

ELŻBIETA OLEKSY, PEDAGOGICAL UNIVERSITY, BYDGOSZCZ

DAISY MILLER VERSUS MAGGIE
VERVER - AN ANALYSIS OF THE TWO
CONTRASTING ATTITUDES

F.W. Duppe calls Henry James "the great feminine writer of a feminine age in letters". /Duppe, 1965/ And, indeed, the American girl became James' main occupation throughout his literary career. He presented her with all her charm, her innocence¹ and her free spirit, features which he always confronted with the world of fact represented in his writings by Europeans and Europeanized Americans.

Daisy Miller from "Daisy Miller - a Study" began James' series of American girls in Europe and Maggie Verver from "The Golden Bowl" ended it. There were other American girls in Europe in James' fiction on the way from Daisy Miller to Maggie Verver, like Isabel Archer in "The Portrait of a Lady" and Milly Theale in "The Wings of a Dove", but the analysis of these novels would go well beyond the scope of this paper. For this reason we shall concentrate on the two heroines: Daisy Miller and Maggie Verver only; our aim is to analyse the evolution which occurs in James' presentation of the American girl in Europe.

James explained in his letter to a friend that "Daisy Miller" was "... the little tragedy of a light, thin, natural,

unsuspecting creature being sacrificed, as it were, to social rumpus that went on quite over her head and to which she stood in no measurable relation". /Edel, 1962:308/.

We first meet Daisy in Vevey and we think she is a pleasing flirt. Winterbourne, from whose view-point her story is presented to us, is often puzzled by her behaviour, but at this point he appreciates her charm and does not give much thought to her not quite lady-like manners.

It is in Rome, where we meet Daisy again, that she creates a scandal. She is constantly in the company of an Italian fortune-hunter, Giovanelli. Being criticised for her behaviour more or less openly, she declares war on the conventions she does not want to obey.

When Daisy realizes what she is accused of, her instinct prompts her to behave in the same way as she used to, only in an exaggerated form. This is her main mistake. She is, as James called her in his letter to Mrs. Lynn Lynton "too ignorant, too irreflective, too little versed in the proportions of things" /Stafford 1963:115/, and she does not realize her behaviour will only make her case worse. And, indeed, when Winterbourne meets Daisy at the Colosseum at night, alone with Giovanelli, he thinks she is not worth any consideration from a decent man. He gives her to understand his feelings. This is very painful to Daisy and when Winterbourne warns her that she may catch Roman fever at the Colosseum at night she responds: "I don't care whether I have Roman fever or not" /James 1964:186/. Daisy is sensitive both to praise and blame. Surrounded by the people who do not understand her, do not admire her - her

spontaneous will to live turns into a will to die. She does have Roman fever and dies a week later.

Although Daisy is often described in negatives /she is utterly uneducated, rather unexpressive, her topics are usually shallow/, she is true to the image of the American girl James got the impression of while still at home; she is independent, vital and innocent. She is courageous, and though this courage of hers took an altogether wrong direction, she managed to demonstrate with her life a point of morality; she forced at least Winterbourne to become conscious of her innocence. This sounds like a victory but the victory is posthumous in this case, and it is hard to disagree with Leslie Fielder's remark that James identifies the immaculate virgin with the girl dying or dead /Fielder 1962/ ².

Europe for James was the society of those who created absurd conventions and those who had to act according to them. Those who did not were regarded as indecent and immoral. Americans accustomed to their country of free spirit where people were too busy to care for the affairs of other people met there the first principal barrier of exclusion from the society which they so much wanted to enter. Osborn Andreas discusses in "Henry James and the Expanding Horizon" /Andreas 1984:1-21/ various types of James' characters, and he characterizes those types by various deeds of "emotional cannibalism", by which he understands harmful deeds based on the illusion that one's own life can get sustenance from the emotional feeding on the lives of others. Andrea's types represent different modes of intervention, identical in essence and variant only in degree.

One of them is the opinion about private lives of other people. James felt that not only opinion publicly expressed, but also opinion privately held about the conduct, particularly the moral conduct, of others was an affront to the right of every individual to base his own conduct on the needs of his nature. Another mode of intervention is that of outright meddling in others' lives. The next, more violent, form of intervention is coercion, and the last is exploitation. A person who makes use of other people for his own advantage and profit was, in James' scheme of values, the supreme source of evil. All those types characterized by deeds of "emotional cannibalism" possess in common a violence directed against the autonomy of the individual, an intent to manipulate the lives of others.

The first two modes of intervention are presented in "Daisy Miller" and the solution of this "nouvelle" was to prove that Daisy's simplicity and innocence was incompatible with her survival in the corrupt world. Her simplicity was certified by her death.

Daisy Miller is a figure lightly sketched; James did not give her the opportunity to mature. This opportunity he gave to his later heroines, especially to Maggie Verver, the heroine of "The Golden Bowl".

Maggie Verver gives us an altogether different impression of herself than her women-predecessors from James' earlier novels. Her similarity to Daisy Miller lies in her innocence, her wealth and her initiation into evil. But just the initiation into evil points to the features which are completely different in her. Those features being: her ability for life and her

subtle ability to plot, which previously was so characteristic of James' Europeans and Europeanized Americans.

Henry James had once heard of a girl and her widower-father who, though greatly attached to one another, decided each to marry, and who were then dismayed to discover that their respective partners were having an affair /Dupee 1965:224/. This was to become the central situation of "The Golden Bowl". Maggie Verver marries the Prince, whose former mistress marries Maggie's father.

Mr Verver, an American millionaire, is an art collector, and this passion of his is the main reason for his coming to old Europe. His "new human acquisition" /James 1963:141/ is an Italian Prince of whom he makes a present to his daughter. The images of "objects d'art" in connection with the Prince Amerigo are used by James frequently in the novel. Here is what Maggie says to her future husband:

"You're at any rate a part of his collection", she had explained- "one of the things that can only be got over here. You're a rarity, an object of beauty, an object of price... You're what they call a 'morceau de musée".

/James 1963:23/.

Two questions may be raised at this point. Is it actually the Prince who is immoral when he marries Maggie because of her wealth but who obviously loves and respects her? Does Maggie's morality consist in her goodness of heart regardless of the fact that she marries the Prince in order to gain social prestige for herself and for her father? We shall answer these questions in turn.

Book First entitled "The Prince" is not, in fact, devoted

to Amerigo only; it presents all the protagonists. However, we have no doubt that he is another of James' passive men, just like Winterbourne. Being brought up in a corrupt society where a marriage like his is not thought immoral, Amerigo with his real affection for Maggie thinks their union a happy one. It is only later when he feels Maggie's reserve and deep love for her father, that he accepts the renewal of his old affair with Charlotte Stant. Here he is immoral, and his immorality consists in the fact that he takes advantage of the situation. The situation is that Maggie, out of her selfish love for her father, wants him to marry her previous school-friend Charlotte because she thinks Charlotte will not steal her father away, and that she, Maggie, will have him still for herself. Here Maggie sets a trap for herself.

Book Second entitled "The Princess" is devoted entirely to Maggie. Like previous James' heroines, she is initiated into evil about which she knew nothing whatsoever. Fanny Assingham says to her husband at the beginning of the novel: "... she wasn't born to know evil. She must never know it". /James 1963:66/. We see Maggie change, we see her grow up. At the beginning of the novel she is an innocent, simple-minded American girl. She has her wealth and her presentable husband. She is selfish in her affection for her father. The impression she gives us at the beginning of the novel is quite wrong when re-read in the light of the whole novel. In the course of her marriage Maggie's innocence is gone, it gives way to the mature treatment of life; her simple-mindedness gives way to the ability to plot against those who abused her trust.

From the very beginning of Book Second we realize that she is completely different from what we thought of her previously. Maggie gradually becomes aware that something went wrong with her marriage. First this feeling is very vague, and it has no real connection with what she thinks the facts of her married life are. But later thinking of her husband and Charlotte she discovers: "Ah, Amerigo and Charlotte were arranged together, but she - to confine the matter only to herself - was arranged apart" /James 1963:301/. This partial "éclaircissement" consists in the subconscious feeling the basis for which are some delicate symptoms on the part of her husband and Charlotte which they so much want to hide from her. The complete "éclaircissement" comes when she learns about the facts. Here the symbolism of the golden bowl is very important. In Book First the flaw in the golden bowl which Charlotte wanted to give to the Prince as a wedding present is the symbol of their adultery. As to the second symbolism of the golden bowl the critics vary in their interpretations. F.W. Dupee writes that Maggie is to overcome several forces that threaten her marriage and that they together make for a symbolic flaw in the golden bowl of her wedded life /Dupee 1965:244/. Oscar Cargill quotes Adeline H. Tintner's interpretation. According to this critic the golden bowl "becomes a symbol of the Ververs' deformed attitude towards their precious people. For when people are treated like works of art, certain human needs are ignored..." /Cargill 1961:425/. Both these interpretations are possible. Maggie realizes her mistake, and decides to fight the difficulties and to save her own marriage and that of her

father's. Here is the main point of difference between James' previous heroines and Maggie Verver. The confrontation of the two traditions takes the same form here as previously; the innocent are opposed to the corruption of Europe. However, the solution is quite different. Maggie will not give up; she will free herself from her childish love for her father, and she will surrender wholly to her husband. The way she does it shows her great capacity for life. She will not hurt the feelings of others, she will let them preserve their pride, even if she is thought stupid. She will master the situation without any violent scenes, and she is even able to feel sympathy for those who abused her.

When, at the beginning of the novel, we find ourselves sympathizing with Charlotte and the Prince, it is now Maggie whom we come to admire most. It is now Maggie who is great in her ability to forgive and to feel sympathy for the woman whom she naturally might have hated. Perhaps it would be more natural for a woman to hate her rival, and perhaps this is the reason why some critics think Maggie's final triumph to be a failure. R.P. Blackmur in his introduction to "The Golden Bowl" writes: "... She destroys, I would suppose, all the values between the two pairs, ... and destroys, I would suppose, all that could make life tolerable between her husband and herself" /James 1963:10/. Blackmur quotes the final scene of the book. After the parting of the two couples Maggie is awaiting her husband and the feeling of uncertainty comes upon her:

... the delay of his return, making her heart beat too fast to go on, was like a sudden blinding light on a wild

speculation. She had thrown the dice, but his hand was over her cast. /James 1963:510/.

The Prince comes and to Maggie's question he answers:

"See? I see nothing but you". And the truth of it had, with its force, after a moment, so strangely lighted his eyes that, as for pity and dread of them, she buried her own in his breast. /James 1963:511/.

We may agree with Blackmur that the meaning of the image of "pity and dread" is that Maggie cannot bear her triumph over what she held dear. She wanted to rise to the occasion, to adopt the European ways, and to base her marriage on the firm foundation of maturity. She managed to prove that to her husband, but she failed to prove it to herself. That is why we cannot agree with Blackmur that Amerigo is the hero of the tragedy. He writes: "It is his life, not Maggie's that seen in perspective is tragic and shows a tragic fault, that can be explained but not justified, in the nature of his effort". /James 1963:11/. It is Maggie who is the heroine throughout the major part of the novel, and remains such to the very end. It is her life which, after all, may not be happy. The Prince has always loved her, and now he loves and admires her all the more because he finds in her what he thought she previously lacked, and what, indeed, she did lack. Apart from her intelligence, he finds in her the strength and firmness of character, features which he, being a weak man himself, always so much admired in women. But will Maggie be able to be happy with him after all that has been said and done? Will she be able to forget? She will not, and that is why she looks to her future life with fear.

We might look for the reason of the evolution which occurs in James' presentation of his American girls in the fact that he must have realized that American conditions had much changed during nearly half a century of his absence from America³. Daisy Miller though thought by many critics a narrow-minded and irritating girl, was, in fact, true to the picture of the American girl James received an impression of in his adolescence years. He does not blame Daisy for her ignorance and ill-breeding; he does blame those around her and especially those corrupt who criticize her, who see her ignorance but do not see her charm. Besides, to repeat what we have already said before, James did not give Daisy the opportunity to mature which he gave to his later heroines, especially Maggie Verver. Here we have arrived at a very important point. James gave his American heroines education suitable for their roles because he realized that each of them in all her goodness, innocence, independence and high morale lacked something very important. Through their initiation into evil James draws out what is best in them and then shows their virtue triumph over the corruption of the old world. Daisy's radical innocence is shown to triumph over the evil-mindedness of the old world. Her victory made her rise above those who criticized her.

James realized as Leon Edel points out that in order to make "... alliances between Europeans and Americans ... consummated and ... strong and durable and possessed of a future ..." /Edel 1960:35/ he had to equip his Americans with such features as to make them equal partners for his Europeans. This he did in the case of Maggie Verver. Maggie with her capacity for life resembles none of James' previous heroines.

She can arrange a very careful plot, and at the same time she knows how to carry it out in such a way as not to hurt anybody. The excellent portrait of Maggie Verver is the effect of James' elaborating his main subject and also of the fact that he must have realized that the type of American girl had changed, and he also realized he had idealized his vision of the American girl to produce Milly Theale from "The Wings of a Dove", a very unconvincing character. This conviction led to the realistically drawn picture of Maggie Verver.

We may only wonder why James left us uncertain as to Maggie's future if he found the solution of his American-European problem. Why did he make us doubt at the end of "The Golden Bowl" any possibility of "... the alliances between Europeans and Americans ... consummated ... and strong ... and possessed of a future ..." /Edel loc.cit./ if he wanted to convince us as to Maggie's ability not only for life but also for her survival in the old world?

James himself had many doubts about this problem. He showed all his American heroines trying to enter European culture, trying to adopt European codes. In the case of Maggie Verver he showed that the American girl was able to break the barrier of exclusion from European society. He did convince us that the American girl could rise above the corruption of Europe, could prove to be, apart from her innocence and charm, wealth and elegance, a woman of character. But he also told us that she would, in the process of maturing, lose her innocence and her innocence was what James admired most. Edmund Wilson draws the following conclusion analyzing the problems in James' later works:

He has come to be occupied here ever more than in his earlier work with what seem to him the irremediable antagonisms of interest between people who enjoy themselves without inhibitions, who take all they can get from life, and people who are curbed by scruples of aesthetic taste as well as of morality from following all their impulses and satisfying all their appetites - between the worldly, the selfish, the "splendid", and the dutiful, the sensitive, the humble. This humility, this moral rectitude takes on in Henry James the aspect of a moral beauty which he opposes, as it were, to the worldly kind; both kinds of beauty attract him, he understands the points of view of devotees of both, but it is one of his deepest convictions that you cannot have both at the same time. /Edel 1963:68/.

NOTES

1. A few interesting remarks on "innocence" in H. James' fiction can be found in Joseph Hynes' "The Transparent Shroud: Henry James and William Story" /Hynes 1915/.
2. See also "The Wings of a Dove".
3. Henry James was born in New York City in 1843. In the same year the James family went to England and stayed there until 1845. Twice during his adolescence James was taken to Europe, when he was twelve until he was sixteen, and again during his seventeenth year. From 1869 James spent most of his life in Europe. He settled in London in 1876 and became a naturalized British subject in 1915.

REFERENCES

- Andreas, Osborn. 1948. Henry James and the Expanding Horizon, University of Washington Press.
- Cargill, Oscar. 1961. The Novels of Henry James. New York: The MacMillan Company.
- Dupee, F.W. 1965. Henry James. New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc.
- Edel, Leon. 1960. Henry James. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Edel, Leon. 1962. Henry James. The Conquest of London: 1870-1881. New York: J.B. Lippincott Company.
- Edel, Leon. 1963. Henry James. A Collection of Critical Essays. Prentice Hall, Inc.
- Fiedler, Leslie A. 1962. Love and Death in the American Novel. Cleveland, Ohio.
- James, Henry. 1974. Daisy Miller. New York.
- James, Henry. 1963. The Golden Bowl. New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc.
- Stafford, William T. 1963. James's Daisy Miller. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Hynes, Joseph. 1975. The Transparent Shroud: Henry James and William Story. American Literature. Vol. 46. No 4.