

America Vs Europe and Identity Recognition In the Teaching of *Daisy Miller*
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"One thing becomes clear as the direct delivery of some curriculum, teaching as scripted conveyance of information, as clerking, is simply a myth."

(Ayres 5).

As disciplines heavily invested in making sense of the contemporary world, literary and cultural studies are constantly engaging with new examples, new political contexts and even new theoretical paradigms. Literary and cultural studies, as relatively recent interdisciplinary fields, have a canonical set of texts and all-conquering theoretical heroes or classic methodologies. What we teach and how we teach shifts, in part, along with the evolving experiences and enthusiasms of our students and changes in the cultural landscape.

The progressive cultural ethos in the field of literature and cultural studies create enthusiasm to create pedagogical innovations that promise to shake up existing practices, hierarchies and conventions. Literature and cultural studies seem proper environments for university teachers to reflect on, research and transform cultures of teaching in their classrooms. In academe, there's always an opportunity to test the grounds, acknowledge, and recreate what the classrooms offer for cultural investigation. Giroux explains that "[t]eachers need to find ways of creating a space for mutual engagement of lived difference that does not require the silencing of a multiplicity of voices by a single dominant discourse" (201).

This paper analyzes the experience of a pedagogical innovation in literary and cultural studies, a pedagogy which teaches culture and identity. Has pedagogical innovation allowed flexibility and an extension of the curriculum, or has it been merely used to reduce traditional spoon-feeding techniques? Have I as a teacher of English literature truly internationalized my curricula reading? Has pedagogical innovation advanced student's recognition of their true identity? What broader cultural development does the consistent call to innovate in the classroom reflect? Bracher states:

The mechanisms by which educators can provide recognition to students are many, and virtually all of them are already in operation in literature (and other) classes, though often without teachers' being aware of them. And only rarely are these various forms of recognition employed in a systematic, coordinated manner with the aim of promoting students' identity development. (179)

Academics in literary and cultural studies have long been committed to understanding cultural change. The aim of this paper is to bring cultural studies methodology to bear on recent changes in the pedagogy of literature, as an insight into changes in the historical role of the academic and educational sector more generally:

Teachers who understand and value their own cultural identities recognize culture as a complex construction. In doing so, they create the possibility for deeper connections with their students Cultural responsiveness comes from understanding self and others so that different values are understood and respected, rather than one set of values being imposed on all. Culturally responsive teachers can build robust learning environments in which students and teachers can build richer and deeper understandings of

themselves and each other as they investigate and uncover the school curriculum. (White, et al. online 2005)

Some researchers like Eleuterio and Hoelscher found that classrooms with teachers and students who openly share their life experiences, their values, customs, social codes and their cultural identities are able to build trust and foster stronger relationships with each other on one hand, and recognize their identity components on the other hand. This climate leads to student engagement and excitement about learning about cultural values and reading literature altogether. Getting to this place requires an understanding of the factors that influence individual cultural identity.

Pedagogy of Identity Recognition

Identity is a major issue for most students who are continually moving from the identity they have formed in relation to their family and society, and embracing an identity of their very own. "The onset of cognitive thinking triggers a host of emotional tasks to be completed, not the least of which is the development of a positive self-esteem and some degree of autonomy from their parents" (Irvin 25), who represent a cultural community.

In this paper, *Daisy Miller* addresses the issue of identity and several issues paramount with cultural identity. The main character of the novella negotiates her identity as an American in Europe in the Nineteenth Century. Many of the predicaments/conflicts that the character suffers are in relation to the identity that Daisy has either made for herself or has been made for her by others. Many students could be going through these same emotions the character encounters, so this gives the students an opportunity to see that there is a universal/global theme. If students are able to see this through the literary work, then they are able to express

their feelings about the character's plight, and where they stand. They will realize that their identity is many-faceted and in the process of being reformed/recognized, just like the character's identity in the novella. Bracher states that "[o]utside of those relatively few classes that make empowerment of students their central aim, such recognition-providing practices are usually implemented in piecemeal and desultory fashion, and in the service of 'getting students to participate' or 'getting students to love literature' or another discipline, rather than with the primary aim of facilitating students' identity development" (179).

Reading *Daisy Miller*, which addresses identity, explores the idea of students having or developing an identity. *Daisy Miller* is about an individual character whose identity is partially decided by society, and the individuality of Daisy must negotiate this identity.

Bracher suggests that in "literary study cultural recognition is present most obviously in the topics and attributes foregrounded in texts' agents (characters), actions, and objects" (183). This novella will give the students an opportunity to see the importance of one's identity and the way in which they negotiate how their identity is seen to society at large by observing and analyzing the character of Daisy. The character in the novella is pressured in Europe to ignore her true identity or to embrace another identity as the whole work deals with this struggle. Through the study and discussion of *Daisy Miller*, students are able to consider their own experiences with these types of situations and to recognize their inner self, which leads to a formation of identity. This process of social interaction enables students to mature both socially and intellectually (Irvin 26). Dealing with issues of identity in literature leads students to better understand their own identity by reexamining their initial thoughts in relation to the thoughts of the others in the classroom and by relating to the characters in the text they are reading.

It is important to realize that part of our identity is related to our own culture and our interaction with other cultures. Since the students will be given the opportunity to discuss *Daisy Miller*, they will be able to better understand their own identity in relation to culture. Students should think of their own identity in relation to their culture as well as their identity with other cultures, to figure out how similar or how different they are. Shawn Pate indicates that a great deal of this conflict erupts out of the conflict students are experiencing between these two cultural identities (3) namely, here, the culture of Europe and the culture of America. My answer to this can be summed up by Erik Erickson's comment on students' identity: "They are sometimes morbidly, often curiously preoccupied with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are" (Erikson 128). Students will be able to relate to the literature they are reading and make connections about the issues that are paramount to their identity development. "Individual meanings have intrinsic worth for the students. Linking events in the text to their own lives helps to build meaning" (O'Keefe 123).

Praxis: *Daisy Miller* as a Paradigm for Identity Recognition

Bracher theorizes that in "providing recognition for students, it is helpful to distinguish three different levels of the self ... , the recognition of which takes different forms and produces different results" (179). He then proceeds that:

First, there is the public self, which includes those parts of oneself that one acknowledges and freely displays to others in hopes of their being recognized. Then there is the private self, encompassing elements that one acknowledges and yearns to have others recognize and accept but that one hides from others out of fear that they will not approve of these elements. And finally there are the unconscious

elements of one's self, those parts of the self that one is unaware of possessing because one has disowned them, excluded them from identity, largely as a result of socializing pressures. For each of these levels there are multiple forms, modes, and channels of recognition available through literary study (179).

I have taught *Daisy Miller* several times for Jordanian undergraduate students (Arabs and Muslims). Each time I introduce this novella in my first class; I start by introducing the major theme of America Versus Europe, rather than starting with the plot. Teaching such a work to Jordanian students creates such a dichotomy for my students and a challenge for me as well.

I have always begun by writing on the board the two binaries by creating a long list underneath each of the two parts of the binary. Of course, beneath America, I write words such as Freedom, liberty, innocence, new money, individualism, youth, beauty, which are practically attributes of Daisy herself and America. On the other side, where Europe is placed, I write traditions, customs, restrictions, social codes, rigidity, society. It ends up with creating other basic binaries, mostly significant, which is Individualism vs Society.

America	Europe
Freedom, Liberty	Restrictions, Customs, Codes
Youth (Young Nation)	Old Europe
Reality	Appearances
New Money	Old Money
Innocence	Experience
Individualism	Society

Equality	Class hierarchy
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The list goes on and on and students come to a point where they are somehow puzzled about the significance of these two binaries.

Knowing that we live in a changing world, where globalization has had an impact even on those remote spots all over the world, my students, of course not immune from the effect of globalization, are entrapped. I've always raised questions such as which of these binaries apply to our Arab and Muslim society? Where do we stand as a society? And, where do you as an individual stand if you have to choose one of these polarities to express who you are? Are you Europe, or America? The answers are amazing.

An Arab Muslim society for sure is more closely-knit, and more often described as very much close to the nineteenth-century European society for its conservatism and traditionalism, belief in social codes and customs, and somehow not open to change, and this exactly mirrors the list beneath Europe on the board, in the nineteenth century. My students were actually puzzled as how they would describe themselves and how they see themselves compared to others. Asking students to be part of the text interpretation and analysis is new to them because in traditional teaching, they are not active thinkers who could and should rightfully assert their viewpoint as individuals and a group in a classroom. The question is, once asked to do so, will they express their opinion from the perspective of how society judges them, or will they express who they are as they see themselves as individuals? Some were sure, they advocate society for its recognized and well-established system; they will always conform to what society sees fit and right, therefore they choose Europe; while other students, who thought of themselves as strong-headed, independent, and having more character of their own, certainly thought that America represents them more.

Some students couldn't decide what they are or who they want to be; they are both a mixture of society and individualism, and both American and European in the recognition of their value system. To help them out, I asked them rhetorical questions about their practical lives as do they dress the way they like, or do they dress the way they are expected to because they gain approval from society? Do they behave publicly as they wish, or as expected from them by social groups? If they are criticized for their behavior, would they change it for society's sake or keep it as is to sustain their individuality? Still, they couldn't tell. Some answered they have to dress as their parents, who represent a small-community, require them to dress up by covering essential parts of the body because there are religious and social codes that must be followed. Some students said they, reservedly and hesitantly, did dress as they liked. The matter of dress is very important as it is part of the social codes which bespeak of a certain identity. Therefore, a long dress with the Muslim head-dress *hijab* is a display of conforming to religion and social traditions and customs, which are of course welcome in the Jordanian (Arab and Muslim) society. In this case, those who are not following such a dress code are mostly not accepted and not respected by some social circles because such individuals are considered as unruly, uncommon, and irreligious; rather than pertaining to society's codes, they go against them.

By taking a stand, students then are unconsciously defining their culture; they either identify with Daisy's culture, or with the culture adopted by Mrs. Costello and Mrs. Walker. Some of the males and very few female students declared they dressed as they liked; female students explained they have less freedom than males in a male-dominated society; therefore they are unwillingly part of the Costello-Walker culture. But if given more space, they would adopt part of Daisy's culture. Male students mainly said they would rather stick to traditions, but they can break them when they

wish to retain their individuality, something that the females didn't have much choice with because their smaller family-society didn't approve for religious and cultural reasons. Therefore, male students were able to see themselves enjoying mobility between following social rites and pursuing individual aspirations since they are given more freedom of choice. Thus, they are Winterbournes, more or less.

As for those very few who declared they refuse to do anything but what they desired, they were hesitant. It seemed like they didn't have enough support and they shied away from explaining themselves because they were somehow ridiculed for daring to express individuality in a community that believed that society is the only point of reference for good behavior or misbehavior. "Recognition for the public self is the most common in literature classes as well as generally, and its provision usually produces an immediate boost to identity. Direct expressions of admiration or approval by the teacher or other students for a student's knowledge, understanding, insight, or sensitivity are both immediately energizing and profoundly nourishing for identity" (Bracher 179).

Keeping all this in mind, and after hearing all what they say, I open the floor for another discussion by asking: how far would you go to achieve what you believe in and what you desire? Many of my students declared they will not disobey their parents or, largely, society. I thought that was very sympathetic and I posed the question, then: can you live with other peoples' decision tailored for you? They did not have answers. Actually, no one was courageous enough to say I will always go after my own individual wishes, meaning they will always be followers for others, and therefore each individual will be a carbon copy of others. And in this way, I was trying to explain the concept of what "society," or Costello-Walker culture, in the novella meant.

Then I moved to discuss those very few who said they make their own decisions independently and they would meet all challenges to be

who they "are" or who they want to "be." My question was: would you, as an individual, die to prove that your set of values and beliefs are right, regardless whether society approves of them or not? I then moved to the point where Daisy dies as a flower because she does not fit in the European soil, and because she couldn't/wouldn't adapt to Europe's set of values. I reiterate the question: Would you sacrifice your life to show society that you are just different, and maybe stubborn? That was an eye-opening question for the students. Students felt they are somehow responsible for their choices or who they want to be, or turn out to be, since self recognition, and self-definition has come to self-questioning. Many of my students thought if they are challenged by society then, society over-rules, since it is always creates and recreates traditions, customs, rites and values. So, when truly challenged, students find it impossible to accept Daisy/America, and they embrace the Costello-Walker/Europe value system of keeping in line with traditions.

From there, and after I've set the background for the setting of *Daisy Miller*, I start with title of the work. How does the title reflect this whole binary? The name Daisy is very interesting as it reflects a kind of a flower, exactly what the character signifies. Having two settings, Daisy as an American female, is planted in the land of Europe, namely in Switzerland, and Rome. A flower needs sunlight, water, and a good environment. Obviously, when reading the novella, we understand that Daisy at the end dies. Going back to the point that she symbolizes a flower, Daisy certainly is suffocated by the environment and dies because the Roman fever that she contracts at the end is actually the result of the cultural clash that couldn't be mended.

Having an American culture in Europe created a confusing atmosphere; Daisy had to adapt and accommodate herself to a cultural shift from individualism to society to stay alive and survive the challenges, but she didn't out of her belief in individualism, and her resistance to be

un-American. The price was, ultimately, her life. It also represents the emerging nationalism of America, where its youth die/sacrifice to forge America's new identity, rather than give in to old Europe's system of beliefs.

Daisy's choice, out of innocence or willful intention, highlights her presence rather than her absence by accepting the challenges posed by the expatriate American triangle (Winterbourne-Costello-Walker) that interplay roles with Daisy against her individuality, since they themselves have already conformed to the European culture, and they have come ironically, and eventually, to represent it. Winterbourne, who has lived long enough in Europe that he has forgotten what it is like to be American, becomes the harshest among others to misunderstand and misjudge Daisy for who she is and what she represents. Winterbourne, representing the other side—Europe—finds it difficult to communicate with Daisy and accept her individuality. He admires her beauty, her dresses, yet he is ashamed of her friendliness with the European courier Eugenio, a friendship which actually explains her ability to move over and get across her individuality and understand the other, unlike Winterbourne. Winterbourne finds her distasteful as she tends to "pick up acquaintance" - -words which Mrs. Costello, and Mrs. Walker condemn her for. These two ladies, who represent the rigid high class in a hierarchical society, form a jury, which gives itself the right to pass judgment on others, especially on Daisy Miller.

The Costello-Walker ladies represent social codes, customs, rituals, hierarchy, all of which are opposite to Daisy. Can they be harsh on Daisy? They certainly can, whether they mean it or not; she is not from their own cultural world and they are not from her world either. Daisy's attempt to befriend Winterbourne is an attempt to reconcile America and Europe, an attempt to end the clash between old and new, society and individual, mother-land and daughter-land, self and other. But in the end,

Daisy does not succeed, nor does Winterbourne; it is only after Daisy's death that Winterbourne realizes that he had an undesired misjudgment of Daisy, and that he was not able to give her credit or a chance to prove her innocence. Even Winterbourne, an ex-patriot, fails to understand his fellow countrywoman, and drifts to the old European codes of society. Daisy as well, tries to make Winterbourne jealous when she flirts with Giovanelli, creating the idea that America is still not mature enough. This alludes to the idea that America is still in its fetal stages and has not gained cultural maturity just yet, all of which is represented particularly by Daisy's flirtation, and her overall social manners.

Taking this untraditional introduction into account, students use their own culture to rely on for the reading and interpreting of *Daisy Miller*, that is, through their interaction with the text, whether individually or socially. As students progress in their reading of the parts of the novella, they start to see how the description of Daisy is manipulated to display an image of an apparently wild American girl, reiterating the propaganda in the Arab world about American women just as is being reiterated in Vevey at the time about Daisy. While students compare and contrast themselves with Daisy, they are able to figure out who they are, basically recognizing aspects of their identity for each of them, whether they identify their standards with Daisy, or with the codes set by Winterbourne, Mrs. Walker and Mrs. Costello.

The outcome was very interesting; making a decision was very difficult. Students turned out to be hybrids in their identities. Students were unable to decide who they truly are since they wanted to be Americanized when it came to their personal thinking about personal freedom, yet they were unable to free themselves from social supervision of behavior and manners. They desired to have more freedom like Daisy in their social behavior and manners and hoped not be criticized by any social circles, wished to communicate with others openly without social restrictions,

however they hesitated between their true and inner desire to free themselves and the reality which allows no room for freedom of choice. Just like the symbols of social codes, Mrs. Walker and Mrs. Costello, they revert back to this reality which is inescapable. Therefore, the recognition and realization of their identity brings in hope for individualism and disappointment for the improbability of obtaining social approval of individual freedom.

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