

English 202 in Italy

[Official course title: English 280-2]
World Literature I
Dr. Gavin Richardson

Text 5:

Henry James, Daisy Miller

EDITION: Supplied.

READING JOURNAL:

In a separate document, write 3-5 thoughtful sentences in response to each of these reading journal prompts:

1. Toward the end of part one, as Winterbourne and Daisy are visiting the Château de Chillon, Daisy is disappointed to learn that Winterbourne will soon return to Geneva and not accompany her further, though he does pledge to visit her later that winter in Rome. Do Daisy's words and actions here indicate a real affection for Winterbourne, or do they seem empty flirtation?
2. On pp. 58-59 and elsewhere, Mrs. Costello and Winterbourne discuss Daisy's character and behavior, essentially engaging the nature/nurture debate. Mrs. Costello believes Daisy to be morally flawed by nature; Winterbourne is inclined to see Daisy as innocent and uneducated, and therefore not fully aware of how scandalous her behavior might seem. If you had to choose one perspective, whose would you support and why?
3. A little over halfway through the novella, Daisy Miller is walking along a Roman thoroughfare accompanied by both Winterbourne and her new Italian admirer, Mr. Giovanelli. Mrs. Costello rides up in a victoria (an elegant carriage) and is scandalized to see a young woman carrying on with two men and demands that she enter her carriage. Daisy declines. This scene will later come to be seen as a turning point in the novella, both for Daisy and for Winterbourne. Parse the scene here. What does it say about motives and values of Winterbourne, Daisy, Mrs. Walker, and Mr. Giovanelli?
4. So much of our attention is taken up with Daisy Miller that we might have neglected the character of Winterbourne. Do you think he was ever in love with Daisy? Why didn't he do more to show his affection? How does the final paragraph affect our estimation of him?
5. In contrast to romantic or ideal narratives of the nineteenth century, Henry James believed that literature should reflect life as it is. In this respect he is akin to Thomas Mann and his realist style. (It may be no coincidence that Henry's brother, William James, was a pioneer in the emerging field of psychology.) Although much of this novella is quite mannered, in what ways might we glimpse Henry James's interest in representing life as it is, as opposed to life idealized?

QUIZ STUDY SHEET: You will have a 10-question matching quiz based on the information found on the study sheet below.

Henry James, *Daisy Miller*

SYNOPSIS: The plotline of this short novella is quite simple; it describes Winterbourne's fragmented courtship of the beautiful and charismatic American girl Daisy Miller. A main focus of the novella concerns the manners and customs of courtship in 1878, when the novella was written. Today we would call Daisy a flirt, but her flirtatiousness—mild by modern standards—would be regarded as scandalous by nineteenth-century standards. Although both main characters are American, the action of this novella is set in Switzerland and Italy, culminating in Rome. While in Rome, Daisy spends more and more time with an Italian man named Mr. Giovanelli, and we are prompted to speculate on Mr. Giovanelli's intentions and whether Winterbourne will save Daisy from them, or if he can save Daisy from herself.

MAJOR CHARACTERS:

Frederick Winterbourne: The male protagonist, an American man traveling through Europe who develops a fascination and frustrated romance with Daisy Miller.

Daisy Miller: (aka Annie P. Miller), the independent and flirtatious female protagonist of the novella, born in New York and vacationing in Europe. Her family is quite wealthy, though perhaps of the *nouveau riche* and thus not particularly refined. She seems to be traveling through Europe as a means of gaining such refinement. Her businessman father remains back in Schenectady, New York, while her mother ("Mrs. Miller") and brother accompany her.

Mrs. Miller: Daisy's mother, who doesn't quite know what to do with her headstrong daughter, and thus doesn't make much of an effort to curb her behavior.

Randolph Miller: Daisy Miller's high-spirited and somewhat ill-behaved little brother.

Eugenio: The Millers' courier, a kind of constant travel agent who accompanies them on their European tour.

Mrs. Costello: Winterbourne's wealthy widowed aunt, who, being of an older generation, is especially judgmental of Daisy Miller and her family.

Mr. Giovanelli: A young Italian suitor of Daisy Miller, with whom Daisy spends an increasing amount of solitary time while in Rome, to the shock of polite society and the frustration of Winterbourne.

OTHER TERMS AND CONCEPTS:

Vevey: A city in Switzerland where the action of the novella opens.

Château de Chillon (Chillon Castle): Now a Swiss tourist attraction, the Château de Chillon “is an island castle located on Lake Geneva...Chillon is amongst the most visited castles in Switzerland and Europe.” Winterbourne and Daisy take a trip there soon after meeting.

Pincio: The Pincian Hill, a spot offering a picturesque view of certain regions of Rome.

Roman fever: Another term for malaria. Although it’s a famous and safe tourist attraction in a busy modern thoroughfare today, the Roman Colosseum in the nineteenth century was an uncared for ruin in a swampy area in Rome that was prone to malaria outbreaks; the word *malaria* even comes from the Italian *mala aria*, or “bad air.”

FRENCH TERMS: (You will not be examined on these, but they may be helpful.)

Tout bonnement: “simply, completely, flatly”

Comme il faut: “correct in behavior or etiquette.”

Oubliette: “a secret dungeon with access only through a trapdoor in its ceiling.”

Persiflage: “light and slightly contemptuous mockery or banter.

Elle s’affiche: “she’s showing off”



The Colosseum, in the 19th century and today.