

# The Study of the International Theme from Winterbourne

YU Xue-ping

University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China

Henry James is a writer who is renowned for the international theme in his works, which bridges the New World and the Old World. *Daisy Miller* is one of the novels in James' early stage of literary career, which won Henry James popularity in the western world. The novel portrays the subtle relationship between Daisy and Winterbourne. The changing attitude of Winterbourne to Daisy shows Winterbourne's changing reflection to the two cultures. From a young American who has been so assimilated into old European civilization to an emancipated American, Winterbourne finally chose to live in Europe and ignored secular prejudice. The change not only shows he tried to merge the two cultures also Henry James' idea of cultural integration.

*Keywords:* *Daisy Miller*, Winterbourne, the international theme

## Introduction

Henry James is a famous writer who occupies a crucial position in literature field. He came from an upper-class intellectual family in New York, and grew up with a good education. After graduating from college, he lived in Europe for a long time and observed the upper-class life in America and Europe at the end of the 19th century in great detail. So, he realized the conflict between the two different cultures and value systems deeply. Europe is old and conservative Europe while America is young and simple. He wrote it as one of the key themes of his many works.

*Daisy Miller* is one of the novels in James early stage of literary career which won Henry James popularity in the Western world. It tells us a story about an innocent girl Daisy Miller who is very fascinated with Europe. When she takes her journey to Switzerland, Daisy meets the hero Winterbourne in Vevey. Winterbourne is an American who has been dwelling in Switzerland for a long time and he is deeply influenced by the European culture. Both of the two young people have good impressions on each other, but Winterbourne feels confused toward Daisy out of her American manners and behaviors. Although he is attracted by her beauty, he is inclined to think Daisy as a pretty American flirt. Because of prejudice and misunderstanding, they have a bad ending.

After the publishment of *Daisy Miller*, it sparked endless discussions at home and abroad. Scholars have explored the work from different perspectives such as the international theme, writing skills, feminism and so on. As to the international theme, domestic scholar Tian Junwu figures that studying the European travel narration in Henry James' novel has a great significance to realize the essence of the international theme (Tian, 2018). In terms of the writing skills, the particular one used in Henry's works is the central consciousness, and *Daisy Miller*

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YU Xue-ping, postgraduate, College of Foreign Language, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China.

is not an exception. A number of scholars have carried out fruitful studies by using this unique narrative technique in *Daisy Miller*. The trick of Daisy is that the narration places itself close by Winterbourne's mind, making his confusion seem like complications ascribable to Daisy's character (Freedman, 2000). Li Mingzheng deemed this work abandons the traditional omniscient perspective and adopts the "consciousness center" character or "inner focus" approach to bring readers a new experience. On this basis, the international theme is also deepened (Li, 2015). The feminism is a popular study perspective for domestic scholar. For example, Tian Juan analyzed the construction of feminism in Henry's works. She deemed it reflects the feminist consciousness of how American women reposit themselves, find their own development and criticize the hypocritical old European rituals (Tian, 2012). Maybe because the title of the novel is *Daisy Miller*, the name of the female protagonist, quite a few scholars have paid more attention to Daisy. But the male protagonist Winterbourne is also a good character to study, this paper would study the international theme from Winterbourne's perspective.

### Europeanized Winterbourne

Winterbourne, who grew up in Europe, appears at the beginning of the novel as a young American who has been so assimilated into old European civilization and social morality that even Daisy, the female protagonist, thinks he doesn't look like a "real American". When Daisy said she has always been a friend of gentlemen. Winterbourne was surprised because he had never heard a girl dare to reveal her heart in such a way. He understood, of course, that on special occasions, there were people who tried to put on airs to show their debauchery, but other than this situation, what she had just said was unheard of. He even considered if should he follow the customs of Geneva to accuse Miss Daisy Miller of misbehavior and blame her for the possibility of impropriety. Due to staying in Geneva for too long, the rise and fall of the American tones is even unpleasant to his ear. In his opinion, Daisy is a beautiful American flirt and he wants to have an affair with her. So, he promised to introduce Daisy to his aunt. However, his aunt rejected him because she distains any common families also the rumors about Daisy. Winterbourne interestedly listened the rumors about Daisy. And when Mrs. Costello pointed out that though he said Daisy is pure, he doesn't think so in mind, he didn't deny his aunt. Why does he have such reaction? Because he has been europeanized through long staying in Europe. He now thinks in Europe way.

At the same time, from the direct speech of Winterbourn, we can also find he has been europeanized. When Winterbourn discussed with Daisy about their trip to Chillon. He said "I should think it might be arranged." Simultaneously, Daisy suggested him stay with Randolph. After a moment hesitation, he replied Daisy with such a sentence "I should much rather go to Chillon with you." The word "should" in the first sentence of Winterbourne is a formal word usually used in a meeting or in some important occasions. "I should like" and "I should much rather" seem more like an order rather than an invitation. The word "should" used by Winterbourne on this romantic occasion seems a little uncomfortable and to some degree ridiculous. Winterbourne is such a stiff person. Even Daisy considers him so stiff when she invites him to dance with her. And here the using of the word "should" twice strengthens Winterbourne's stiffness towards others. In the whole novel the word "should" appears many times in Winterbourne's speeches. In fact, Winterbourn is only 27 years old, but the way he speaks is just like an old man. Why? Because in Europe, speaking in this way is polite. Winterbourne stay in Europe so long, he has been europeanized, so he has such character and speaking style.

### **Confused Winterbourne**

However, since met this innocent American girl, Winterbourne has come to examine the European identity he has become accustomed to. In the course of his relationship with Daisy, he is often confused and conflicted by her unpredictability and erratic nature. On the one hand, he constantly reminds himself of the moral rules of society and considers Daisy's behavior to be out of the ordinary. On the other hand, he is fascinated by Daisy's cultural traits that are inherent in his bones and cannot bear to listen to the negative comments others make about her.

The confusion of Winterbourne is showed explicitly in chapter 3—the plot that Mrs. Walker and Winterbourne talk about the rumors that Daisy is too intimate with Giovanelli. Mrs. Walker asks Daisy not to go out alone with Giovanelli because it is improper for an unmarried woman to get too close with a man in Europe. However, Daisy doesn't do as Mrs. Walker says. As a result, Mrs. Walker is too angry to end up her relationship with Daisy. When hearing this, Winterbourne explains to Mrs. Walker about Daisy's behaviors. Winterbourne replied to Mrs. Walker that they have lived too long at Geneva. Winterbourne is trying to speak for Daisy that she does not do anything wrong. He maintains the idea that their values have been greatly influenced by European values because they have lived in Geneva for long. It is the European values that do not allow this kind of behavior. May be in America, this kind of behavior is considered as common ones. And even if Mrs. Walker tries to persuade Winterbourne into ceasing his relationships with her, Winterbourne refuses to do that. We can find from here that Winterbourne has come into realization that they have lived too long at Geneva, and they have been europeanized. Besides, he spoke directly that he likes her extremely. The word "extremely" not only shows Winterbourne's strong love toward Daisy also implies that even though many people talk about Daisy's behavior he will still love her. This shows Winterbourne tried to break down the secular prejudice in Europe bravely. Unluckily, he is coward finally and left with Mrs. Walker. At the same time, to Winterbourne, visiting the castle with Daisy seems like a "transgression" and he acknowledges her vulgarity and ill breeding. When he sees Daisy alone in the Colosseum late at night with her male friends, with no regard for her ladylike appearance, his opinion of Daisy rises to the level of criticism, saying that she "does not deserve the respect of a gentleman" and "deserves to be scorned". In sum, Winterbourne's unpredictable relationship with Daisy and his evaluation of her is a reflection of his wandering between American culture and European civilization. His process of observing and evaluating Daisy is actually a process of reflecting on himself, examining his inner self and reconstructing his identity.

### **Emancipated Winterbourne**

The story develops to its climax when Daisy catches Roman fever and dies of it. Winterbourne realized he has misunderstood Daisy finally. And when Giovanelli evaluated Daisy as the purest girl, Winterbourne's heart immediately tormented with anger. He chided him that "why are you taking her to that fatal place?" Here, Winterbourne is going to be emancipated, he dared to question Giovanelli at the funeral though it's improper to be so rude in public in Europe. Maybe because of pity or disappointment to the Europe culture, Winterbourne left Rome without delay, almost immediately. But, in the following summer, he went to Vevey to see his aunt, Mrs. Costello. During his time in Vevey, Winterbourne often thought of Daisy Miller and remembered her inscrutable behavior. One day he talked with his aunt about her—the girl he had misunderstood, fulling of pity and ultimate

unsettlement. Facing his aunt's evaluation to Daisy, he only replied with the prediction—if he lives too long abroad, it would be a disaster, has come to true. Nevertheless, he still went back to Geneva. As soon as he returned to Geneva, rumors spread that he was indulging in “study”, implying that he was interested in an exotic woman with an exquisite mind. Here, Winterbourne is completely emancipated, he can ignore the rumors and peacefully confront the secular prejudice.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the book portrays the subtle relationship of Daisy and Winterbourne. Because of the conflict between the old Europe and the young America, the two have a bad ending. The changing attitude of Winterbourne to Daisy shows Winterbourne's changing reflection to the two cultures. Winterbourne changes from a young American who has been so assimilated into old European civilization and social morality to an emancipated American. He finally chose to live in Europe and ignored secular prejudice, which shows he tried to merge the two cultures. Here, it might also show Henry James' idea of cultural integration. When faced with a clash of cultures and a crisis of identity, Americans should learn to base on their own moral spirit and liberal vitality, and learn to draw on the aesthetics and experiences of European culture for their own use. So that they will not be lost in another civilization, swallowed up or destroyed by it.

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