Innocent Daisy Miller

One of the biggest topics of debate among readers of “Daisy Miller: A Study”, by Henry James, is Daisy’s innocence throughout the story. Many readers would suggest that Daisy is being manipulative with her actions. Despite what they believe, Daisy is as innocent as she appears and Winterbourne originally thinks.

One of the reasons Daisy is innocent is because she is a “nouveau riche” girl traveling through an area full of old money. Because of this, she is not used to the culture and customs of the European countries she is traveling through. Her actions, such as walking around with young gentlemen and no chaperone, are not attempts to rebel against society or act out in any way. She simply does these things because she is not aware that they are looked down upon, and because this is the way she would act in America where the society is less strict. Daisy is also called “uncultivated” several times throughout the story, showing that those who know her are aware that she is not used to the type of society that Europe involves.

Daisy is also innocent because she means no harm with her actions. Winterbourne shows that he thinks this way when he is talking to Mrs. Walker in the carriage and says, “I suspect she means no harm” (417). When Winterbourne finds her and Giovanelli at the Colosseum and asks them why they are there, Daisy answers, “I was bound to see the Colosseum by moonlight” (427). She does not have a secret motive for anything she
does. Daisy is simply a free spirited young woman who is used to doing what she wants to do. She even tries to make up for the one time she possibly did do harm by having her mother pass along the message to Winterbourne that Daisy was never engaged. She was using that as a way to flirt with him, but because she was dying, she wanted to make sure that Winterbourne knew the truth.

Another reason Daisy is innocent is because being friendly with gentlemen is something she is used to in her daily life. During the conversation between Daisy and Winterbourne when they first meet, Daisy says, “In New York I had lots of society. Last winter I had seventeen dinners given me; and three of them were by gentlemen” (396). This shows that Daisy is accustomed to having gentlemen as company while she is at home, and therefore it can only be expected that she leads the same lifestyle while traveling. In fact, she probably doesn’t even realize the societal expectations until Mrs. Walker explains them to her, and even then she doesn’t understand why she should be expected to act differently than she would at home. Later in the same conversation from the first time Daisy and Winterbourne met, she once again says, “I have always had a great deal of gentlemen’s society” (396). This is Daisy’s way of explaining that she is so friendly with guys because that is how she has always been, not because she is trying to stand out or cause a scene.

Daisy’s innocence, or lack there of, will always be something that is debatable. There will always be at least one person who sees it differently than everyone else. However, judging from the evidence that I’ve found in the story, Daisy is as innocent as she appears and Winterbourne originally thinks.

I don’t always agree with your analysis, but this is clear and organized.