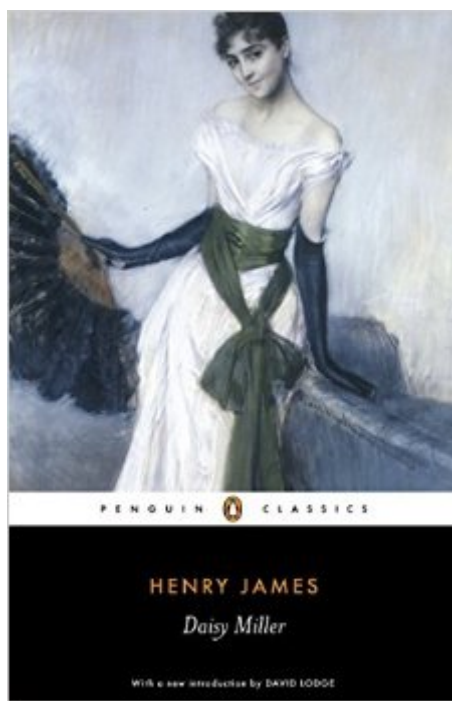


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Daisy Miller (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Travelling in Europe with her family, Daisy Miller, an exquisitely beautiful young American woman, presents her fellow-countryman Winterbourne with a dilemma he cannot resolve. Is she deliberately flouting social convention in the outspoken way she talks and acts, or is she simply ignorant of those conventions? When she strikes up an intimate friendship with an urbane young Italian, her flat refusal to observe the codes of respectable behaviour leave her perilously exposed. In Daisy Miller James created his first great portrait of the enigmatic and dangerously independent American woman, a figure who would come to dominate his later masterpieces. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

One of Henry James's earliest novellas, *Daisy Miller* (1878) follows the activities of a wealthy, and brashly confident, young American woman as she audaciously challenges European society in Vevey, Switzerland, and in Rome, having fun, doing what pleases her, and leaving staid European society gasping in her wake. Daisy Miller, whose father is in the US and whose mother is her ineffectual "chaperone," is a free spirit in a society bound by unstated but rigid "rules," determined to

do whatever she wants, whenever she wants, with whomever she chooses. Frederick Winterbourne, an expatriate who has spent most of his life in Geneva, is attracted to Daisy, but his bonds with his stuffy aunt, Mrs. Cosgrove, and her friend, Mrs. Walker, both of whom govern ex-patriot society in Europe, leave him ill-equipped to deal with Daisy's flouting of society's conventions. When she is obviously attracted to Mr. Giovanelli, a singer/musician of no social standing, and when she is seen with him publicly in places that a "nice" girl would not grace at night, her reputation is threatened, and anyone associated with her is tainted. Winterbourne is uncertain how to protect her, while, not incidentally, protecting his own reputation. Developing his most famous theme, James considers the conflicts between American and European values and the naivete of the Americans and their spontaneity as it contrasts with the old world formality of the Europeans. Daisy, who is often foolishly naïve, is also seen as brash and ego-centric, a young woman whose destiny cannot be avoided (or even predicted) because of the strength of her own, often wrong, willfulness.

Originally published in book form in 1879, "Daisy Miller" brought Henry James his first widespread commercial and critical success. The young Daisy Miller, an American on holiday with her mother in Europe, is one of James' most vivid and tragic characters. Daisy's friendship with an American gentleman, Mr Winterbourne, and her subsequent infatuation with a passionate but impoverished Italian, bring to life the great Jamesian themes of Americans abroad, innocence versus experience, and the grip of fate. This story emphasizes an upper-class expatriate's efforts to understand and deal with a charming, independent but uninformed heroine who poses a strong challenge to conservative manners. In the end the story's emphasis is not so much on social portraiture as on the tragic effects of class distinction. When Winterbourne learns that Daisy was after all completely "innocent", he understands his serious mistake in going along with the other Americans who blackball her. Like the ancient Roman spectators in the Colosseum, Winterbourne has participated in a human sacrifice. While Winterbourne worries over the morality of the young American woman, it is his own behaviour that constitutes immorality. He is committing an unpardonable sin in his overly intellectualized searching out of the moral fault of another. As in other tales, James makes direct contact with the mythic materials of Judeo-Christian culture equally to gloss his sense of evil and measure its fate in the modern world. The narrative in "Daisy" can be understood as a commentary on a culture in which gossip has replaced the gospel.

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