

Daisy Miller and the American Solitude

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Introduction

Henry James's *Daisy Miller* was published in 1878 and had a favorable reception on the whole, while it provoked a part of the Americans' antipathy because of the misconduct of their compatriot heroine who seemed to represent American girls at that time. So far it has been discussed that the heroine, Daisy, was described as a flat character unlike other James's heroines who had rich inner world in their selves, and that the story itself was simply constructed to bring about the difference between American and European sense of culture. James himself wrote about Daisy's character in his *The Art of the Novels* as follows:

It qualified itself in that publication and afterwards as "a Study"; for reasons which I confess I fail to recapture unless they may have taken account simply of a certain flatness in my poor little heroine's literal denomination. Flatness indeed, one must have felt, was the very sum of her story; so that perhaps after all the attached epithet was meant but as a deprecation, addressed to the reader, of any great critical hope of stirring scenes.(268-9)

However, Daisy is not simply a flat character; on the contrary, she plays a pretty symbolic role in this novel. Instead of her own soliloquy about her inner feelings, the people who watch her, including young Winterbourne, continue to interpret the meanings of her deed. They wonder if she is innocent or audacious, uncultivated or vulgar. Their wonder speaks for Daisy's rich inner world in which contradictory elements construct complex human nature. That is, she is not a flat character but has a certain human complexity.

The people around Daisy including Winterbourne always talk about the meaning of Daisy's behavior. She enjoys what she wants freely and does not take notice of people's attention. Although Mrs. Costello, Winterbourne's aunt,

blames Daisy as a “common” girl, Winterbourne wishes to believe her to be an “innocent” American girl who is very attractive to him. It is certain that he once thinks Daisy as an audacious girl whom a gentleman need not respect; however, he concludes that she is completely innocent. Then if James gave Daisy a symbolic role in this novel and she has sensitive inner world, what her innocence means is not her characteristic simplicity but an aspect of contemporary American sense of values. Blamed and left out of the European society, Daisy experiences solitude even if she never talks about her situation. However, it is remarkable that Daisy is not the only one who experiences solitude in this story.

Thus, in this essay, I would like to consider the relation between what Daisy represents and what the American solitude means in this novel, through analyzing every character’s solitude and sense of American culture.

I Searching for the Norm of the American Manners

In this novel we can see Daisy is a heroine as much as Winterbourne is a hero whose inner conflicts are shown. Although Winterbourne was born in America, he is much Europeanized. As such a Europeanized American he watches Daisy as the embodiment of American manners and is puzzled because of her behavior. His inner conflicts bring out the question what the American sense of values is. That is, Winterbourne as well as the readers always watches and analyzes “America” though the scene of this novel is set in Europe. The remarkable point is that, in the European scene, what is searched is the meaning of America. What Winterbourne talks with Randolph praising America at the beginning of this story has symbolic meanings.

“... American candy’s the best candy.”

“And are American little boys the best little boys?” asked Winterbourne.

“I don’t know. I’m an American boy,” said the child.

“I see you are one of the best!” laughed Winterbourne.

“Are you an American man?” pursued this vivacious infant. And then, on Winterbourne’s affirmative reply—“American men are the best,” he declared.(5)¹

Winterbourne looked along the path and saw a beautiful young lady

advancing. "American girls are the best girls," he said, cheerfully, to his young companion.(5)

Here, they admire things American. Winterbourne, Randolph and Daisy construct a kind of bond as Americans. The storyteller describes these three persons as "compatriots" who praise America in a foreign country. When Winterbourne tries to understand Daisy, he wants to admire American sense of values, which he tends to forget. While he criticizes Daisy, he wonders how he should understand and respect her way of life. Firstly, he cannot sense how to associate with Daisy by a frank "American-like" way. Secondly, he does not know to what extent he must esteem Daisy's unrestrained behavior. After his long stay in Geneva, he wonders how informal he may become in Vevey when he associates with young ladies. He always worries about how other people around him think of his manner. Thus, it is "his" manner that he is interested in best. When he knows Daisy, however, his attention is completely drawn to her. He becomes to criticize her manner instead of worrying about his own deeds. Therefore, the process of his becoming absorbed in criticizing Daisy brings out his loss of introspection about his own behavior.

To probe Winterbourne's anxiety about a "norm," I'd like to search his association with Daisy who confuses his norm about American girls. When he meets Daisy for the first time, he thinks that she is a girl "of a want of finish"(7) though she is very pretty. When Daisy chats with him without any hesitation, he judges her that "[b] ut this young girl was not a coquette in that sense, she was very unsophisticated; she was only a pretty American flirt."(10) In this way, the less he worries about his own manner, the more he criticizes Daisy and looks down on her though he never dislikes her. When his aunt, Mrs. Costello, calls Daisy as "common," "a Comanche savage"(13) and "vulgar,"(25) he speaks for her saying that she is "uncultivated"(14) and "too innocent."(15) While he associates with Daisy, he concludes as follows: "'Common' she was, as Mrs. Costello had pronounced her; yet it was a wonder to Winterbourne that, with her commonness, she had a singularly delicate grace."(17) In this way, he gains a kind of "norm" about American girls' manner; however, a lot of meanings of Daisy's deeds remain mystery for Winterbourne. So Winterbourne's confidence for this norm is always wavering. Daisy remains "an extraordinary mixture of innocent and

crudity.”(24)

However severely Mrs. Costello and Mrs. Walker criticize Daisy, Winterbourne never changes his mind to think Daisy as a pretty American girl and is attracted by her. That is, even if Daisy is crude, he fundamentally likes her frankness. It can be said that Winterbourne's will to understand Daisy has the root in his affection for her. However, when he knows an intimate friendship between Daisy and Giovanelli, his impression on Daisy becomes to change. That is, however rationally he tries to judge things, his jealousy deprives him of affectionate feelings and makes him criticize Daisy. He becomes to conceive more severe norm for the manner of American girls. Like Mrs. Costello and Mrs. Walker, fastidious middle-aged women, Winterbourne observes Daisy and Giovanelli. Of course, Winterbourne does not like Giovanelli who approaches Daisy and judges that he is not a “gentleman” at all in spite of his appearance. For Winterbourne, he and Giovanelli who friendly walks with Daisy are completely different kinds of men, though he is also attracted by Daisy and went with her to Chillon once. Taking a pride in his own value as a gentleman, Winterbourne is irritated by Daisy's not having an eye to judge gentlemen. Here, we must clear what the norm of a “gentleman” is. Winterbourne himself thinks he can judge a gentleman by instinct. Who shares the norm of a gentleman as such as a self-evident concept? Daisy simply enjoys the time with Giovanelli who is gentle to her. And her mother never stops Daisy from associating with Giovanelli. It is Mrs. Costello and Mrs. Walker who criticize Daisy's family and regard Giovanelli as a mean and common man. In this time, Winterbourne, who tried to understand Daisy's innocence once, has the same sense of values and norm with them. In this norm, even if Winterbourne and Giovanelli love Daisy the same, they are quite different kind of men. It is, of course, Winterbourne who is a gentleman in the norm. Viewed objectively, when Giovanelli walks with Daisy freely without being concerned over her fame, his careless deed can be called not to be gentleman-like. But, actually, whatever Giovanelli does, he is not and cannot be a gentleman at first glance for Winterbourne. Daisy cares neither Winterbourne's pride nor the norm as such, so that he feels solitude. Although both Winterbourne and Daisy are compatriot Americans, they must feel solitude because of Winterbourne's pride in the European manners. Winterbourne's adherence to

the norm of a gentleman is rooted in the European sense of values that people enjoy their privileged status by creating classes and discrimination in the society. People's adherence to a privileged class excludes American manners and brings about Daisy's solitude. Although Winterbourne once tries to understand Daisy and her American manners, he firmly abides by the norm, which is different from the American manners, and his Americanism disappears at last.

Winterbourne judges Daisy who never stops associating with Giovanelli to be a frivolous person and thinks that "[s]he was a young lady whom a gentleman need no longer be at pains to respect."(46) So when Daisy asks Winterbourne to guess whether she is engaged or not, he replies, "I believe that it makes very little difference whether you are engaged or not!"(47) At this moment, Daisy's direct feelings are never described; however, the author's description about her "eyes" clearly suggests her injured feelings as follows:

He [Winterbourne] felt the young girl's pretty eyes fixed upon him through the thick gloom of the archway.(47)

Actually she is shocked by the change of Winterbourne who appears indifferent to her. Thus she replies to Winterbourne who advises her to take pills for malaria, "I don't care ... whether I have Roman fever or not!"(48) In her answer, her disappointed solitude that she feels herself meaningless after losing Winterbourne's attention is shown. Different from Winterbourne who always cares the norm of manners, Daisy has acted freely without paying attention to public eyes. However, she experiences solitude and fear of not being understood by others for the first time. Her fear symbolizes contemporary American weakness and solitude when the one's sense of value as an American is not favorably evaluated by the European people at that time. Whatever rich Americans, like Daisy's family, do or regard Europe as their "frontier" to buy things, they are thoroughly regional barbarians for the Europeans. According to Jun Furuya, America was originally a frontier for Europe which was the center of the world and continued to be the "growth point" of Europe. When the Americans who had economic power aggressively tried to regard Europe as their frontier on the contrary, the Europeans never admitted their power. The conflict between the Americans and the Europeans, who regard each other as their frontier, brings out the existence of their own manners, which are never mutually understood. In Daisy's solitude,

a claim of American identity, which is too strong to abide in the norm of the manners set by Winterbourne, is shown though the Americans search for mutual understandings with the Europeans. After all, Winterbourne who remains to hold the European sense of values cannot understand Daisy's manners, which represent inevitable American solitude as well as its originality.

II American Innocence or Audacity

What Winterbourne and other Europeanized Americans wonder is whether Daisy who behaves as she pleases is innocent or audacious. There is no detailed description about Daisy's inner feelings and sensibility, so that her image as just a simple and pretty American girl is emphasized. Her impression as such on others brings out the contrast between Europe with complex manners and American simplicity. The problem how the European people respond to the American innocence in this novel is worth arguing. It can be considered that the different sense of innocence between Europe and America also causes American solitude. In this story, the people in Europe regard American simplicity as ignorant barbarians' character or criticize Americans as moral corrupter. Anyway in Europe, American innocence or simplicity cannot be understood and becomes a factor of American solitude. Indeed being "innocent" is not evil human attribute in Europe at all; however, such "innocent" Americans who never seem to respect European manners are always disliked and excluded by the Europeans. Even if Daisy is truly innocent, her attribute as such only shows lack of intelligence as weakness for Winterbourne.

When Daisy keeps her way of manners in Europe ignoring the people's criticism, she embodies reckless but fresh American power. It can be considered that what Daisy embodies are not the Americans as descendants from Europe but as adventurous people who regard Europe as their "frontier." Actually when this novel was published, the people in America feel indignant at Daisy who disgraces American images. Philip Rahv also points out as follows: "It should be recalled that originally the story of Daisy Miller was considered by a good many patriots to be a disloyal criticism of American manners and an outrage on American girlhood."(442) However the people in America dislikes Daisy to be a specimen

of American girls, she certainly represents a kind of American power which leads the material rise of the modern American civilization. Thus American innocence can be a prominent power which the people in Europe feel a menace to be excluded.

Indeed Daisy's innocence drives her into solitude, but it also moves Winterbourne to understand her after her death. When Daisy earnestly leaves a message that she is not engaged to Giovanelli, Winterbourne regrets the lack of his imagination very much. In spite of her appearance, she was a girl who reserves her real feelings. It is not until Winterbourne loses her that he understands her character without prejudice rooted from his jealousy over Giovanelli. He says, "She was the most beautiful young lady I ever saw, and the most amiable... The most innocent!"(49) Here, the word, "innocent," is not used in pejorative sense; however, it simply expresses human goodness. Daisy's innocence, which once drove her into solitude, plays the role of stirring Winterbourne's understanding after her death. In this sense, the meaning of innocence changes in this novel. Besides, her innocence unexpectedly appeals to Winterbourne's pride as a gentleman. That is, Giovanelli tells Winterbourne that Daisy will not marry Giovanelli if she can live long. Giovanelli says, "If she had lived, I should have got nothing. She would never have married me, I am sure."(49) Hearing Giovanelli's sorrow as such, Winterbourne can feel as if Daisy surely distinguished a true gentleman. He may have an impression that Giovanelli is just a tool for Daisy to draw Winterbourne's attention and to bring out his superiority over the Italian. However, actually those men who can innocently entertain Daisy are equally gentlemen for her. And she is too innocent and too irresponsible to think of getting engaged to someone seriously, so that she didn't get engaged to Giovanelli. Although Daisy's "innocence" as such does not mean virtue but suggests frivolous character of her, she moves Winterbourne.

Of course, what moves Winterbourne best is Daisy's message that she never gets engaged to Giovanelli. Indeed her innocence represents an aspect of American sense of values, which draws Winterbourne's attention, but it is her conscious will that makes Winterbourne understand her after all. Thus it can be said that Daisy is not a simple innocent American girl without inner conflict of her but is a puzzling young person who tries to be innocent to cover up her fear for the

strange society or her weakness. Her innocence as such does not suggest her ignorance and audacity or her simplicity. That is, with an assumed innocence, she tries to draw Winterbourne's attention. Her strategy succeeds in the process in which the effect of her innocence on other people changes throughout the story. However, by her death, it may be suggested when the Americans are just simple and innocent they have a risk of being suppressed by the European sense of values. The danger of American innocence is prominently described in those situations of Christopher Newman in *The American* (1877) and of Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), too.

As her name "Daisy" suggests, she is weak and transient for Winterbourne, in spite of her audacious impression on other people. She is so childish that Winterbourne cannot help advising her regardless of her association with Giovanelli. He mainly tries to help Daisy not to worsen her reputation by others and tells her not to walk around Colosseum at night, without thinking of his pride and his risk of being involved in a frivolous girl. But Daisy says to meddling Winterbourne, "I have never allowed a gentleman to dictate to me, or to interfere with anything I do." (31) Here, her attitude is too childish for Winterbourne to injure him. Therefore, she cannot really be an audacious American who exploits Europe even if her innocence is misunderstood and is criticized by the Europeans. Such American weakness reflects James's consciousness for the contemporary America. R.W.B. Lewis writes about the developing American civilization in the early 19th century in his *The American Adam* as follows:

In the decade following the end of the War of 1812, an air of hopefulness became apparent in American life and letters. It expressed the sense of enormous possibility that Americans were beginning to share about the future of their new country; but hopefulness at the outset was combined with feelings of impatience and hostility. (13)

Then in the later 19th century, those Americans like Daisy's father, who never appears in the story but is an essential economic sponsor for the family, symbolize the nation's material success. However, different from the 20th century America which comes to have a power to associate with other countries "audaciously" with its material influence as a center of the world, James tries to bring out an aspect of the Americans who are "innocently" confused by a foreign culture.

Daisy's innocence is not a tool to exploit Europe for her audacious purpose, but a disguise to conceal her confusion or affection. What her innocence means in this novel is a kind of unsophisticated manners of America in the world at that time. Reinhold Niebuhr points out that when America developed materialistically it was "innocent," which means ignorant, to its responsibility of the nation's growing power in the world. Such American "innocence" as Niebuhr states may lead to the modern American egotism as the center of the world. When the Americans find the superiority of its material power over Europe and leaves its needless innocence, it is the time the "innocent" desire of the Americans to exploit the world starts to have an audacious meanings.

III The Solitude of the Americans as Cosmopolitans

So far we have searched the solitude of Daisy as embodiment of contemporary America. Then we would like to remark the fact that Winterbourne is originally an American though he is Europeanized. It can be considered what Winterbourne feels also suggests an aspect of the American solitude. It is remarkable that both Mrs. Costello and Mrs. Walker who criticize Daisy's manners are originally Americans and that Giovanelli who associates with Daisy freely without paying attention to the norm of the European manners is the only pure European. This Italian never looks down on Daisy by showing the European manners or excludes her out of the society. In this novel it is described that Daisy is badly rumored in the European "society"; however, the people who actually criticize her are all Europeanized Americans. Therefore, they are also "outsiders" and remain foreigners in the European society, however well they are accustomed to its manners. They Americans are more nervous of the European manners than the Europeans are, not to be excluded by the society. They suppress their American manners regardless of its suitability and lose their national identity. As they think "when in Europe do as the Europeans do," the Americans are instinctively obedient to the European sense of values to survive in the foreign country. Their fear of solitude and of being criticized by foreigners is shown in the scene where Winterbourne seriously wonders how to control the level of formality of his attitude to women in Geneva and Vevey. What is the most important for

cosmopolitans living abroad, is not to keep their own customs or manners but to know the norm of manners which the society requires them. Those Americans who criticize Daisy are all afraid of being criticized “like Daisy.” By their fear as such, the solitude of cosmopolitan Americans is brought out. They suppress their Americanism and consciously lose their identity as Americans.

The Americans in this story fear their heterogeneity in the foreign country. Here, I'd like to consider about the argument about “foreigners” by Kazuhiko Komatu. Komatu points out the two kinds of point of views about foreigners. The first viewpoint means to see positive meanings in being a foreigner. According to this viewpoint, to be a foreigner means its freedom, liberty and objectivity. Then the second viewpoint means to see negative meanings in being a foreigner as an excluded one out of the community. With this viewpoint, to be a foreigner means its unsteadiness, pains and discrimination. All the Europeanized Americans in this novel do not afford to see foreign cultures as free Americans objectively. They have the negative viewpoint about foreigners. However, James must have had positive viewpoint about his own standpoint to watch contemporary America and the world as an expatriate and as a cosmopolitan. Those Americans who extremely fear of being regarded as barbarians from a developing country may reflect the consciousness of James who also disliked the shallow American culture at that time.

Sara Blair states about James's description about America and Europe in his early novels as “dramatic confrontation between the American ‘national type,’ comparatively ‘savage’ in its ‘natural’ instincts, and the ‘strange secrets’ of ‘old races.’”(15) Daisy is as if killed by evil old world's secret named the European manners. Her death symbolizes what those Europeanized Americans fear most. The author never defines to what extent the European manners, which the people are so afraid of, have moral significance. The European manners are, at least in this story, just a villain which drives Daisy into death. Therefore, the European manners represent a fearful “secret” which the Americans cannot control in a different culture. And those cosmopolitans who never try to search the meaning of this secret in the foreign country may lose their identity and withdraw into their solitude.

Although Winterbourne wonders whether Daisy is a girl worth respecting or

not, he is so attracted by her that he immediately follows and visits her when her family move to Rome. He is charmed by her simple and innocent personality without complex European sense of manners. That is, Daisy who never pays attention to the European sense of manners represents certain Americanism, which leaves fresh impression on Winterbourne. Although, like his aunt Mrs. Costello, Winterbourne is almost Europeanized and loses American identity, he is instinctively attracted by Americanism in which he has his root. At the beginning of the story, Winterbourne, Randolph and Daisy soon open up to each other by praising things American and feel a certain bond as compatriots. Their rapid friendship as such suggests Winterbourne's solitude as a cosmopolitan in foreign countries. Thus he is attracted by Daisy because she is a compatriot as much as because she is a beautiful young girl. As he speaks for Daisy against Mrs. Costello, he wants to help the Americans who cannot behave smoothly in the European society. So when he thinks about the meanings of her innocence, he tries to search for American identity for him in her. Indeed he expresses negative feeling to Daisy as this: "What a clever little reprobate she was, and how smartly she played an injured innocence!"(46) Far from playing "smartly," she cannot but express her feelings awkwardly. Finally, Winterbourne can sense and understand the awkward manners of contemporary Americans, which he also shares as a cosmopolitan. He is, after all, an American who continues to search for his identity in foreign countries.

Winterbourne regrets that he lost Daisy before he could really understand her awkward affection and that he was too Europeanized to sense American manners. But he never returns to America and continues to live in Europe. What is the significance of his meeting with Daisy? It can be considered that he realizes his solitude by his association with her. His solitude then reflects James's consciousness about the cosmopolitan Americans and the contemporary Americanism. Indeed Daisy is not intelligent enough to change Winterbourne's character, but he knows his inner nature by her like a mirror of his own life. Firstly, he knows the Europeanized Americans' psychology, including his, when they criticize such compatriot American as Daisy who ignores the European manners. All the Americans in this novel come to Europe to search for something which they yearn after as well as Daisy wishes to go Europe looking those dresses made

in Paris. However, they cannot accept Daisy's family as if they regard American manners and their mother country as shame. Their criticism of Daisy brings out a complex about their own country, America. When Winterbourne is not sure whether Daisy is a good girl to respect or not, his lack of confidence in his sensibility is rooted in the same complex about contemporary America. Although he worries about Daisy's behavior and advises her about the manners in Europe, he is delighted at dating with her to Chillon and knows what he really wishes rather than the obedience to formal manners. Besides, he is attracted by Daisy and wants to enjoy his time with her as well as Giovanelli does so, though he wants her to distinguish him as a "gentleman" from Giovanelli. In fact, as far what he wishes, he is not so different from Giovanelli though only his care about appearances prevents him from doing what Giovanelli does. After all, by Daisy, he knows his shallow identity as an American and solitude as a cosmopolitan who lacks confidence in evaluating American manners. Daisy shows him how his identity as an American is lost and how the foreign culture changes a person's sensibility.

Carol Ohman writes about Winterbourne's loss and solitude as follows: "Like so many Jamesian heroes, Winterbourne has lost the capacity for love, and he has lost the opportunity to come to life." (447) In Winterbourne's solitude we can find out unstable sense of culture as a cosmopolitan. It can be considered that cosmopolitans like those Europeanized Americans in this novel are very nervous of adapting themselves to the sense of manners which the society requires them to survive anywhere. They cannot afford to think about the suitability of its sense of manners for them. Searching Daisy's destiny, we can find out the solitude of those Europeanized Americans who criticizes Daisy as well as Daisy's solitude. What her innocence suggests in this novel is completely different from the state of modern America after 20th century, which "innocently" exploits other countries showing imperialistic power in the world. That is, what Daisy represents as an American is not audacious and clever desire of America to exploit other culture but awkward nationality of America, which suppresses its identity in the world even if it has enough modern material power. Therefore in this novel, the solitude of the Americans reflects contemporary "innocent" Americanism by which the people do not know how to claim its identity in the world

without vanity.

Note

- (1) Henry James, *Tales of Henry James* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc, 1984) 5. All the quotations from the novel refer to this edition; hereafter, all page references will be noted in parentheses after the quotation.

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