

A CHARACTER STUDY OF DAISY MILLER AND WINTERBOURNE  
FROM HENRY JAMES' "DAISY MILLER: A STUDY" ©

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Henry James wrote his "Daisy Miller" characters the way an artist would paint his canvas, contrasting his characters with lightness and darkness. Both Daisy and Winterbourne share an independent viewpoint, but the two differ on their approach to this viewpoint. This essay will examine the relationship between the two, the minor characters that influence them, and the difference between innocence and sophistication.

*Daisy Miller and Winterbourne*

Daisy Miller is a typical American girl, unaffected by the conservativeness of European society. Although American-born, Winterbourne has lived in Europe long enough to be groomed in its customs. Daisy's first encounter with Winterbourne shows to him her mannerisms as uncultivated. Her bragging about her gentlemen friends back in New York has Winterbourne judging whether she is naïve or coquettish. By commenting to himself, "How pretty they are!", Winterbourne categorizes Daisy with other American girls. Daisy seems unaffected by European arrogance by acting and speaking impulsively to the people around her. However, Winterbourne acts on pretense, keeping his feelings to himself. He constantly analyzes Daisy's character attempting to figure her out, but Daisy is not that deep in her emotions to care. Winterbourne continually

expects Daisy to change, but she never does, which leads him wondering until the end whether she maintains her innocence.

### Minor Characters

The secondary characters in the story allow us to see the full facet of Daisy Miller and Winterbourne's relations. In part one, we observe Randolph Miller obsessing about candy, prodding his walking stick into flowerbeds and women's trains. He nonchalantly chats with Winterbourne, a stranger. Winterbourne is in the garden smoking a cigarette and drinking coffee. Their actions describe themselves instantly – Randolph as the pompous American boy and Winterbourne as the aloof American-European. Mrs. Miller and Daisy have no understanding of social class or culture but certainly want and enjoy the finer materials of wealth. Mrs. Costello and the other American-Europeans do not approve of the Millers treatment of Eugenio, their courier, as part of their family. Mrs. Costello and Mrs. Walker symbolize the old America since they still abide by European customs. Mrs. Costello's refusal to meet Daisy, because she thinks Daisy is not proper enough to be with Winterbourne, reveals the differences between old and new money. The European characters, including the American-born ones, show resentment towards the newly wealthy Americans and are not receptive to their ways.

### Innocence Vs. Sophistication

James explores how class ranks and social graces affect the life of one woman. Daisy Miller lacks the knowledge of European society customs

and her reputation suffers. The American-European social circle never considers the fact that Daisy is unaware of their rules of etiquette; they hold her to the same high regard as they do with themselves. Their standards for men differ from women. Winterbourne's dalliances with another woman are overlooked, but Daisy's flirtations with men are scrutinized. By living in Europe for so long, Winterbourne is incapable of seeing Daisy as an inexperienced young girl. He becomes enlightened of her innocence only after her death, when it is too late.

James' novella provides insight into the emerging modern American woman and America itself. Daisy Miller may have played the ingénue, but she was as fiercely independent as the country she came from. Europeans viewed America as young but ignorant, whereas Americans saw Europeans as cultured but calloused. In essence, James' "Daisy Miller" shows the repercussion of naiveté in a sophisticated and mature society.