

## Unit 4: Realism in America

**Semester 4 - Week 3**

**Section 2:** American Literature

**Unit 2:** American Realism

**Time allotted:** 2 to 3 sessions

**Weekly Workload :** 1 hour 30 mn

### **Description:**

Late eighteenth century, American Realism, Genteel tradition, Daisy Miller.

### **Objectives:**

1. The novella and the genre

**Pre-requisites:** A reading of Daisy Miller

### **Lesson Plan**

A Study of American Realism

A Study of an Excerpt from the novel *Daisy Miller*

## **Lecture 1: Realism in America**

Realism in American literature refers to a literary movement that emerged in the late 19th century and continued into the early 20th century. Realist writers sought to portray life and society as it truly was, focusing on everyday experiences and the struggles of ordinary people. This movement was a reaction against the romantic and idealized depictions that were prevalent in earlier literature. Key characteristics of realism in American literature include:

### **1. Accurate Representation of Life:**

- Realist writers aimed to provide a faithful and accurate representation of the details of everyday life, often depicting the social, economic, and political realities of the time.

### **2. Focus on the Ordinary:**

- Realism emphasized the lives of ordinary people, as opposed to the extraordinary or the romantic. It explored the challenges, hardships, and joys of the common person.

### 3. **Social Critique:**

- Realist literature often included a critical examination of social institutions and class structures. Writers exposed the injustices and inequalities in society, addressing issues such as poverty, industrialization, and the impact of societal changes.

### 4. **Character Depth and Psychological Realism:**

- Realist authors delved into the psychological depths of their characters, exploring their motivations, thoughts, and emotions. This emphasis on psychological realism added complexity to characters and made them more relatable.

### 5. **Detailed Descriptions:**

- Realist literature was characterized by detailed and meticulous descriptions of settings, characters, and events. This attention to detail aimed to create a vivid and accurate representation of the world being depicted.

### 6. **Regionalism and Local Color:**

- Realist writers often incorporated regionalism and local color, emphasizing the unique characteristics of specific regions and portraying the dialects, customs, and landscapes of different areas.

### 7. **Influence of Science:**

- The scientific advancements of the time influenced realist literature. Writers approached their work with an observational and empirical mindset, seeking to understand and represent the world through careful observation.

### 8. **Rejection of Romanticism:**

- Realism rejected the idealized and sentimental aspects of romantic literature. Instead of focusing on heroic or larger-than-life characters, realist writers depicted individuals facing the challenges of everyday existence.

Some notable American realist writers include:

- **Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens):** Known for works like "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" and "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer."
- **Henry James:** Famous for novels such as "The Portrait of a Lady" and "The Bostonians."
- **Edith Wharton:** Notable for novels like "The Age of Innocence" and "Ethan Frome."
- **Stephen Crane:** Known for "The Red Badge of Courage."
- **William Dean Howells:** A leading figure in American literary realism, with works like "The Rise of Silas Lapham."

The realist movement in American literature reflected the changing social and economic landscape of the late 19th century, and its influence continued to shape literary trends well into the 20th century.

### **Analysis of the Excerpt from *Daisy Miller***

The excerpt in hand is extracted from **the American Realist novella belonging to the Genteel Tradition entitled *Daisy Miller*** written by **Henry James** in 1878 who was an American expat. The story is set in Europe, and follows the adventure of an American young woman named Daisy Miller, as she challenges the social conventions of the old world.

The novella is about an American seventeen year old girl, **characterized by her beauty**, named Daisy Miller. She travels from America to different places around Europe, and settles in Vevey, Switzerland, where the narration of the novella begins. At the hotel garden; Daisy met another American expat, Mr Winterbourne, who was conversing with her younger brother Randolph. After multiple encounters, Mr Winterbourne is attracted to Daisy's beauty and wishes to see her again. Daisy travels to Rome where she meets Mr Winterbourne again. Yet, he discovers that she already made friends in Rome including a young good-looking gentleman named Giovanelli. Daisy makes the acquaintance of a group of Americans living in Rome and who identified more as European aristocrats than American citizens.

Daisy was not accepted inside the American circle, because her behaviours were common, and did not conform to the European social norms. Daisy met her male friend late at night in public places, like the garden where Mrs Walker tried to advise her to change her habits yet she ignores her warning. The next day Daisy is rejected in Mrs Walker's party and is shunned from the American circle in Rome. Later, different encounters with Mr Winterbourne make him think that her relationship with Mr Giovanelli was romantic. Daisy was trying to make Mr Winterbourne jealous while pretending she was engaged to the Italian young man.

One evening, Daisy went to the Colosseum with Mr Giovanelli near midnight to see the moon at the historical site. Mr Winterbourne arrives and over-hears Daisy saying wicked things about him, comparing him to a lion ready to attack and devour them. He feels deceit in Daisy and decides not to respect her anymore. Mr Winterbourne decides to address her and Mr Giovanelli to warn them against the danger of staying in the Colosseum at night because of the Malaria/Roman fever. Daisy, as stubborn as she is, rejects his warning and thinks that she will be safe if she leaves the place before midnight.

The conversation between Daisy and Mr Winterbourne is cold and tense as she learns from him that he has no longer any interest in her. She thus states that she does not care if she dies because she lost his interest in her. A few days later, Mr Winterbourne learns that Daisy was ill and that her presence in the Colosseum at midnight was known by every American in her circle even though he did not mention that to anyone. Daisy passed away to let Giovanelli reveal that their relationship was purely friendly.

Daisy is a wealthy young American, who did not belong to the upper class, which made her subject of criticism by the European society. Her family was classified among what was referred to as the Newly-rich. Her name represents a flower that has a short life, and is common thus reflects her behaviours. She was seen as cheap and available to anyone that surrounded her despite her beauty and wealth. She is the protagonist of the novella, and round because she shows truthfulness of character and

multi-dimensionality especially when she converses with Mr Winterbourne revealing multiple emotions including love and anger.

Mr Winterbourne is a main character, he was twenty seven years old. He was American studying in Europe. He lived with his aunt Mrs Castello who obliged him to conform to the European values as an American expat. Unlike the other characters, Mr Winterbourne is the only one who shows psychological depth. His thoughts are exposed to the reader, the entire narration is done from his own point of view and his intimate side is explored by the author, which makes this novel a first attempt in what is known as the psychological novel. He is round because of the psychological depth that is revealed about him.

Mrs Constello and Mrs Walker are two American ladies living in Europe and who represent European mindset and values. They are judgemental to Daisy and contribute in her rebuke.

The main themes that are discussed in this novella are social class, prejudice, and innocence. Daisy's innocence is representative of the young American character that breaks with everything European and which is approached by the Europeans as immature, irresponsible and low culture.

The point of view in this novella is third person limited as the narration is done from the perspective of Mr Winterbourne who was more judgemental to Daisy in representing her. The plot begins when Daisy and Mr Winterbourne meet in Vevey, and complicates as they explore different historical sites which triggers attraction between them. The plot rises as they meet again in Rome and the relationship of Daisy and Giovanelli is discovered by Mr Winterbourne and the other ladies of the American Circle. It reaches the climax when Daisy is first rebuked by Mrs Walker then is discovered at the Colosseum with Mr Giovanelli. The climax is particularly influential because Mr Winterbourne decides to quit on his feelings for her at this moment. The plot resolves as Daisy dies of Malaria and Mr Winterbourne realizes that she was innocent and was never engaged to Mr Giovanelli.

The diction is latin-origin because of Henry James' European background and upbringing, and the register is formal for the traditional that is represented in the text (the genteel tradition).

Literary devices in the novel include Daisy's name which is an indirect metaphor that refers to her beauty, youth and spontaneity. There is a simile in the line "he looks at us as one of the old lions or tigers may have looked at the Christian martyrs!" which means that Mr Winterbourne looked angry and violent as if he was planning to attack and hurt Daisy.

The atmosphere in the novel varies from attraction, to anger, judgement, stress, sometimes enjoyment then deceit. The tone includes disappointment, low esteem to the character and to all American young girls represented in Daisy's spontaneity referred to in the novel as frivolous and flirt.

The novel presents a juxtaposition between the old world represented in the ladies who mis-judged Daisy and sometimes Mr Winterbourne too, and on the other side America represented in Daisy's innocence and spontaneity. The international theme as a main theme in the novel depicts the cultural values and lack of tolerance in the European camp.