each other, to use a word and its cognates that feature significantly in James's revisions to these two tales (as well as elsewhere in his writing, including the novella *Confidence* (1879)). This is how we first see her, as 'a pretty American girl coming to stand in front of you in a garden with all the confidence in life' (p. 7). Of course she can be irritating: 'Of all this Daisy delivered herself with the sweetest brightest loudest confidence, looking now at her hostess and now at all the room' (p. 48); and yet, as with her instinct for sociability, 'her impatient confiding step' (p. 27) expresses a trust in someone else. It is a sad moment in the final scene when one of her bereft admirers decides to 'confide' in the other.

The personal liberty so blatantly—and vulnerably—championed by Daisy can never stand on its own. It needs something more than the 'imperfect reciprocity' James thought Americans were bound to encounter in Europe, something more nearly if not perfectly reciprocal, such as another kind of American might conceivably supply. A slim chance for these two particular persons, yet imaginable enough to hurt when it fails. Quite how badly it hurts Winterbourne we shall never know. But we do know that Daisy dies of it.

⁹ James had a particular actor in mind for the part, Charles Brookfield, to whom he made an interesting approach about the play in Nov. 1882 (*James Letters*, ed. Edel, ii. 389–90).

It is through the dialogue that we get the most promising glimpse of what might have developed. For much of the time we have to watch Daisy through Winterbourne's eyes or over his shoulder, so it is a relief when she meets him on equal terms as a speaking partner. Daisy can more than hold her own in quick-fire repartee. The effect of her racy colloquialisms on the reader, then or now, is uncertain. An old-fashioned ear might hear the contemporary idioms she shares with her mother and brother as horribly vulgar: 'She's always blowing at me', 'She's right down timid', 'Zürich's real lovely', 'I'm going to go it on the Pincio', and so on (pp. 6, 21, 35, 37). By contrast Winterbourne is constantly picking words up to inspect them for their credentials—ironically, quizzically, gingerly: 'an insinuation that she "picked up" acquaintances', '"tremendous flirts"', 'he should enjoy deucedly going "off" with her' (pp. 15, 18, 27). All the punctuation marks we have learned to call 'scare quotes' indicate his effort to hold words in a kind of quarantine. Yet one of the things that attracts him is exactly Daisy's exemption from the studied, finished verbal forms he's used to. If talking with her is so free and easy, what might more intimate intercourse be like? He's not used to being teased, and Daisy is good at it. When she rebukes him for not instantly coming to visit her in Rome, he declares: 'I've had the honour of telling you that I've only just stepped out of the train' (p. 39). Later she returns the compliment of this absurdly pompous courtesy: 'As I've had the pleasure of informing you, you're too stiff' (p. 50). Relax, she keeps trying to tell him: 'you've no more "give" than a ramrod' (p. 58). Or as one might say on her behalf, let your winter turn into spring.

Much of the tale's magic depends on its 'romantic' settings, in Switzerland and in Rome. The vocabulary of magic, charms, and spells is of great importance to James,¹⁰ and Winterbourne struggles throughout the tale to work out whether Daisy's magic potion will kill him or cure him. But it is something more that works through her, something to do with the landscape and history invested in Switzerland and in Rome. Switzerland stands for the

¹⁰ See my essay 'Henry James and Charm'.

struggle of liberty against oppression, both the Geneva of Calvin and the Vevey of Rousseau, whereas Rome stands for the weight of the past, of authority both papal and imperial. No wonder Mrs Miller prefers Zurich. Yet Switzerland is itself divided, so at least the guidebooks consumed by James's first readers assured them. Calvinist Geneva stood for spiritual probity against the libertinism of Rousseau, whose controversial best-seller *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) had 'immortalized' Vevey and its environs. Baedeker sternly warned its readers that Rousseau had employed 'his transcendant [*sic*] powers of mind in disseminating principles, generally considered to conduce neither to the good nor the happiness of mankind'.¹¹ Winterbourne may have seen in Rousseau's story about the passionate love of St Preux for his pupil Julie a warning against taking on a similar role with Daisy (and her brother Randolph). As with Switzerland's contradictory models, so too with Rome, its Vatican and Colosseum, its multitudinous lessons about the possibilities of human history for good and ill, triumph and defeat, innocence and experience. Where else could an innocent American girl, 'a child of nature and of freedom', as James described her in his Preface (Appendix 1, p. 149), come face to face with a worldly old pope called—'Innocent'?

The magic of James's tale is that Daisy's 'case' is inseparable from its setting in time and place. Consider the reverberating word that describes the effect on Winterbourne when he comes across Daisy in one of Rome's most celebrated sites, 'that supreme seat of flowering desolation known as the Palace of the Caesars'.

The early Roman spring had filled the air with bloom and perfume, and the rugged surface of the Palatine was muffled with tender verdure. Daisy moved at her ease over the great mounds of ruin that are embanked with mossy marble and paved with monumental inscriptions. It seemed to him he had never known Rome so lovely as just then. He looked off at the enchanting harmony of line and colour that remotely encircles the city—he inhaled the softly humid odours and felt the freshness of the year and the antiquity of the place reaffirm themselves in deep interfusion. (p. 57)

¹¹ K. Baedeker, *Switzerland: Handbook for Travellers* (Leipzig, 1879), 193.

We know that the memory of this beautiful girl moving at her ease over the great mounds of ruin will live on after she is dead and gone. It is the word 'interfusion' that clinches it. 'Interfused' and 'interfusion' were not uncommon in nineteenth-century writing. They are readily found in George Eliot, Meredith, and Pater, and with some frequency in James: of Venice in 1882, for example, he declares that '[N]owhere . . . do art and life seem so interfused'.¹² Shortly after the first appearance of 'Daisy Miller', James wrote of Hawthorne's 'mixture of subtlety and simplicity, his interfusion of genius with what I have ventured to call the provincial quality'.¹³ There is a fine passage describing the comfort that Isabel Archer takes in the Roman *campagna*, blending her personal sadness with thoughts of the longer continuity of the human lot: 'She had become deeply, tenderly acquainted with Rome; it interfused and moderated her passion' (ch. 49).¹⁴ The Protestant cemetery too, had made James reflect that 'when funereal things are so interfused it seems ungrateful to call them sad'.¹⁵

To an ear attuned to English Romantic poetry, the word is bound to recall its appearance in Wordsworth's 'Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey':

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thoughts
And rolls through all things.¹⁶

¹² *Collected Travel Writings: The Continent*, 303.

¹³ *Literary Criticism*, i. 438.

¹⁴ The text of 1881 is unchanged in the New York Edition, save that the semicolon becomes a colon.

¹⁵ *Collected Travel Writings: The Continent*, 467.

¹⁶ William Wordsworth, *The Poems*, ed. John O. Hayden (New Haven and London, 1977), i. 360.