

# The ambiguous nature of daisy millers character literature review

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



The aim of this essay is to present you with an analysis and detailed description of Daisy Miller's character. Who is Daisy Miller? She is a young girl, holding the leading character in the short story 'Daisy Miller' written by Henry James. Henry James, though born in America, has been considered more of an English rather than an American writer who has gained wide credibility within the borders of the literary community. He is a writer prominent for his writing style which depicts details of his era, criticizes indirectly the faults of the society and social structure of his time and raises questions considering the validity of the time's principles. Henry James, born on 15 April 1843, came from a well-mannered family belonging to the so called upper social class of his time. Focusing on the importance of Education he came to realize at an early point of his life that he wanted to become a writer. It was in 1876 that Henry James left America and moved to Europe. After spending a few months in Paris, he eventually went and established in London in 1876. His novella 'Daisy Miller' is widely acknowledged as one of James' masterpieces having gained literature readers' attention during the years. It is the writing style of Henry James but mainly the context of his story itself that has drawn so much attention. The core of the story's plot is as simple as that. A relationship based on flirt developed between a handsome young man and a pretty young girl. But it is the real meaning and interpretations of this relationship which give this story the power of a must -reading. Henry James uses this relationship so that he can depict the ambiguous nature of human characters, their everlasting, commonly shared characteristics and wonders. Marcus Tullio Cicero once said as part of his effort to depict the significance of reading in one's life,

that ' a room without books is like a body without a soul'. Paraphrasing this I would say that Daisy Miller is the character whose attitude and behavior generates such discussion and reflections on human nature and behavior that if not reading it, is like depriving your soul from its extra breath.

The story when written was received by various reactions. According to the journalist, editor, and critic William Dean Howells, English readers were reportedly split between the fans and warm supporters of Daisy Miller who stood against the passionate enemies of the story's main female character. The main feeling created when reading the story is a feeling of discomfort. Is Daisy Miller indeed as innocent as first presented? Or could this innocence be a veil under which the real audacious character of Daisy lies? Interpreting characters as depicted through the lines of a story is not clearly objective when the writer depicts a character whose main trait is ambiguity. This essay will focus on highlighting these ambiguous traits of Miss Daisy Miller who generate heated discussions and conflicts among readers. Their presentation is based upon the story itself keeping an objective look in their interpretation.

### **Daisy –Millerites vs. Anti-Daisy-Millerites**

As already said, the plot of the short story is that of a common flirtatious relationship developed between two people of young age. The relationship ends a dead-end since no happy ending is involved and the readers try to find what it was that the writer wanted to tell them. Daisy Miller is a young girl from New York who is in Vevey, Switzerland with her spoiled brother and mother. It is in the garden of the hotel she is staying, on an afternoon that her 9 years old brother, Radolf, meets Mr. Winterbourne, a young man at

twenty seven who is there to visit his aunt. While Mr. Winterbourne is admiring the garden's beauty he meets Radolf and while talking over sugar and American candies, the young lady comes looking for her brother. It is the first time Daisy Miller appears and it is obvious that she is not just any girl. ' In Geneva, as he had been perfectly aware, a young man was not at liberty to speak to a young unmarried lady except under certain rarely occurring conditions; but here at Vevey, what conditions could be better than these?— a pretty American girl coming and standing in front of you in a garden.' (1. 27). James' writing style depicts all the liveliness characterizing Daisy Miller but also highlights the existing innocence of Daisy Miller and Mr. Winterbourne whose meeting in this garden reminds the meeting of Adam with Eve in the garden of Eden. This quote of the first part prepares the readers for the hypocrisy which they are about to witness in the forthcoming plot on part of Mr. Winterbourne. He who in the garden sees innocence in Daisy Miller is the same person who will get carried away by people's criticism against the young lady. Nevertheless their first meeting is covered in an air of innocence and joy. The dress of vivid color which Daisy is wearing makes her look so pretty to Mr. Winterbourne. Through the development of the plot we see the flirt between those two which is equally enjoyed on behalf of both. Daisy is a girl showing unusual, not common courage in her interpersonal relationships. She is not what anyone would call a typical girl of her social class. She addresses the young man with no hesitation. On the contrary she could be considered to show extreme audacity. This is the main contradictory combination of her personality. They share a walk all alone to a castle nearby, an event also causing shock to the people of their era. It is not

socially acceptable for a young girl to extend herself to social criticism by letting herself alone accompanied by a young man. Daisy and Mr. Winterbourne give a promise to meet again in Rome in the following winter. The second part of the story finds Mr. Winterbourne in Rome listening to all kinds of comments regarding Miss Daisy Miller. She is alleged to go out with a number of Italian men enjoying their companionship. His aunt who had denied to meet her in Switzerland because she was not a typical example of the behavior expected of people of their class - noticeable that she had spent too much time with their servant - is once more outrageous as far as Daisy's Miller behavior is concerned. Mr. Winterbourne's aunt, Mrs. Costello had expressed her dislike towards Daisy Miller since the first time her nephew talked to her about his acquaintance at the hotel with the young girl. " But don't they all do these things - the young girls in America? Winterbourne inquired. Mrs. Costello stared a moment. ' I should like to see my granddaughters do them!' she declared grimly. This seemed to throw some light upon the matter for Winterbourne remembered to have heard that his pretty cousins in New York were ' tremendous flirts'. " (1. 139-40). This is another part in which readers see the hypocrisy on which James really wants to focus. Mrs. Costello seems to be unable to stand Daisy Miller's behavior even though her granddaughters are known as girls who love flirting. So the question on Miller's social fault in flirting rises. Is it really fault? Or this is what Mrs. Costello wants her nephew to believe? It is noticeable that the effect of Mrs. Costello's criticism on Mr. Winterbourne is defining of his later behavior and attitude towards Daisy. But even at the beginning of their acquaintance, Mr. Winterbourne who was attracted to her

personality, finds nothing really good to defend her to his aunt. All he says is " she is wonderfully pretty, and, in short, she is very nice" (1. 124). It seems that the young man has a problem. He cannot really define the quality of Miss Daisy's character. It is this weirdness of her character, her differentiation that causes this ambiguity to readers.

The amazing element of Daisy Miller is that even at the time she dies after catching fever (malaria) in the Colosseum, she lives Mr. Winterbourne puzzled and at a greater shock. He himself admits one year later when in Switzerland again to his aunt, Mrs. Costello, that he had misjudged Daisy Miller. ' She sent me a message before her death which I didn't understand at the time; but I have understood it since. She would have appreciated one's esteem.' " Is that a modest way," asked Mrs. Costello, " of saying that she would have reciprocated one's affection?"

Winterbourne offered no answer to this question; but he presently said, " You were right in that remark that you made last summer. I was booked to make a mistake. I have lived too long in foreign parts."

Daisy Miller gives the impression of a maze. Finding the way out to what she really feels is quite demanding and difficult. This is because Daisy is a young girl not compromised with the typical behaviors of her time. She is a young spirit who has denied hypocrisy and irony and has adopted immediate reactions in her relationships. She seems to leave no room for social, economic, language barriers to prevent her from getting to know people. Her nickname, Daisy, because her real name is Anne, depicts the real tendency of her character. Like the daisy flower which troubles people - she loves me, she loves me not - and keeps them in agony, Daisy is a girl that can leave no

one unaffected. Everyone who gets to know her cannot stay away from her. Daisy reminds readers of what was once said regarding people's attention. It is better to draw people's attention even by creating enemies, rather than staying in the darkness of being unknown. Daisy provokes feelings, makes the social circles within she lives to be awoken at someone acting different than expected.

Henry James mastery is obvious since this is a short story in which readers do not know whether they are to love or hate the difference of the heroine. And this is because Henry James builds the personality of Daisy Miller upon his need to stand with sarcasm and criticism against all this hypocrisy of his time, all the materialistic values which tended to cover the real values of life. Henry James appears to have written this story using Daisy Miller as the scape-goat. All he wants to do is talk to his readers' hearts. He wants to bring his readers face to face with their own inner controversies, their real oppressed dilemmas, their well-hidden, in the name of what they are expected to do, dreams. Daisy Miller is a girl who loves the beauty of life. That is the reason why her permanent characteristic is 'pretty'. She is a pretty girl who loves to enjoy life not at the cost of the others but not paying any attention to any kind of social restrictions. She seems to love freedom. She seems to trust people's good intentions and well-mannered behaviors. She is actually betrayed by her own trust. How can anyone trust others when all these others are not confident on who they are? Mr. Winterbourne is a man who does not seem to have defined who he is and what he wants. That is the reason why he wanders all around Europe. On the other hand, Daisy's trip is not a trip without a meaning. Daisy's trip is trip to enjoy Europe's

beauty and have some fun. It is obvious that Henry James wants to say something about this tendency of people of his time to stick to social criticism without looking deeper in their souls. Mr. Winterbourne seems to experience his admittance to making this mistake of falling into the trap of misinterpreting people based on others' comments and ways of perceiving situations. He admits to it at the end of the story.

Daisy Miller is a painting in which Henry James draws and paints the portrait of his society.

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