# A QUEER MIXTURE: LAWLESS PASSIONS IN "DAISY MILLER"

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> [On seeing a beautiful boy in Venice] Verily, nature is still at odds with propriety.
>
> (*Italian Hours*, 1909)

The inspiring, irritating elusiveness of queer. How to write a queer analysis? The temptation is to devise a queer method, a methodology, an algorithm, which would make the analysis more "legitimate" in academic terms. Or perhaps one should defy the method, "queer" the academic discourse itself, find in it a libidinal energy that would explode it from within. When Teresa de Lauretis inaugurated "queer theory" in a 1991 issue of *differences*, she was drawn to what she apparently saw as its disruptive potential, only to withdraw her support for the term a few years later, once it assumed the status of an easily identifiable trademark on the academic market. Jacketed into academic discourse, queer ceased to be functionally disruptive, albeit it is hard to think of queer otherwise than as disruptive and subversive. Living in the System's belly, queer should be acting as the leech, the parasite, the noise, the third. But how subversive can anything be, after all? There is a turning point where subversion becomes a new version of the very Same. "One can play the game of exclusion without leaving the system, on the contrary, entering it deeper and deeper," Serres warns; "the counter-norm is never a noise of the norm, it is the same norm inversed, I would say a twin one" (92).[1] Queer may simply be playing an outsider while remaining firmly stuck in the guts of the System—eaten up, digested, metabolized, the indigestible parts safely removed. Let this essay be dedicated, then, to indigestion.

"'She's got the dyspepsia,' said Randolph. 'I've got it too. Father's got it. I've got it worst!'" (28).[2] This almost sounds like a reading hint, an intima-

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[1] "[O]n peut jouer le jeu de l'exclusion sans sortir du système et, au contraire, en s'y enfonçant plus avant, [. . .] la contre-norme n'est jamais un bruit de la norme, elle est la même norme inversée, je veux dire jumelle" (92).

[2] There are two standard versions of "Daisy Miller": the earlier one was originally published in two numbers of *The Cornhill Magazine* in 1878; the later, revised version was part of the 1909 New York Edition. Most of the quotes I use come from an edition based on the 1878 text.

tion that the reading of James's text may result in dyspepsia, a failure to fully digest. Do not expect Reader's Digest, get ready for Reader's Indigest. And since "digestus" also means a collection of laws, the trope of indigestion may well point in the direction of the violation of the Law (storytelling, Roland Barthes tells us, is always "speaking one's conflicts with the [Father's] Law," 47). The novelette's world is a fatherless domain. To name the absent patriarch of the Miller family "Ezra" is a significant, if not ironic, gesture, given the biblical Ezra's status as "the scribe of the law of the God of heaven" (Ezra 7:21, King James Version).[3] In the absence of the Father (left behind "in that mysterious land of dollars and six-shooters"), Daisy becomes an index of the "lawless passions" which, as the narrator notes, romancers are familiar with. Apparently, she is the only member of the Miller family who does not suffer from physical dyspepsia; instead, she causes intellectual dyspepsia to Winterbourne and his highly exclusive "social circles." She proves indigestible to the societal animal: in keeping with the phallogocentric logic, the system must expel her, as indeterminacy is highly unhealthy. Daisy-the parasite gets infected with a deadly parasite herself. She must be fought off to end the system's dysfunction, to re-affirm the norm, to unblock the canals and restore the flux.

But Winterbourne is not safe himself. While he seeks to "fix" Daisy into the categories of his "chopping logic," the reader may be at pains to find a formula for Winterbourne—and end up equally perplexed. His name is significant, critics tell us; actually, it may be a little *too* significant. Winterbourne is a "cold analyzer," of course, a detached rationalist devoid of passion. He seems to be "fixed" as a character through his telling name which makes a reference to the moment of origin (birth) and is thus supposed to "explain" him. But the origin remains obscure, in fact: not a single word is spoken of Winterbourne's parents. What's in a name, after all? Daisy's "real name" is Annie. Her self-renaming shows her as much more aware of the conventional nature of name-giving and identity-construction than one might suspect. If innocence means the belief in the transparency and naturalness of the sign, then Daisy is not innocent: she knows that signs are opaque and manipulable. And Winterbourne knows the rules of the game, too: characteristically, in the 1909 edition of the text (unlike the earlier, 1879 one) he

In order to highlight some significant changes that James introduced in 1909, I will occasionally quote from the later version, identifying it either by the year of the original publication (1909) or by referring to it as the New York edition.

[3] The biblical high priest and legislator Ezra condemns illegitimate marriages between Jewish men and pagan women. What he thus condemns are "lawless passions," the illegitimate, tabooed channels of desire.



"artfully" asks Randolph to tell him his "honest name," and he gets "unvarnished truth" in response (1561). The wheel of truth and deception (as if the two could really be kept apart) starts revolving, the story begins.

The motives of Winterbourne's sojourn at Geneva remain notoriously obscure throughout the story: "[W]hen his friends spoke of him, they usually said that he was at Geneva, 'studying'" (4). Another explanation is suggested: he might be "extremely devoted to a lady" at Geneva, but the very existence of this lady is called into question right away: "Very few Americans—indeed I think none—had ever seen this lady, about whom there were some singular stories" (4). Winterbourne's attitude toward women is even more perplexing. In one of the few instances where the narrational "I" makes itself visible, we read curiously: "I may affirm that, with regard to the women who had hitherto interested him, it very often seemed to Winterbourne among the possibilities that, given certain contingencies, he should be afraid—literally afraid—of these ladies" (42). It is, apparently, a painful confession on the part of the narrator: the structure of the sentence is strained and convoluted, the inserted phrases push the intended information further and further away, as if trying to weaken its impact. Yet the fear of women is asserted twice: it was "literal" fear, we are told, not just a discursive ploy. The 1909 New York version deletes the narrator's "I," simplifies the sentence's structure, but significantly it adds the anticipation of the reader's derision: "Smile at such a betrayal though the reader may, it was a fact with regard to the women who had hitherto interested him that, given certain contingencies, Winterbourne could see himself afraid—literally afraid—of these ladies" (1588). What happened between the two versions of the sentence was Oscar Wilde's trial which made the general public restlessly suspicious of male friendships: to say "I may affirm" translates as "I know the person intimately enough to have this kind of information"; to say "it was a fact" locates the information safely in the realm of "objective truth." No less significant is the phrase "Winterbourne could see himself afraid"—clearly, Winterbourne is much more self-conscious here, as if detached from himself, monitoring himself "from the outside," through the inquisitive public eye.

My argument here is that Winterbourne's ambiguity (sexual or other) is commensurate with Daisy's. My queer, or at least queerish, reading of the text seems to re-affirm more traditional readings in which the reader's gaze remains fixed on the "ethos of American girlhood" impersonated by Miss Miller. Social convention, sexual manners, transgression—these have always been asserted as the novel's central problematic. A queer reading need not contradict such interpretations, it may simply redirect the reader's gaze to delineate less obvious circuits of desire. For desire is not a straight horizontal line running from a vertical subject to a vertical object, as the "norm" would

have it. "The norm," Serres remarks, "is a line perpendicular to the prostrate horizon [. . .]. What to say, then, of the right angle and its force, if not that its efficacy is at its maximum? The normal, like many of our concepts, is a peak, an optimal concept: maximum force, minimum discourse" (265).[4] If not straight, desire must be queer, ab-normal. The straight geometry of traditional concepts of desire was problematized by René Girard in his 1961 book *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, where he introduces the figure of the "mediator" of desire, "radiating toward both the subject and the object" (225), with the ensuing arrangement schematized as an erotic triangle. Girard was subsequently criticized by Sedgwick for his blindness to gender asymmetries, yet the original insight—the unsettling of the straight line and the introduction of "the third" or the medium—seems to remain valid. There are, moreover, other ways to complexify Girard's account: the triangular model, efficient as it is, may appear too simplistic and too static to represent the multifarious, ever-shifting configurations of desire which queer theory tries to delineate.

Arguably, Winterbourne's desire oscillates between Daisy and her nine-year-old brother.[5] Indeed, Randolph's role as the mediator—the third—is signalled through the narrative's chronology which has Winterbourne meet the boy first; it is *through* the boy that Winterbourne starts any communication with Daisy. Nowhere is Randolph's mediacy more conspicuous than in the scene of Daisy's introduction:

> "Tell me your name, my boy," he said.
> "Randolph C. Miller," said the boy, sharply. "And I'll tell you her name," and he levelled his alpenstock at his sister.
> [. . .] "Her name is Daisy Miller!" cried the child. "But that isn't her real name, that isn't her name on her cards.
> [. . .] "Her real name is Annie P. Miller," the boy went on.
> "Ask him *his* name," said his sister indicating Winterbourne.
> But on this point Randolph seemed perfectly indifferent; he continued to supply information with regard to his own family. (8)

[4] The full quotation in the original reads: "[L]a norme est une ligne perpendiculaire à l'horizon couché, l'orthogonal, debout, ne fait pas d'ombre, aussi peu que le soleil à midi juste. Que dire alors de l'angle droit et de sa force, sinon que son efficace est au maximum? Le normal, comme beaucoup de nos concepts, est une crète, un concept optimal: force maximale et discourse minimal" (265).

[5] Let me point out—for the spice of it rather than in the name of some obscure and vulgar numerology—the pervading presence of "threes" in James's text: Randolph's age is 3 times 3, which multiplied by three gives us Winterbourne's age, 27. Could three be the number of desire, the number of an eternal lack that longs for the phallic completion of four?



Winterbourne's attention gets attached to the conspicuous figure of the boy only to be redirected—in accordance with the normative logic of compulsive heterosexuality and the strict taboo on pedophilia—towards Daisy. That apparently casual, yet intensely uncanny scenes of men conversing with little boys are rather common in James has been noticed and commented upon by critics.[6] Although the pedophiliac element is banned from reaching the surface of the narrative, Randolph might be described, I daresay, as the object on which Winterbourne's desires hinge.

The boy, we are told, "was dressed in knickerbockers, with red stockings, which displayed his poor little spindle-shanks; he also wore a brilliant red cravat" (4). Daisy, by contrast, "was dressed in white muslin, with a hundred frills and flounces and knots of pale-coloured ribbon" (5-6). The pale-coloured ribbon can hardly compete with the intensity of the brilliant red cravat, fraught with covert sexual undertones. Clothes are often sites of intense emotional (or fetishistic) investment in James. In his *Autobiography* we find two anecdotes recording Thackeray's pleasantries "over our perversties of dress" (52). In one, the target of Thackeray's teasing is Henry himself, who—in an intensely felt moment of exposure (first in Mr. Brady's daguerreotype "establishment" and second, being addressed by Thackeray) becomes extremely conscious of his dress. The dress becomes an important marker of difference, albeit (and because) it is subjected to the rules of propriety, like language or behaviour. James concludes: "It had been revealed to me thus in a flash that we were somehow *queer*" (52). The little "perversity of dress" is translated into a broader sense of alienation, a "perversity of nature," as it were. In the other anecdote, on seeing Henry's sister (then eight years old) dressed in a crinoline dress, Thackeray exclaims: "Crinoline?—I was suspecting it! So young and so depraved!" (52). Thackeray's remark clearly betrays a pinch of fetishistic imagination: the association of a particular type of fabric with "depravity" locates dress in the realm of bodily drives, certainly due to the physical (metonymical) proximity of clothes and body. Dress may contain a message of "lawless passions," it may be a site of displaced desire or a source of illegitimate pleasure. Above all, dress has an almost infinite potential for visual and tactile pleasure.

The exchange that Winterbourne has with the "urchin" seems to affirm homosocial, more than national, solidarity: American men are the best men, American boys are the best boys. By identifying himself with the child ("Winterbourne wondered if he himself had been like this in his infancy, for he had been brought to Europe at about this age," 5), Winterbourne seeks to evade

[6] In "Henry James's Permanent Adolescence," for instance, John R. Bradley states that frequently James's characters enjoy "being in close physical proximity to, while having to remain emotionally and socially ambiguously distanced from, attractive younger males" (47).

the route of desire, since in traditional psychoanalytical accounts identification and desire are mutually exclusive, running linearly in opposite directions. Yet a number of textual clues seem to suggest that Winterbourne's desire, before locating Daisy as its apparently ultimate object, attaches itself to the figure of the little boy. That Randolph cannot be excluded from Winterbourne's circuit of desire should be clear from the seemingly innocent remark that he makes on first seeing Daisy: "How pretty *they* are" (6, emphasis added). Let us notice, too, that the first time he spots Randolph, Winterbourne is digesting contentedly his breakfast "served to him on a little table in the garden by one of the waiters, who looked like an 'attaché'" (4). The moment the man lights a cigar, the little boy comes up asking for sugar. There is a disturbing symmetry in the activities of the young man and the boy: both derive pleasure from an oral activity at the same time. Thus they both point to the oral drive, which—if we are to believe psychoanalysis—is where human sexuality begins. Winterbourne plays out his sexual regression through his declared identification with Randolph; but then the nearly teethless boy seems to take us even further back, to the stage of teethless infancy with its originary bliss of breast-sucking.

In the first scene of the novel we might be witnessing an almost ritualistic exchange of gifts between Winterbourne and Randolph. After Winterbourne hands the boy some sugar, the boy offers him Daisy in return: both gifts are to be consumed or eaten up, both promise some kind of pleasure, even if rather than satisfaction the gifts will actually bring the loss of teeth or mental dyspepsia. In this male-to-male trade "Master Randolph's sister" (as she is called later) becomes a lover's gift, a substitute, a fetish – like a lock of hair or a personal belonging. As his sister, Daisy *is* a part of Randolph in an important sense and as such she can serve perfectly well as a fetish, diverting Winterbourne's desire from the boy.[7] But if Winterbourne, in an act of mental regression, projects himself onto the figure of the boy, the boy seems to anticipate the figure of the mature man. "The child, who was diminutive for his years, had an aged expression of countenance, a pale complexion and sharp little features," while his voice is described as "immature and yet somehow not young" (4). What this striking description achieves is the affirmation of gender and age continuity (so important in the Greek tradition of pederasty), in contrast with the rupture between the male and the female vertical orders. Randolph's immature maturity renders him a figure of indeterminacy (which, like dyspepsia, seems to be a family trait of the Miller clan)—as much despised as compulsively desired by Winterbourne.[8]

[7] The girl attempts to reverse the gift by later offering Winterbourne her brother: "I wish *you* would stay with him" (11), yet the gift is refused after a moment of hesitation. On women as "objects of exchange" within the homosocial framework see, for example, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick *Between Men* (ch. 1) and Judith Butler *Gender Trouble* (ch. 2).



The age-and-gender continuity asserted through Winterbourne's uncanny relationship with Randolph constitutes the homosocial phallic order, described in terms of sharpness, pointedness and hardness. Randolph's features are sharp, his eyes penetrating. His voice is sharp and hard. The prop he carries around is "a long alpenstock, the sharp point of which he thrust into everything he approached" (4), just as Winterbourne will take pains to pinpoint Daisy throughout the story. Even the 1909 preface to the novelette makes a point on pointedness: James heard the original story from "amiable but not otherwise eminent ladies, who weren't in fact named, I think, and whose case had merely served to point a familiar moral; and it must have been just their want of salience that left a margin for the small pencil-mark inveterately signifying, in such connexions, 'Dramatise, dramatise!'" (1269). The writer's pencil (and let us keep in mind that "pencil" means "little penis" in Latin) leaves a mark on the margin of the ladies' lack of saliency. Daisy herself somehow lacks definiteness: in the 1909 version she is characterized as "having no idea whatever of 'form'"[9] (1560). Winterbourne accuses her face—"very forgivingly"—of a want of finish: "It wasn't at all insipid, yet at the same time wasn't pointedly—what point, on earth, could she ever make?—expressive" (1909, 1560). The inserted rhetorical question sounds almost contemptuous and sharply contrasts Daisy with Winterbourne's pursuit of "pointed" perception. In the 1909 preface to the story, again, James speaks of "a certain flatness in my poor little heroine's literal denomination" and admits that flatness "was the very sum of her story" (1270). Appropriately, Daisy's prop is her parasol, which acts as a screen (at one point it literally conceals Daisy and Giovanelli from Winterbourne's—and public—view), while her recurrent gesture is "smoothing" the flounces and ribbons on her and other women's dresses. Thus Daisy becomes associated with the hymenal female order, of which another attribute is the shawl that Daisy shares with her mother.

More than anything else, dress is a visible sign of the hide-and-seek game that we are all doomed to play in our social existence. Since the mid-nineteenth century men have pursued a simplicity and austerity of dress that would mark their "naturalness" (honesty, authenticity, straightness) and their

[8] Randolph's signs of "maturity" may also stem from his inclusion, one way or another, in the "adult," forbidden circuits of desire. Neither Daisy nor even her little brother may lay claim to innocence.

[9] James adds parenthetically: "with such a tell-tale appendage as Randolph where in the world would she have got it?" (1560), suggesting clearly that "form" has much to do with withholding information.

"down-to-the-business" attitude, where the business in question is more often than not the business of truth. Despite the imposition of more and more exacting social rules, it is women who have, on the whole, remained much more dress-conscious, and thus more aware of the interplay of revelation and concealment which is the stuff social life is made of. At every point, dress covers in order to uncover, displays in order to hide; even nakedness is already almost disguise. In an ideal world of transparent signs dress should reflect the identity or status of the wearer, but how could one possibly judge when dress is 'telling the truth' and when it is withholding it? "Given fashion's penchant for obfuscating the very distinction between deception and truthfulness," Dani Cavallato and Alexandra Warwick remark,

> even the boundary between "telling lies" and "telling the truth" becomes precarious and uncertain: the language of dress ironically intimates that if all telling, by dint of its complicity with strategies of narrative elaboration, is, at least potentially, a form of lying, then: "we always graze against the lie, as long as we are in narrative. Telling truths is already almost lying" (xviii, quote from T. Todorov).

James's narrative is a masterpiece precisely by avoiding its own truth. If "the truth" lies with naturalness, Daisy constantly strives after it, however, she is too shrewd to be innocent: "If I didn't introduce my gentlemen friends to mother," she remarks at one point very self-consciously, "I shouldn't think I was natural" (18). Too much artifice lies behind this innocent remark: clearly, she has a hard time trying to be natural. Daisy's is a different kind of truth—not the truth of transparent signs and straight lines but the truth of opacity and obliqueness, the truth of indeterminacy, the truth of the erotic—which amounts to saying that she is natural precisely by *not* being natural, i.e. by being conscious of what "natural" is and how it can be achieved. In the New York edition she is described as the wearer of a face (1560), a phrasing which uncannily puts the face (a synecdoche of nakedness, through which it is also associated with truth) on a par with the mask.[10] Consequently, the distinction between natural Daisy and artful Winterbourne does not stand criticism: they both participate in the play of truth/identity versus deception/desire, circulating their energies between the drive for explanation and the drive for satisfaction. How can there be any truth in the fabric of signifiers that Daisy's world is made of?

James's fiction oscillates constantly between revealing the truth and concealing it, or indeed it would be more appropriate to say it makes the very notion of truth rather dubious. There are always conflicting claims for "the truth," an incessant interplay of verity and deceit. Each "truth" the narrative seeks to assert turns out to be deceitful at a different level. (It is worth noting that in mid-nineteenth century "queer" was a slang word for "fake," antonym to "straight" construed as "genuine.") David Minter argues in this respect that

> [. . .] James's insistence on knowing every mind through another mind, and his habit of treating even the pretence of knowing clearly and directly as dangerous, illicit, or vampirish, had social as well as epistemological and aesthetic roots. He avoided primal social and economic scenes as well as primal sexual scenes, not simply out of reticence or because he was unfamiliar with them, but also because he thought of language and sensibility as always already too deeply conditioned by and implicated in them. [. . .] From the *Portrait* on, language and sensibility were for him at once necessary and unreliable—the locus of illumination and understanding, and the locus of error and deceit. In his style, in which engagement and evasion coexist, he enacts the predicament of a writer who recognizes that his most essential tools are potentially deceitful and destructive as well as creative. (42)

But were we to delineate the dynamics of revelation and concealment in the story, would that be queer enough? Would that not be falling back on the essentialist assumptions of some earlier gay and lesbian criticism? Without fixed (sexual) identities, can the movement of (self-)revelation and (self-)concealment be still conceivable, or is it reserved for coming-out narratives in which the true identity is finally affirmed and displayed to the hungry eyes of the world? What I envision is a mode of being constituted by the constant dynamics of revelation and concealment with nothing to reveal or conceal. (Beckett spoke of "the expression that there is nothing to express [. . .] together with the obligation to express.") *There is* revelation and concealment, yet there is *nothing* to reveal or conceal, no essential identity, sexual or other.[11] On this account, identity may be a side-effect of these two movements, emerging precisely at the point of their intersection, the infinitely thin line between the self-revealing future and the self-concealing past, the elusive present which is never fully present.

Truth-as-identity (or identity-as-truth) has a double edge: it bestows a psychological and social power that cannot be underestimated, but at the same time it denies the fundamental dissemination of desire as well as the erotics of deceit. The movement of identification is a movement toward truth, while the movement of desire is a never-ending discovery of deception (the object promises satisfaction but never gives it). In other words, possessing an identity promises ultimate satisfaction and thus threatens to halt permanently the

[10] In the same, 1909 version Daisy is said to be "composed [. . .] of charming little parts that didn't match and that made no *ensemble*" (1560). Where truth is construed in terms of "wholeness" and consistency, Daisy—as a site of indeterminacy—constitutes a hole rather than a whole.



[11] It is a kind of subversive phenomenology whose analogue I can only find in some Eastern philosophies.

movement of desire. The interplay of truth and sex was finely analyzed in Foucault's *History of Sexuality* and taken up by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who aptly summarizes the French theorist's argument: "[. . .] sexuality per se comes into existence [. . .] during the long process, culminating in the nineteenth century, by which, as sex learned an infinity of new paths into discourse, the value of Truth itself – in particular the Truth of individual identity – came to be lodged in the uncovery or expression of the Truth of sexuality" ("Gender Criticism"). Foucault himself says: "The essential point is that sex was not only a matter of sensation and pleasure, of law and taboo, but also of truth and falsehood, that the truth of sex became something fundamental, useful, or dangerous, precious or formidable: in short, that sex was constituted as a problem of truth" (56). And it is precisely through the problematic of truth that James's narrative approaches sexuality. His delineations of the flows of desire seem to suggest that desire never tells the truth—because it *has* no truth to tell, unlike the identity discourse which gasps for truths. In an attempt to save Daisy from a scandal, the proper Mrs Walker confesses: "I don't want to be clever—I only want to be true!" (1909, 1583).[12] By contrast, Daisy remains a hopeless non-believer in such professions of an adamant adherence to truth: "[. . .] I don't believe it," she exclaims when warned about society's hostile reaction to her flirts. "They are only pretending to be shocked. They don't really care a straw what I do" (46). Her little brother is just as bad—his stance is that of an ultimate skeptic, if we are to believe Daisy's statement that he "doesn't believe anything" (47).

If the rhetoric of truth is historically linked to the promise of transparency, the erotic lies with the opaque, contradicting the claims of (the) truth. "Is not the most erotic portion of a body *where the garment gapes?*" Roland Barthes asks in *The Pleasure of the Text*. "[I]t is intermittence," he continues, "[. . .] which is erotic: the intermittence of skin flashing between two articles of clothing (trousers and sweater), between two edges (the open-necked shirt, the glove and the sleeve); it is this flash itself which seduces, or rather: the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance" (9-10). It is precisely where the erotic of the text dwells as well. In his depiction of Winterbourne, the ghostly narrator intimates: "When his enemies spoke of him they said—but after all he had no enemies: he was extremely amiable and generally liked" (4). Nowhere is James's erotic play with the reader—the game of hide-and-seek—more conspicuous than in this one sentence. Clearly, the transparency of the story's truth is denied here, a piece of information is deliberately withheld, evidently something is being concealed. "What I should say," the narrator

[12] The 1878 version reads: "I don't wish to be clever, I wish to be *earnest*!" (36).



continues, "is simply that when certain persons spoke of him they conveyed that the reason of his spending so much time at Geneva was that he was extremely devoted to a lady who lived there [. . .]" (4). The normative "should" at the beginning of this substitute statement marks the proper as opposed to the improper: there are things I *should* say and things I *shouldn't*. Next the narrator provides a piece of information that he immediately contradicts ("Very few Americans—indeed I think none—had ever seen this lady, about whom there were some singular stories"; 4), and he never really gives us the reason for Winterbourne's stay in Geneva other than his "attachment for the little capital of Calvinism" and youthful friendships which "were a source of great satisfaction to him" (4). We are as far from the unveiling of "the truth" as we can be in a realist short story. If it is true that the pleasure of the text is "an Oedipal pleasure (to denude, to know, to learn the origin and the end), if it is true that every narrative (every unveiling of the truth) is a staging of the (absent, hidden, or hypostatized) father" (Barthes 10), then in "Daisy Miller" we are denied the final satisfaction (which entails the final disappointment as well), the final unveiling of the (Father's) truth. Rather than a seamless and transparent truth, we receive a textured, opaque fabric in which the dashes (see quotes above) expose the cuts, the erotic intermittences, we receive "the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance." It is the infinite movement of deception, the fragmentation of desire that accounts for the narrative's erotic potential.

As long as appearance and disappearance are kept apart as two distinct and separate movements, the former will stand for truth (legitimizing, for instance, the claims of gay identity politics), and the latter for deception (staying in the closet). Ascertaining *the* truth about oneself involves self-exposure, self-reduction to a hieroglyphic representation of, say, gay identity. My impression is that James's reaction to Wilde's trial (when Henry called Oscar "an unclean beast") was not so much an abhorrence of sodomy as, above all, an abhorrence of *self-exposure*, of public performance as homosexual, of "posing sodomite." Apparently, James did not condemn same-sex affection as such, but rather the politics of ostensibility, through which the (defiled) creature named "homosexual" is born and exposed to the curious public eye. This does *not* mean that James places himself on the side of the newly emerging "closet," what he rejects in the first place is a social framework that forces the polar distinction between the "closet" and the "coming out." He seemed to defend a different type of social relations in which what we today mean by "being gay" was precisely *not* what we mean today by being gay. In the *Autobiography* James displays a profound nostalgia for the "old ways" and a fascination with relations—the infinitely complex and fluid relations rather than stable identities. "During Oscar Wilde's trial," we learn from John

R. Bradley, "James even returned his copy of *Modern Ethics* [Symonds's defence of pederasty] in a registered envelope, on the extraordinarily self-conscious grounds that 'These are days in which one's modesty is, in every direction, much exposed, and one should be thankful for every veil that one can hastily snatch up or that a friendly hand precipitately muffles one withal'" (54). It is veils that James is after, at the end of the day, not the unveiling. What is also worth noting here is the peculiar use of the word "modesty," a usage which almost equates modesty with immodesty, as it is usually the latter that one would seek to conceal.

The whole truth could never—should never—be told. But if you cannot tell the *whole* truth, can you tell any truth at all? The narrator, nearly absent from the text yet all the more visible precisely due to this minimal presence, is far from being conclusive on any point at all. Out of the six direct statements he makes, in three he manifests his uncertainty or corrects himself ("I hardly know," "I think," "what I should say"). In one instance (deleted in the later version) he says he may affirm Winterbourne's fear of women, thus offering personal testimony about the latter's intimate life. In the remaining two or three appearances the narrator simply marks his presence and signals the literary nature of the text: he refers to something he has mentioned before. On one such occasion we read: "But he himself [Winterbourne] in fact must speak in accordance with gallantry. The finest gallantry, here, was simply to tell her the truth; and the truth, for Winterbourne, as the few indications I have been able to give have made him known to the reader, was that Daisy Miller should take Mrs Walker's advice" (35). Just as Mrs Walker desires to be *true* in protecting Daisy from scandal, so the rigid rules of the "finest gallantry" invoke the rhetoric of truth; the truth, however, is immediately relativized ("the truth, for Winterbourne...").[13] Besides, the narrator acknowledges limitations in his description of Winterbourne (apparently *some* indications he has not been able to give) and is careful to assert that what he offers is merely a *way* of knowing Winterbourne, not *knowing* him. There are multiple ways of making a person known to the public, there is a web of indications and silences, of exposures and withdrawals that constitute a persona.

The narrational "I" eroticizes James's text by introducing the erotic intermittence that Roland Barthes refers to in the passage quoted above. The marginally present narrator is the seductive flash where the text(ure) gapes, promising the naked truth and always withholding it—not because he knows the truth and teasingly keeps it for himself, but because truth itself can only flash between the edges of expression and repression. The "I" creates a slit in the apparently smooth surface of the text, a vertical cut which tears the horizontal expanse of the fabric. The narrator's presence-in-absence is an example of Barthes's "staging of an appearance-as-disappearance," making the narrator into an apparition rather than a flesh-and-blood creature. Ghosts are neither fully present, nor fully absent: they appear in order to disappear and disappear in order to obstinately return. (Let us notice, parenthetically, that ghosts usually need some kind of apparel, they do not appear naked.) Up to the nineteenth century the creature we now label homosexual enjoyed a ghostly kind of existence which did not force a stable identity onto him but instead created a spectral aura around him. The spectre lives in the uncanny territory of the middle, the in-between: "The Devil or Good God?" Serres asks. "Exclusion? Inclusion? [. . .] The answer is a spectre, a spectrum, a continuum. No more will we answer 'yes' or 'no' to the questions of belonging. Inside or Outside? Between yes and no, between zero and one" (78).[14]

John Fletcher argues that the "uncanny spectrality" of James's ghost stories (of which "Daisy Miller" is not considered one) provides a queer space for homoerotic desires to dwell in. Could "Daisy Miller" be regarded as a ghost story, none the less? There is at least the spectre of Lord Byron haunting the places and characters. Appropriately, the ghost never shows itself fully, but merely signals its presence by casting a shadow. Let us notice, first, that in moving from Switzerland to Italy James's characters follow—unawares—Byron's steps. Besides, the castle towering over the lake at Vevey is the setting of Byron's *The Prisoner of Chillon* (1816), a passionate defense of the "Eternal Spirit of the chainless Mind," Liberty. Winterbourne, who repeats the story of Bonnivard's imprisonment in the castle to Daisy, seems to symbolically assume the role of the bard. This identification becomes even more conspicuous when, standing in front of the Colosseum at night, Winterbourne murmurs "Byron's famous lines, out of 'Manfred'" (48). The nocturnal scene described in Byron's lines is ghostly itself: "The dead," Manfred observes, "[...] still rule / Our spirits from their urns.—" (300-1), which is another way of saying that the dead are somehow still alive.[15]

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[13] Notice Winterbourne's contradictory actions that can only be explained by his sado-masochistic inclinations: he warns Daisy of the societal consequnces of her reckless behaviour even as he urges her to transgress the social norms; he craves to categorize her even as he enjoys the pain of not being able to do so.



[14] "Diable ou Bon Dieu? Exclusion, inclusion? [. . .] La réponse est un spectre, une bande, un continuum. Nous ne répondrons plus jamais par oui ou par non aux questions de l'appartenance. Dedans ou Dehors? Entre oui et non, entre zéro et un [. . .]" (78).

[15] Let us notice the regressive movement, the ghostly nature of intertextuality: James quotes Winterbourne murmuring Byron whose Manfred recalls in a soliliquy a past experience which negates the deadly absence of the ancient dead. Manfred's words may indeed be read as a comment on intertextuality.

James must have been aware of the aura of scandal that had surrounded Byron in his lifetime and long after. He must have known of Byron's incestuous relationship with his half-sister Augusta Leigh and the affair with his Greek page Loukas. Many years after writing "Daisy," having browsed through Byron's unpublished correspondence that he referred to as "masses of ancient indecency," James burnt a stack of his own letters, notebooks and manuscripts to "frustrate as utterly as possible the post-mortem exploiter" (Ravitch 124). The acute sense of—and concern about—his own afterlife makes James into a spectral figure even in his life-time: by burning the letters he releases his own ghost-autobiography that would haunt James critics ever after (although the act can be seen as an attempt to ultimately control his literary afterlife and guard his post-mortem privacy). In the 1870s—much more than today—Byron served as a convenient index to the blending of genius and perversion, noble elevation and satanic transgression. By no means do we have to set as our task the unearthing of Byron's sexuality; I agree with Michael Ravitch in this respect, who writes that "[. . .] an explicit catalogue of his perversions doesn't bring us any closer to the truth of his sexuality. It was the dynamic of secrecy and revelation that really turned him on; the actual content of his secrets is ultimately beside the point" (128). John R. Bradley takes a similar stance on James when he declares: "We should, I think, be glad for James's holding back, should resist from making him crude and explicit. His moral and sexual ambiguity is the source of much of his elusiveness and complexity [. . .]" (67). Ghosts must remain ambiguous and elusive if they are to preserve their privileges as ghosts.

The ultimate spectral, or rather vampirish, figure in James's narrative is the weird courier Eugenio. With a name that etymologically goes back to the Greek "good spirit," he presents a rather ambivalent figure. He is described briefly as "a tall handsome man, with superb whiskers and wearing a velvet morning-coat and a voluminous watch-guard" (12). Let us concentrate on dress, again, as it seems to be a fruitful strategy with James. Though never unambiguous in its symbolic associations, velvet "seems ideally suited to appeal to the world of the senses" (Cavallaro and Warwick, 70). There are two connotations of the fabric that I wish to foreground here. One is the vampiric dress-code which had Victorian vampires dress in black velvet coats, and the other has to do with the immense fetishistic potential of the material. "'Velvet' is everywhere in James," Michael Moon observes, "once one becomes aware of it" (753). The critic derives the writer's fascination with the fabric from the bourgeois culture of his childhood which "may be said to have had its own intense velvet fetish" (752). Eugenio's tacit association with "unlawful pleasures" (his intimacy with Daisy) adds to his being an alien, an index to the threatening outside: at one point he looms out of darkness and announces the hour in "a voice with a foreign accent."



Eugenio is a figure around which the numerous tropes of disorder and displacement are organized. His status in the Miller family is at least dubious: clearly, he usurps the power belonging rightfully to the absent Father. The family itself is exemplary of an entropic disintegration of order: given the default of the patriarchal power centre and the ineffectual figure of the mother, the Millers represent familial dysfunction that may reflect the threat of social anarchy, a token of which might be nameless and "lawless passions," unrestrained and gone rampant. Reflecting on Daisy, Winterbourne at one point confesses that "it was painful to hear so much that was pretty and undefended and natural assigned to a vulgar place among the categories of disorder" (44). At another level, the element of disorder finds expression in bodily dysfunction: insomnia and dyspepsia seem to be the Millers' hereditary traits. When Winterbourne inquires about the Miller family, Mrs Costello replies disparagingly: "An obstreperous little boy and a preposterous big courier?" It is worth observing that etymologically obstreperous means "noisy," preposterous—"in the wrong order"—one more clue to associate Eugenio (together with the family he nearly fathers) with a disruptive, subversive element. The Millers together with their courier exemplify an endless series of substitutes and displacements, which might be said to properly constitute the order of desire. David Kirby has remarked tersely that "[i]n psychoanalytic terms, each word, each act, each memory is both itself and something else" (3). Given the internal split, a displacement—however minimal—of the self, which results in the impossibility of ascertaining any final identity, each character in the story is simultaneously something more and something less than he or she appears: Daisy is natural and yet crafty, Winterbourne is interested in Daisy but in a rather intellectual manner, Randolph is a child "yet somehow not young," Eugenio is a courier who pretends to be a father, and so on, and so forth.

Indeed, Daisy seems to enact the Electra complex by flirting with her substitute father. "She is a young lady," Mrs. Costello announces, "who has an intimacy with her mamma's courier," to which Winterbourne responds, in one of the flashes of sudden understanding: "Ah there it was!" (1909, 1565). If Daisy takes any notice of the young American, it is because she can use him in the little games she plays with Eugenio. When, for example, she expresses her wish to go on a night boat-trip alone with Winterbourne, the courier

> [. . .] looked for a moment at Winterbourne—the latter seemed to make out in his face a vague presumptuous intelligence as at the expense of their companions—and then solemnly and with a bow, "As Mademoiselle pleases!" he said.
>
> But Daisy broke off at this. "Oh I hoped you'd make a fuss! I don't care to go now." (1909, 1572)

The inserted phrase describing "a vague presumptuous intelligence as at the expense of their companions"[16] sounds somewhat mysterious: there seems to be a disturbing affinity, a secret understanding between the two men, a knowledge that they do not want to share with the others and that alienates them from the societal world they inhabit. If we adopt Michael Moon's argument that James's recurrent theme is that of initiation into "perverse circles," the glint of recognition that unites the two men for an instant might point to an affinity between two adepts of the same secret order, two subjects of the lawless passions that permeate James's narrative without ever being named. As men, they both occupy the position of agents in the homosocial continuum: they organize the social fabric around their hungry egos and create circuits of desire over which they preside. Given the absence of Ezra B. Miller, Eugenio and Winterbourne are the only members of the privileged male world ("Men are welcome to the privilege!" Mrs Costello remarks caustically; 26) who can claim any patriarchal authority, yet both fail in this role: the former is an impostor, while the latter remains a figure of utter ambiguity.

I have dedicated this essay to indigestion. With Eugenio's alleged vampirism we return to the motif of eating, or more specifically to some form of covert cannibalism inscribed secretly into the story. The action starts with Winterbourne's breakfast, and draws to a close after his having dined at a friend's villa; thus the story moves, as it were, along the alimentary tract, from the mouth to the anus (a path not unknown to the flows of desire). The villa is located on the Caelian Hill, while the climatic scene takes place in the Colosseum. Through a mechanism of linguistic displacement (of the kind Freud noticed repeatedly in his patients' dreams), "Caelian" might come as a substitute for "celiac," and the Coloss(eum) for the colon. With its "villainous miasma" the Colosseum possesses a cloacal aura that entitles one to see it as "the anus of the city." Its ring-like shape and rooflessness (openendedness) are no less suggestive. Tradition has associated the Colosseum with the arena of Christian martyrdom, and it is precisely the motif of being eaten up that Daisy takes up in her conversation with Giovanelli: "Well, he looks at us as one of the old lions or tigers may have looked at the Christian martyrs!" It is by no means clear who is meant by the personal pronoun here. As Daisy and her Italian friend are seated at the base of a big cross, it is probably the figure of Jesus Christ they refer to, which would subvert the legend in a very ironic way: this time Christians (personified by Christ here) are the ones who cannibalistically devour the undisciplined Daisy.

But, through a kind of metonymic association, the "he" in Daisy's utterance might also refer to Winterbourne. She exclaims, the moment she spots

[16] The earlier version reads "the latter thought he was smiling" (22).



him: "Why it was Mr. Winterbourne! He saw me and he cuts me!" (48; "cuts me dead" in the New York edition). Let us recall at this point Winterbourne's "chopping logic" with which he has sought to render Daisy explicable as well as the exchange of gifts at the outset of the story, an exchange in which Randolph offers Daisy for Winterbourne's delectation. The girl's death is, in a metaphorical sense, a result of Winterbourne's "cutting," or—in a broader sense—of organized social (Christian) cannibalism. It is at the moment of "cutting" Daisy that Winterbourne experiences one of his little illuminations that grant him a momentary sense of security and legibility:

> Winterbourne felt himself pulled up with final horror now—and, it must be added, with final relief. It was as if a sudden clearance had taken place in the ambiguity of the poor girl's appearances and the whole riddle of her contradictions had grown easy to read. She was a young lady about the *shades* of whose perversity a foolish puzzled gentleman need no longer trouble his head or his heart. That once questionable quantity *had* no shades—it was a mere black little blot. (1909, 1593)

At this point Winterbourne returns to the world of right angles (the cross looms over the scene, let us remember) and moral righteousness, the world of the norm. In a passage that I have quoted partially above, Michel Serres defines the norm as a "line perpendicular to the prostrate horizon." The erect orthogonal, he adds, "does not produce shadow, just as the sun at midday" and talks about its efficacy: "maximum force, minimum discourse" (265).[17] Winterbourne returns to a world of no shades, in which Daisy becomes a perfectly readable figure (which, in fact, she has always been to people like Mrs Costello). In a flash of illumination things "get straight" again in Winterbourne's eyes, at least for a short while. (Given my argument above that the Colosseum is metonymically related to the anus, it is an ironic coincidence that "rectum" means "straight" in Latin.) It is a world in which two vertical gender orders remain perfectly distinct, joined by an orthogonal, cross-gender line of desire.

The light imagery in this key passage of James's narrative is worth a closer look, too. As Winterbourne approaches the Colosseum, we are told that "[t]here was a waning moon in the sky, and her radiance was not brilliant, but she was veiled in a thin cloud-curtain which seemed to diffuse and equalise it" (47). This cloud-curtain—which seems to be evocative of the hymenal order I mentioned above, just like Daisy's parasol—dramatizes what Winterbourne perceives as female shapelessness or indeterminacy, the lack of pointedness he discovers in Daisy. The 1879 version of one of the sentences

[17] For the original French text see footnote 4.

quoted above reads: "It was as if a sudden illumination had been flashed upon the ambiguity of Daisy's behaviour and the riddle had become easy to read" (48). The mental flash which makes things legible stands in opposition to the diffused moonlight of the setting, it "pierces through" the cloudy veil, declaring a momentary victory of chopping logic over the "ambiguity of the girl's appearances."

The victory can never be permanent in Winterbourne's case, however, for he himself is too much of an ambiguous figure. The text's queer, unspecified territory lies between Daisy's undecidability and Winterbourne's indecision. Winterbourne oscillates incessantly between the right-angled norm and the queer regions beyond, between the intelligible world of signifieds and the obscure world of signifiers. His phallogocentric drive to pin down and fix is only matched by his masochistic desire to be continually disappointed and teased by Daisy's (and even his own) indeterminacy. He provokes and enjoys Daisy's excesses, even though he condemns them, when forced, as improper. Daisy is right, Winterbourne *is* "a queer mixture" (23). He fails as a "classical" male hero because—while set firmly in the male homosocial, phallogocentric order—he fails to act as a patriarch in that order. If homosocial affection is legitimate within the patriarchal arrangement, the system withdraws its patronage over male-to-male relations as soon as one fails to take up one's prescribed position within it. Winterbourne is "man enough" to understand the world in phallogocentric terms (and structure his relations accordingly), yet "not man enough" to become the Father, the Patriarch, the "scribe of the law of the God of heaven"—which, to my mind, is one of the queerest moments in the narrative. There is an unexpected affinity between Winterbourne and Daisy in that they both function as signs of ambiguity and figures of disorder, set against the rules of propriety. For queer manifests itself in figures of disorder and transgression, in curved lines and secret circuits of desire. Queer defies right angles and straight lines, favouring the oblique, the obscure, the uncertain. As an agent of the illegible and indigestible, it is still at odds with propriety.

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