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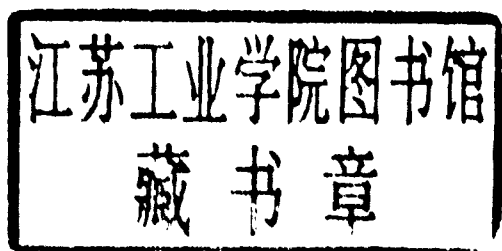
*Daisy Miller
& Other Stories*
HENRY JAMES



SELECTED STORIES

DAISY MILLER
and Other Stories

Henry James



WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Wordsworth Classics are inexpensive editions designed to appeal to the general reader and students. We commissioned teachers and specialists to write wide ranging, jargon-free introductions and to provide notes that would assist the understanding of our readers rather than interpret the stories for them. In the same spirit, because the pleasures of reading are inseparable from the surprises, secrets and revelations that all narratives contain, we strongly advise you to enjoy this book before turning to the Introduction.

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INTRODUCTION

'The international theme', Henry James's most notable subject, is entertainingly expressed in these three tales of romantic contrast and courtship. In the period prior to and during their writing, James himself moved between New York, Boston, London, Rome and Paris, experiencing at first hand how travel highlighted the different values and attitudes of the European and American worlds. That these worlds might unite, that an international marriage might represent a kind of high fusion of values captured his imagination; he also saw that these worlds might collide damagingly: in either case it would make for interest. His heroes and heroines approach each other on unfamiliar ground with new freedoms, yet find themselves unexpectedly hidebound by old constraints. The fact that each one of the tales suggests a romantic entanglement, but that each then, in intriguing and different ways, subverts the conventional ending of a traditional courtship plot, is indicative of James's innovation: the international marriage is new cultural territory, but it is also new

fictional territory. The unusual outcomes of the three tales pose a number of social questions about marriage and freedom and traditional roles. Is marriage to remain the feminine destination? Is an international marriage symbolic of the happiest interfusion, or is it an old-style raid and capture? Edith Wharton, James's younger friend and fellow novelist, following his lead in taking up the international theme, entitled her last unfinished novel of 1937, in which American girls search for rich titled English husbands, *The Buccaneers*. By 1937, some sixty years after James has taken up his great theme, the topic has coarsened and simplified. James, however, in these tales, is at the outset; there is an early freshness and a glow upon the enterprises of his characters, a sense of discovery, and also of trial, of undergoing the moral and ideological challenges of crossing cultures. European and American manners are represented as rich sources of mutual fascination and incomprehension. The reader, likewise, encounters the different social locations as brimful of interest and atmosphere.

James wrote these stories in the age of the great Atlantic passenger ships, when steam was giving way to the turbine engine. The Atlantic crossing had become faster, its duration having been reduced from twenty to ten days by the time James wrote *Daisy Miller* in 1878, so that transatlantic traffic was becoming more common. Looking back on these tales as he prepared them for inclusion in the New York Edition of 1907-9, the collected edition of his work,¹ James felt that he had captured the changes of the era, the new social currents, the forays, the hesitations and determinations that were at once individual and culturally representative. He realised that his portrayal of the unprecedented international encounters of the era had become, in twenty-five years, 'ancient history',² but he knew how much he had discovered through writing them. Their inclusion in the New York Edition is a retrospective benediction upon the international theme as the subject that was to shape his literary career.

Daisy Miller

Daisy Miller was to become James's most popular story, but initially there was a setback. Rejected by *Lippincott's Magazine*, it was his first tale to be refused by an American journal. However, Sir Leslie

1 Hereafter the Prefaces that James wrote for Volumes XIV and XVIII are referred to respectively as 'Preface to *Lady Barbarina*' and 'Preface to *Daisy Miller*'.

2 'Preface to *Lady Barbarina*', p. xii

Stephen accepted it for the English *Cornhill Magazine* and it appeared in two parts in June and July 1878. The critical reception was more excitable and vociferous than James's work had received before; he wrote excitedly from England to his brother William that the tale had 'made a great hit' and 'has given me a capital start here'.³ As his friend, the novelist William Dean Howells, retailed in a letter, the tale was virtually a *succès de scandale*:

Henry James waked up all the women with his Daisy Miller, the intention of which they misconceived, and there has been a vast discussion in which nobody felt very deeply and everybody talked very loudly. The thing went so far that society almost divided itself into Daisy Millerites and anti-Daisy Millerites. I was glad of it for I hoped that in making James so thoroughly known, it would call attention to the beautiful work he had been doing so long for so very few readers.⁴

Howells did not exaggerate. The *North American Review* critic, for example, acknowledged that Daisy was 'a characteristic portrait of a certain type', but fastidiously regretted that her name might become the '*sobriquet*' in European journalism of the American young woman of the period'.⁵ John Hay, a friend of James, writing anonymously in the *Atlantic Monthly*, took a more robust view, deriding the silly provincialism that made some Americans sensitive to foreign opinion of Daisy. There is no doubt, however, that Daisy had taken a hold upon American and English imaginations. The tale was topical, yet it also proved to have a longer, more penetrating ideological reach. These contrasting views anticipate the ideological divide at the heart of subsequent responses to Daisy. For some readers, James had satirically exposed a certain kind of American vulgarity, to others Daisy came to symbolise New World freshness and openness of spirit blighted by the mouldering corruptions of the Old.

Daisy is indeed a butterfly broken on a wheel. Flitting from Geneva, 'the little metropolis of Calvinism', to 'the cynical streets of Rome', her American innocence and frivolity are too lightly expressive to survive the Puritanism of the former and the worldly sophistication of the latter. She represents, as the American reviewers noted, a new

3 23 July 1878, *Correspondence of William James*, I, pp. 305-6

4 Letter to James Russell Lowell, June 1879, reprinted in *Henry James: The Critical Heritage*, p. 74

5 Richard Grant White, January 1879, reprinted in *Henry James: The Contemporary Reviews*, p. 68

type, the young single American woman who has far more freedom than her European counterparts. She is neither an intellectual nor that rather intimidating figure, the 'New Woman', a phenomenon beginning to be discussed in the period: such a label is too burdensome for the flirtatious tenor of her ways. In James's novel *The Bostonians* (1886) he takes up and develops issues of feminism, portraying female characters with political agendas. But he does not intend Daisy to be of this ilk: she is neither especially bright nor educated. Unlike Bessie Alden in *An International Episode*, she has had little guidance; no one has formed her taste; unlike Lady Barbarina, she has not been groomed for an important marriage. Her parents are unsophisticated, indulgent and passive, her brother a spoilt brat. She is merely a young American girl wandering aimlessly around the hotels of Europe. James gives us the note of her character in a letter to Eliza Lynn Linton, a well-known writer on the 'woman question' who had declared that she would fall out with James because of his heroine's obstinate defiance of propriety. James replied:

Poor little Daisy Miller was, as I understand her, above all things innocent. It was not to make a scandal that she 'went on' with Giovanelli. She never took the measure of the scandal she produced, and had no means of doing so: she was too ignorant, too irreflective, too little versed in the proportions of things.⁶

By placing Daisy initially on the borders of Lake Leman, a location associated not only with the strictness of Calvin, but also with Rousseau and Byron, who expressed in their works the blighting of freedom and innocence by social regulation, James is highlighting the vulnerability, the tenuousness, of the individual in the face of 'the proportions of things.'

The long short story, what James called a 'nouvelle'⁷ is the ideal vehicle for Daisy's fleeting existence: the form allows for the drift of impressions from place to place without the more heavily plotted formations of a full-scale novel. Interestingly, it was the English reviewers who picked up on James's formal achievement. *The Spectator* reviewer was the most insightful:

Mr James . . . eschews a story. What he loves is 'an episode', i.e., something which by the nature of the case is rather a fragment

6 August 1880, *Henry James: Letters*, Vol II, p. 303

7 a form, James goes on to remark, 'foredoomed' to 'editorial disfavour'; 'Preface to *Daisy Miller*', p. vi

cut out of a life . . . an eddy in it, which takes you for an interval out of its main current, or at least to the point at which you might get back into the main current again . . . if some thread did not occur to cut off abruptly the thread of the narrative. Mr Henry James is not so much a novelist as an episodist, if such a term be allowable. But he is a wonderful episodist.⁸

In *The Graphic*, the critic speculated on how the public 'accustomed to tales in which everybody of interest either dies or lives very happy ever afterwards' would receive 'sketches' such as *Daisy Miller* and *An International Episode*.⁹ Daisy does die, of course, but not in a high tragic way. The first edition of *Daisy Miller* was subtitled 'A Study' and the pictorial meaning of the freshness of an early sketch for a finished work is very appropriate both to the form and to the portrayal of the heroine. Daisy is provisional, in process, not yet fully worked up, on the way to becoming the finished figure: she has the attraction of being suggestive rather than complete. The excursion is her mode. As a new kind of girl, she is the opposite of the English Lady Barbarina who is a 'daughter of the Crusaders', the product of centuries of social formation. The brilliance of James's realisation of his conception of Daisy is that he found a form expressive both of the lightness of her being and of the abstract palette, the patterning of ideas.

Daisy Miller is a tale of contrasts and one of the contrasts is between those who walk about and those who sit and watch. If the early subtitle 'A Study' catches the improvisatory quality of Daisy and her existence, the watercolour sketch, the analytical sense of the word is appropriate to the way others try to categorise and place her. Ironically, it is an American who studies and judges her most intensely. Winterbourne has been brought up in Europe since childhood. He is the learned idler, the expatriate without a function, 'quaint' to Daisy who mistakes him for a German. He first sees her in Vevey, a Swiss lakeside resort, as 'a beautiful young lady advancing'. Seated in the garden of a hotel, at ease with the rituals of European life, his eye is caught by the beautiful girl with a parasol, elegantly dressed, sauntering nearby. He tries to determine her type, but feels perplexed. He does know, however, that in Geneva men do not speak to young unmarried ladies without introductions, but he

8 quoted from *Henry James: The Contemporary Reviews*, p. 72

9 quoted from *Henry James: The Contemporary Reviews*, p. 75

takes advantage of the holiday ambience and her ignorance of protocols to chat to her. This establishes the tenor of their relationship: he knows the European rules; she does not, and, as it turns out later, does not care to know them in their repressive aspects. Throughout their acquaintance, Winterbourne directs Daisy's book knowledge, but allows her to sink and be compromised socially. Critics have looked harshly upon his unmanly behaviour towards Daisy, his response to seeing Daisy and Giovanelli in the Colosseum at midnight has been castigated as the cowardly action of 'one who would rather kill than compete'.¹⁰ Aside from the issue of his masculinity, the indecisive advance-retreat mode of Winterbourne's behaviour is expressive of cultural confusion: he is neither European, nor American; he 'had become dishabituated to the American tone', as have the Europeanised American ladies in Rome who use their carriages and parlours, symbols of restrictive codes of behaviour, in attempts to limit Daisy's freedom of movement. For she is always to be seen walking and strolling, 'going around' Europe, to use her phrase that to other Americans is so vulgar, in parks and gardens, chatting and flirting with young men, more often outdoors than in, but when indoors singing and playing the piano. Daisy's refusal to be confined by Roman codes is not the result of a very developed alternative morality; her feeling does not go beyond 'people have different ideas', but it comes to seem a praiseworthy instinct to refuse to 'know' the codes of her expatriate compatriots who, well meaning as they are, have surrendered American freedoms in exchange for a punitive suppression of feminine spontaneity. Provisional Daisy may be, but there are moments when she is very definite and very American. The freedom of her behaviour is finally interpreted as corruption by Winterbourne, but, ironically, his reading is corrected by that of Giovanelli, a man initially traduced by the American community in Rome as the epitome of the Italian seducer, most emphatically not a gentleman. It is Giovanelli, however, who, after Daisy's death, has the last word in affirming her innocence.

The contrasts are therefore not straightforwardly between American innocence and European sophistication: the subtlety of the tale is in the way the cultural distinctions are muddled and stirred – the shallowest characters behave instinctively and with more integrity

¹⁰ Robert Weisbuch, 'Winterbourne and the Doom of Manhood in *Daisy Miller*', *New Essays on 'Daisy Miller' and 'The Turn of the Screw'*, p. 70

than the more knowledgeable and designing. The expatriate American women, who know both worlds, are the most judgemental and timid, following conventional European patterns without question. Not that they are especially blameworthy, but it would be convenient for them if American girls in Europe were unexceptional in behaviour. As a comedy of manners, the tale is brilliant: the full social irritation for society hostesses of Daisy's ignorant and self-centred behaviour is always vividly before us. The economic parameters are apparent too: Daisy is not an unattended free spirit, she comes with the cultural baggage of her brother Randolph and her socially inept mother, reminders of her Schenectady origins and the absent father, the generator of the wealth that sustains her remarkably good clothes, her sojourns in the best hotels. The nomadic existence of Daisy and her brother is not unlike that of James himself as a child: he referred to the 'parental tent' in his account of the family's European wanderings and described himself and his siblings as 'hotel children'.¹¹ The openness and public nature of Daisy's wanderings contrast with Winterbourne's costive and assiduous attendance on his wealthy aunt and the secrecy of his illicit relationship with an older married woman.

Winterbourne is often the centre of consciousness in the tale – reflecting upon the images of Daisy with her parasol or her fan, puzzling over the propriety of her behaviour – but he is not the narrator. It is an important distinction, one that allows the authorial narrator to comment on the preoccupations and pretensions of this epitome of cautious masculinity, an American whose vitality has been leached by European propriety. His name suggests how his consciousness has been frosted over. He watches and observes, and although at times he fancies himself as a suitor, in his behaviour, as a contemporary reviewer acerbically noted, he is less like a lover 'than a detective'.¹² The ironic distance between narrator and character positions the reader similarly. We never know Daisy's inner self, but we know and feel superior to Winterbourne: his confusions, sexual and cultural, are mercilessly exposed by the narrator. Indeed, the focus is as much on Winterbourne's uncertain masculinity as it is on her femininity. Thus his fussy self-preening is exposed when the

¹¹ *Henry James: Autobiography*, ed. F. W. Dupee, pp. 7 and 19 (hereafter cited as *Autobiography*)

¹² *New York Times*, 10 November 1878, *Henry James: The Contemporary Reviews*, p. 67

narrator reports his disappointment on arrival in Rome: the tardy lover discovers that Daisy is 'surrounded by half a dozen wonderful moustaches' when he had been imagining 'a very pretty girl looking out of an old Roman window and asking herself urgently when Mr Winterbourne would arrive'. But the prudish Winterbourne loses his chance to be revitalised, *re-Americanised* by Daisy, and symbolically abandons his American independence when he deserts Daisy and scuttles back to the stuffy little hypocrisies of European morality.

The complexities that emerge from these apparently simple contrasts of character are generated by a rare distinction of form. James's formal achievement might be called pictorial in sketching in the lights and shades of Daisy's brief existence, yet there is a poetic, almost musical, sense of form whereby the abstract oppositions, the contrasts between America and Europe, between spontaneity and caution, between movement and stasis (to name only a few), are motifs that, as the story develops, are impressionistically reconfigured. Daisy, the symbolic centre, is 'pure poetry'¹³ as James affectionately termed her. The sketch-like quality of her character, not fully rounded as in the manner of European realism, is central to this effect. The story moves with an economy of expressive gesture, by symbolic deployment of a few objects, anticipating in these respects *The Awakening*, Kate Chopin's novel of 1899. The heroine's parasol in *The Awakening* defines her culturally as a luxurious object, the property of her husband; Daisy's parasol, albeit a frivolous accessory, is the sign of a lightness of being, of an elusive quality that evades capture.

Provisionality is Daisy's mode, in part, of course, because of her youth, her life cut off in its springtime. In his Preface, James recounts how the germ of the tale was a dinner-party anecdote of a young girl's death in Rome.¹⁴ There is also another, more personal, origin. James's cousin, Mary Temple (known affectionately to the family as 'Minnie'), died in 1870 from tuberculosis at the age of twenty-seven. Her death affected him deeply. Of all his friends, the one who seemed most alive was the one to die young. He wrote of her that 'she was absolutely afraid of nothing that she might come to by living with enough sincerity and enough wonder'. He felt that her death was 'the end of his youth' and, haunted by it, determined to

13 'Preface to *Daisy Miller*', p. viii

14 'Preface to *Daisy Miller*', p. v

'lay her ghost by . . . wrapping it in the beauty and dignity of art'.¹⁵ He gave Minnie's intelligence, 'lightness' and 'restlessness of spirit'¹⁶ to Isabel Archer, the heroine of *The Portrait of a Lady*, and the 'lightness', although not the ardent intelligence, to Daisy. The intelligence (in *Daisy Miller* so suspect a value) is assigned to Winterbourne in his analytic-observer role, so like that of a writer. Through the character of Winterbourne, James evokes the dark side, the deathly chill of art on its subject, the living presence. This is symbolised in the Colosseum when Winterbourne delivers his death-blow to Daisy that he no longer cares what she is and observes her wounded response.¹⁷ It is as if he consigns her to the tomb, not only of propriety but also of art. The tale can be read as a kind of psychodrama of art and life, and the fact that Winterbourne is not given the authoritative role of narrator is indicative of James's anxieties about the observer role of the artist. He projects into Winterbourne not only the neurosis of the artist, but also the negative aspects of that rôle in which even the power to define and to create is like a death. For his name carries not only its wintry resonances, but also the Shakespearian sense of the boundary between life and death 'from whose bourne no traveller returns'.¹⁸

Daisy represents life, youth and frivolity, but her most important and most American quality is her commonness, the characteristic that all her compatriots despise. It says something for James's roots that he created so unabashedly an American figure with an identity more provisional, less fettered by origin, class, hierarchy, than her European counterparts. James admired the poetry of Whitman, whose famous volume of poetry, *Leaves of Grass*, first published in 1855, celebrated grass – the most ordinary, most common foliage – as a symbol of the democratic inclusiveness of American culture. The daisy is similarly a common flower. The speaker of Whitman's poem loafes, whereas Daisy strolls, yet both are garrulous and intuitively celebrant of relaxed modes of behaviour.

If Daisy represents the spirit of American democracy, however,

15 *Autobiography*, p. 544

16 *Autobiography*, p. 509. The more thoughtful and searching aspects of Minnie Temple's character were an inspiration for the character of Isabel Archer in James's novel *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881).

17 James's revision of this passage for the New York Edition – 'He felt her lighted eyes fairly penetrate the thick gloom of the vaulted passage' – emphasises the premonition of the tomb.

18 *Hamlet* 3, 1, 79–80

this is not abstracted or blurred. The power of the tale lies in a duality of vision: James locates his symbolic poem in culture and history, both in the small-scale and the larger perspective. Daisy is fatally compromised, physically and psychologically in the Colosseum, a tourist attraction, yet historically a place of suffering and exposure where alien races have been subdued. Daisy expresses natural spontaneity, yet as the deracinated Miss who, in her ignorant simplicity, has unsuccessfully grafted the manners of Schenectady on to those of Rome, she pays the price. The paradox is that her perspective is at once narrower, more provincial and at the same time freer than those she encounters.

An International Episode

An International Episode was first published in two monthly parts, December 1878 and January 1879, in the same English periodical as *Daisy Miller*, the *Cornhill Magazine*. This was followed by its first book publication in America by Harpers in 1879, and then, the same year, in England, in revised book form, with a new scene added, as the second volume of *Daisy Miller: A Study*. James later revised the tale for its inclusion in Volume XIV of the New York Edition.

The closest of the three tales to a love story, albeit a love story with an unexpected outcome, the title *An International Episode* plays on the expectation of a serious political dimension. But the reader is beguiled rather than beset: the principal figures are charming, their attractiveness and significance enhanced by the settings. The commercial bustle of New York, the vacation breeziness of Newport, Rhode Island, the exclusive and insular round of London society, these locations, in their diverse scenic texture, become metaphors for national characteristics and attitudes.

The tale opens in New York with the arrival of two Englishmen in August, overwhelmed by the heat and energy: 'Of quite other sense and sound from those of any typical English street was the endless rude channel, rich in incongruities, through which our two travellers advanced.' The clipped register and minimalist speech idioms of Lord Lambert and Percy Beaumont, 'Awfully rum place', 'beastly hot', 'Oh I say', do indeed connote them as upper class. That this was a notable rendering of their colloquialisms is evident in the fact that Mrs F. W. Hill, in reviewing *An International Episode* in the *Daily News* (of which her husband was the editor), accused James of satirically exaggerating upper-class speech. The implication was that

an American could hardly be attuned to the nuances of English speech, yet the very fact that the review focuses on this topic shows that he was becoming a writer to be reckoned with in the representation of English society. James was moved to defend the accuracy of his art. The letter he sent in reply (the only one extant responding to a reviewer of his work) is detailed and confident. In it he cites his membership of St James's Club where:

the golden youth of every description used largely to congregate, and during this period, being the rapacious and shameless observer that you know, I really made studies in London colloquialisms. I certainly heard more 'I says' than I had ever done before; and I suppose that nineteen out of twenty of the young men in the place had been to a public school . . . What I meant to indicate is the (I think) incontestable fact that certain people in English society talk in a very offhand, informal, irregular manner . . .¹⁹

James is asserting his credentials as an observer of English manners. He had just collected and published in book form, in 1878, his essays entitled *French Poets and Novelists*, which included an extended critique of Balzac's power to convey French social classes with a broad sweep, seizing on details of gesture, appearance and location to create his fictional world. The writing of *An International Episode* was a significant moment in James's own seizure of fictional territory, and a negative review was not going to make him back off his English-American domain. One of the strengths of *An International Episode* and *Daisy Miller*, as another contemporary reviewer noted, was the selective *external* representation, 'the objective form':

Writers of fiction are usually supposed to be omniscient within the limits of their stories. Mr James shows how effective the opposite method of developing a plot may be: he avoids the two dangers which beset all dramatic narrative; the heroines are not driven to unfold their inner selves in long egotistical speeches, and they are not so like life as to be uninteresting and to make the reader disinclined to solve the motives which actuate them. Mr James tells us sufficiently little to keep our curiosity alive, and enough to prevent our being puzzled.²⁰

19 21 March 1879, *Henry James: Letters*, Vol II, p. 220

20 *Pall Mall Gazette* 20 March 1879, quoted in *Henry James: The Contemporary Reviews*, p. 74

This is not to say that dialogue totally supplants the authorial voice in *An International Episode*. The dialogue of Lord Mark and his friend (if it can be called that) contrasts with the urbane expansiveness of the narrator who conveys in his own more spacious vocabulary the pleasure of the two Englishman in discovering the 'facilities for prolonged and reiterated immersion with which their apartment was supplied'. Having suffered the glare, both social and climatic, of New York, the young men take up an invitation to Newport and become enfolded in Mrs Westgate's welcoming social circle. The paucity of their speech contrasts amusingly with that of their hostess, which is demonstrative, as if 'making sudden confessions and concessions', although mercilessly continuous, suggesting 'a flowery mead scrupulously "done over" by a steam roller that had reduced its texture to that of a drawing-room carpet'.²¹ The effect of Mrs Westgate's discourse upon the unsyllabic Lord Lambeth is indeed rather flattening: rendered all but speechless by 'her mild merciless monotony', he is able to muster in response only a few 'discriminating motions and murmurs'.

Contrasts between American and English social discourse are the essence of this comedy of manners, but Lord Lambert and Percy Beaumont are themselves a contrast, the one outgoing and susceptible, the other cautious and, as befits his legal background, suspicious of American motives:

'My dear boy, I hope you won't begin to flirt,' said the elder man. His friend smoked acutely. 'Well, I dare say I shan't *begin*.'

... 'our friend mentioned a young lady – a sister, a sister-in-law. For God's sake keep free of her.'

'How do you mean, "free"?'

'Depend upon it she'll try to land you.'

'Oh rot!' said Lord Lambeth.

'American girls are very "cute",' the other urged.

'So much the better,' said the young man.

The two men are taken into the 'awfully jolly', largely feminine leisured society of Newport, one in which, as Mrs Westgate says, 'an American woman must buy something every day of her life', but which is also the source of innumerable agreeable impressions, of 'harmonious images':

21 This metaphorical extravagance is one of the revisions for the New York Edition.

of infinite lounging and talking and laughing and flirting and lunching and dining; of a confidence that broke down, of a freedom that pulled up, nowhere; of an idyllic ease that was somehow too ordered for a primitive social consciousness and too innocent for a developed; of occasions on which they so knew everyone and everything that they almost ached with reciprocity; of drives and rides in the late afternoon, over gleaming beaches, on long sea-roads, beneath a sky lighted up by marvellous sunsets; of tea-tables, on the return, informal, irregular, agreeable; of evenings at open windows or on the perpetual verandahs, in the summer starlight . . . it was all the book of life, of American life

The carefree relaxed Newport society is immensely appealing in contrast to the grudging attitudes and stiff manners of the women of the English aristocracy revealed later in the tale; and Lord Lambeth does indeed begin to fall for Bessie Alden, Mrs Westgate's sister.

In the character of Bessie Alden, James is almost certainly responding to American critical objections to the frivolity of Daisy Miller as a representative of the modern American girl. Bessie, educated in Boston, a feature viewed by the other characters as an awesomely intimidating characteristic, is a more serious proposition than Daisy. She has a sophisticated married sister to guide her socially and is 'not in the least a flirt'. Lord Lambeth finds her 'very clever', but sympathetic; he thinks that 'clearly also there were ways in which she might spare a fellow – could ease him; she wouldn't keep him so long on the stretch at once.' Bessie finds Lord Lambeth attractive, yet she is also a keen, if somewhat naïve, student of social customs. Like the youthful James himself, Bessie has immersed herself in English fiction. Just as she longs to read *The Morning Post* because 'there's so much about it in Thackeray', so James, breakfasting in a hotel on arrival in England as a young writer in 1869, felt:

the incomparable truth to type of the waiter, truth to history, to literature, to poetry, to Dickens, to Thackeray . . . to every connection that could help me to appropriate him and his setting, an arrangement of things hanging together with the romantic rightness that had the force of a revelation.²²

Bessie, a reader rather than an embryo writer, is not, as is her creator, consumed by the desire to 'appropriate' the English world for the purposes of art, but meeting Lord Lambeth gives her the chance

22 *Autobiography*, p. 549

to compare a real-life lord with his fictional counterparts. The device is, on her creator's part, playfully self-reflexive in that Lord Lambeth is a fictional character too.

The contrast between American and English manners is most evident when the two sisters pay a visit to England. For Bessie there is the excitement of 'coming into the great English world, where strangeness and familiarity would go hand in hand', or what James in his *Autobiography* extravagantly called 'the doom of inordinate exposure . . . in the great beheld sum of things'.²³ James is at his most satiric in his portrayal of the Duchess of Bayswater, Lord Lambeth's mother, vulgarly sizing up Bessie Alden. This was another portrayal that Mrs Hill had protested about in her review as being prejudicial to the English. James answers vigorously:

I make a couple of English ladies doing a disagreeable thing . . . and forthwith I find myself responsible for a representation of English manners! Nothing is my *last word* about anything – I am interminably supersubtle and analytic – and with the blessing of heaven, I shall live to make all sorts of representations about all sorts of things . . . And then in such a matter, the bother of being an American! Trollope, Thackeray, Dickens, even with their big authoritative talents were free to draw all sorts of unflattering English pictures, by the thousand. But if I make a single one, I am forthwith in danger of being confronted with a criminal conclusion – and sinister rumours reach me as to what I think of English society. I think more things than I can undertake to tell in forty pages of the *Cornhill*.²⁴

In spite of the protest, James revels in the publicity, egotistical about his powers, giving as good as he gets, declaring that he will 'draw plenty of pictures of disagreeable Americans, as I have done already', but the British will 'see no harm in that!' This was a charmed era in his life when all was set fair and he was robustly linking his work with the 'big authoritative talents'.

Living in the capital city of the English had toughened James, as he acknowledged in an essay: '[London] gives one a surface for which in a rough world one can never be too grateful.'²⁵ The Duchess of

23 *Autobiography*, p. 549

24 21 March 1879, *Henry James: Letters*, Vol II, pp. 221–2

25 'London' was first published in 1888 in the *Century Magazine*. It was collected in James's travel sketches, *English Hours*, in 1905. The edition quoted here is