

**“You Are Too Guilty, Then!”:  
Repression of Sexuality in *Daisy Miller***

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*Daisy Miller: A Study* brought Henry James recognition as a writer as soon as it appeared in the June and July 1878 issues of *the British Cornhill Magazine*. Although the initial attention of the reader was directed to the heroine, the early James's main concern was the international situation. It is true that James says in the preface to the New York Edition in 1909, “my supposedly typical little figure was of course pure poetry, and had never been anything else” (viii), but we should not take this statement at face value. The author of *Daisy Miller* was not yet the master of psychological realism, so it is reasonable to regard the story as about the international theme rather than about one character.

To compare the two societies and stress the difference between them, James presented a “typical” American girl as an enigma to the Europeanized Americans, especially to the Jamesian center of consciousness, Frederick Winterbourne. This is how he formed a framework of the story, and established a solid binary opposition between America and Europe. The former signifies innocence and independence; the latter convention and repression. Because Daisy Miller is a “type,” he could make her as innocent as possible, so much so that Leslie A. Fiedler says that she is “mythically innocent” (312). Besides, since he did not have to develop her character, he could use freely the image of his (almost only) familiar young woman, his beloved dead cousin “Minnie” Temple (note the rhyme with Daisy's real name “Annie”). When one critic reconstructs the figure of Minnie Temple to show how James changed her image to create Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady*, it turns out that the original image of the woman is surprisingly close to Daisy's. We also might mention here that all of James's family members except him hated his cousin because of her “Daisy Millerism.” In short, his position and Winterbourne's were much alike (Habegger 126-49).

Even though the success of the story depends on the characterization of the heroine, to present a main character as a “type” is a double-edged sword. In fact, critics including the author himself have agreed that this story does not have much importance to be discussed because of the flatness (James, Preface vi; Lukacs 209) while they have implicitly admitted that it keeps unity as a work of art.

The purpose of this essay is to consider this “double-edgedness.” For this purpose, I would like to argue both aesthetic and ideological problems of the story. By the aesthetic

problem, I mean that this story loses unity in the process of the author's efforts to make a "type" in order to develop the international theme. And by the ideological problem, I mean that despite the fact that James exposed how sexuality was repressed in the nineteenth century Europeanized-American society, he himself could not escape the repressive ideology. These two problems are interwoven in this novel, probably because the fictional world is very close to the author. The international theme was a personal topic for him; he set the frame and put a female character whose image is close to the only woman he loved in his entire life; and the observer of the girl is in the situation like his own. Viewed in this light, it seems reasonable to assume that the distance between the author and the story cannot be controlled so strictly as has been presupposed by the critics. To consider these points, I would like to begin my argument by seeing how James exposes that sexuality was repressed in the Europeanized-American society.

Mrs. Costello and Mrs. Walker are the representatives of the Europeanized-American society in the novel. Their attitudes toward Daisy are slightly different, but their final judgment is same. Mrs. Costello rejects being introduced to Daisy because the young woman is going to the Château de Chillon with Winterbourne unchaperoned. Mrs. Walker decides to cease her relations with Daisy when the American girl brings her Italian friend Giovanelli to her party very late. Add to this similarity, both of them advise Winterbourne not to associate with Daisy. These examples suggest that they become sensitive and repressive to Daisy's sexuality. Since we do not see any other Europeanized-American woman in the story, we should conclude that the society is repressive to feminine sexuality. This point becomes clearer when we understand that the two women's sexuality is also repressed in such a society, as Cathy N. Davidson points out: Mrs. Walker is "mouthpiece for a society which channels sexual energy into oral activity" (359); and Mrs. Costello "even tries to preserve a socially approved virginal innocence" (363).

The two older women's motto to survive in such a society is to behave in accordance with the European custom, for as long as they follow the code, they can be unconscious of the repression. Since custom is constructed socially, we can say that they are compelled (and compel others) to perform their conventional gender role properly. Therefore they are upset when Daisy "violates codes of gender-appropriate behavior" (Pollak 7; see also Fryer 97-100). In fact, all they want from Daisy is her respect for and obedience to the gender role. In this sense, they do not really care about her nature in itself except for Winterbourne who is in love with her (Grant 22). Daisy is right when she says, "They don't really care a straw what I do" (36). James, when he wrote this story, rightly understood that gender is socially constructed and represses sexuality.

Let us see the case of Winterbourne next. It seems that his gender role is not so repressive as a woman's: "Of course a man may know every one," Mrs. Costello says, "Men are welcome to the privilege!" (22). Even so, however, he is supposed to behave as a

gentleman. Therefore he has to make his relation to an older, clever foreign woman in Geneva a secret. Here is another good example to show the freedom and limitation of his gender:

[Mrs. Costello says to Winterbourne,] "I really think that you had better not meddle with little American girls that are uncultivated, as you call them. . . . You are too innocent."

"My dear aunt, I am not so innocent," said Winterbourne, smiling and curling his moustache.

"You are too guilty, then!" (15)

This scene suggests not only that he is a sexually experienced man (Fogel 56-57), but also that he is "too guilty" if he knows what he is doing. He is a gentleman who is supposed to respect the feminine gender role. When he says that he likes Daisy, Mrs. Walker responds: "All the more reason that you shouldn't help her to make a scandal" (29). Since gender is socially constructed, his gender role has to be a complement to the feminine gender role. As a result, his attitude toward Daisy becomes patronizing, and he cannot behave freely like Giovanelli. Thus his gender role functions to repress his sexuality. After all, he is also "a victim of Victorian sexual ideology" (Fogel 59; see also Home 243).

It is natural that a young man like Winterbourne feels like escaping from the repression. His infamous "great relish for feminine beauty" (10) can be regarded as the exposure of his repressed attraction to feminine sexuality. In fact, he is sexually attracted to Daisy from the first (Kennedy 145): he falls in love with her immediately and dreams of "going off" with her somewhere" (20). His association with Daisy exhibits his "impatience with the stringent code of Geneva" (Gargano 117; see also Cowdery 80). Therefore, despite (or because of) the older women's counterarguments, he tries to believe in Daisy's innocence. The central character's continuous attraction to the heroine makes this tale a kind of love story. The love story, however, remains a monologic drama in Winterbourne's mind until the climax of the novel because of the lack of his commitment to the actual relationship with Daisy. What prevents his court is his dilemma: his love for her means that he is sexually attracted to her, but the sexual attraction compels him to be conscious of his internalized gender role. This dilemma explains that their relationship deteriorates in Rome in which the social code is exteriorized more strongly (Page 593).

To deal with the dilemma, Winterbourne tries to categorize Daisy (Bell 59): "she was only a pretty American flirt. Winterbourne was almost grateful for having found the formula that applied to Miss Daisy Miller" (12). It is clear that the categorization is his effort to put her into either of the two gender roles—"an innocent girl or a fallen woman" (Allen 53). So considered, it is natural that his trial of categorization of Daisy is fruitless (Barnett 285;

Gargano 116), for as long as he is attracted to her sexuality, it is impossible for him to represent or internalize the sexuality in terms of gender roles. When it finally becomes possible in the Colosseum, he is not in love with her any more. A triumph of rationalism is only achieved at the cost of sexuality (Davidson 358).

Because of the observer's love for the heroine, sexuality in the novel always foregrounds a problem about gender, and vice versa. Daisy's sexuality makes Winterbourne conscious of his own gender role as well as hers; his consciousness of gender roles, in turn, foregrounds his lack of masculinity. Examples abound. He avoids male competition and takes a parental stance toward Daisy (Weisbuch 79-80): he does not go to see her soon after he arrives in Rome for the reason that he hears that there are a lot of suitors around her; when a parasol hides Daisy's and Giovanelli's faces from him in the park, he walks away from them; and when he learns from his friend that Daisy and Giovanelli were in one of the cabinets of the Doria Palace five minutes ago (which means that he knows Daisy's absence), he goes to visit Mrs. Miller to whom to tell on her daughter. He is often emasculated by Daisy because of his obedience to his gender role which she criticizes as his "stiffness": "'I wish you would flirt with me and me only,' said Winterbourne. 'Ah! thank you, thank you very much; you are the last man I should think of flirting with. As I have had the pleasure of informing you, you are too stiff'" (31). We should also note here that his status as a rich young man who does not have to work for living is in itself emasculating: "From the vantage point of nineteenth-century American culture," one critic points out, "there is something slightly effete in Winterbourne's lack of occupation" (Fogel 55; see also Weisbuch 69).

Daisy's sexuality makes Winterbourne self-conscious of his gender role, which makes him "stiff," which makes him emasculated, which makes him try to categorize Daisy, which makes him misunderstand her. This is how his gender role accomplishes the repression of his sexuality. He cannot escape the prison of gender, and realizes only after her death that "he had done her injustice" (39). This story does not end simply with his guilt feelings, however. He says to his aunt, "You were right in that remark that you made last summer. I was booked to make a mistake. I have lived too long in foreign parts" (39). When thus he attributes his "mistake" to his long stay in Europe, this romantic observer's dilemma between sexuality and gender is connected to, or, more precisely, absorbed into the international theme of the story written by Henry James.

Seeing this dynamics of the text, it seems that we should regard this novel as cleverly constructed. If we recall that we have seen how the characters' sexuality is repressed in the story, however, then one question arises: doesn't the very dynamics of the text to absorb a love story into the international theme of the novel repress sexuality? If so, the author's typification or mystification of Daisy to make her a tragic heroine is similar to Winterbourne's categorization or patronization of Daisy, isn't it? And if so, since James must have known what he was doing, he was too guilty, wasn't he? Even if he was the person who "was

perturbed by the inequality of the sexes in his contemporary culture” (Cowdery 74), it does not necessarily mean that his novel is free from the ideology which represses sexuality.

Critics have presupposed the difference between the author and Winterbourne. This stance is in itself right, but, since our purpose is to consider the relationship between the narrative and the narrated, we have to keep it in mind that the difference is aesthetically constructed. If the difference is constructed, it must be possible to deconstruct it. If this assumption is right, the similarity between the author and the observer must be exposed in the author’s very efforts to differentiate between them. Therefore the following argument should start with the observation about the construction of Daisy’s innocence, for the difference between the author and the observer is foregrounded most clearly in Winterbourne’s bewilderment and puzzlement about her innocence. In so doing, we do not have to consider every characteristic of her innocence as Annette Kar does in detail (31-38), for Winterbourne knows it in a broad sense. What interests us is her innocence which James knows but Winterbourne is not or cannot be sure about—the innocence about her sexuality.

The way in which James deals with Daisy’s sexuality is double-folded: through Winterbourne’s consciousness of her sexuality and through Daisy’s unconsciousness of it. Let us see both of them to understand James’s maneuver to make Daisy’s sexuality repressed and absorbed into the international theme.

As many critics have pointed out, the difference between the narrator and Winterbourne is stressed as early as the second paragraph of the novel (Graham 40; Page 597; Yacobi 21): “I [the narrator] hardly know whether it was the analogies or the differences that were uppermost in the mind of a young American [Winterbourne]” (7). Because this comment does not express the narrator’s omniscience, it is the more evident that James intends to emphasize the distance between the narrator and Winterbourne. We are made to be conscious of Winterbourne’s independence from the narrative voice, which means that we are made to be critical about his observation and judgment. This evocation of the reader’s critical consciousness is repeated throughout the story. In consequence, the more doubtful Winterbourne becomes of her innocence, the more doubtful we become of his judgment and the more certain of her innocence.

Since “it is Winterbourne’s own conflict, his repressed love for Daisy, and the attraction beneath his disapprobation, which carry the story along” (Geismar 29), it is inevitable that his “masculine way of looking at women” (Bell 55) is foregrounded throughout the novel. He is actually obsessed with Daisy’s sexuality so much so that one critic even calls him “a potential sexual monster” (Kennedy 143), but it is fair to say that this impression stems in part from the contrast to Daisy’s unconsciousness of sexuality. For example, when she accuses Winterbourne of having a “charmer in Geneva” (21), she does not think that the relationship has any sexual component, though the reader is meant to suppose that there is (Fogel 56). She does not try “to provoke him sexually” (Draper 602) even though he is sexually provoked.

"Daisy is comfortable with Eugenio or Winterbourne or Giovanelli," as Philip Page points out, "because, presumably, she assumes no extreme of intimacy, no hint of sexual involvement, and therefore no impropriety," while "Winterbourne's problem is precisely that he does make such assumptions" (593). When she says, "I'm fearful, frightful flirt! Did you ever hear of a nice girl that was not?" (31), the reader knows that the label "flirt" is not really pejorative (Wagenknecht, *Eve* 13; *Tales* 219n8) not only because flirting was socially acceptable at that time in America (Fogel 60; Hay 69) but also because she is unconscious of sexuality. To make her unconscious of sexuality, James keeps her away from the insinuations related to sexual realities: Daisy says to Mrs. Walker, "I don't think I want to know what you mean . . . I don't think I should like it" (28; see Houghton 59n6).

Because of her sexual unconsciousness, Daisy cannot be a flirt. Even though William Dean Howells testifies that "In 1860-70, you saw her [an American girl like Daisy] and heard her everywhere on the European continent" (166), her sexual unconsciousness makes her not a representative of the girls in the real world but rather "the 'archetype of American adolescent girls' reluctant to submit to the initiation into adult womanhood" (Wardley 239). James represses the exposure or development of her sexuality to complete her mythologization, and to secure her innocence. As important is that this process establishes another binary opposition between the two societies: sexually conscious Europe and unconscious America. Like other binary oppositions, this one remains throughout the story. Let us see one example:

"I'm going to the Pincio," said Daisy, smiling.

"Alone, my dear—at this hour?" Mrs. Walker asked. . . . "I don't think it's safe, my dear," . . .

"Neither do I," subjoined Mrs. Miller. "You'll get the fever. . . ."

"Give her some medicine before she goes," said Randolph.

. . . . "Mrs. Walker, you are too perfect," she [Daisy] said. "I'm not going alone; I am going to meet a friend."

"Your friend won't keep you from getting the fever," Mrs. Miller observed.

"Is it Mr. Giovanelli?" asked the hostess.

. . . . [Daisy] answered, without a shade of hesitation, "Mr. Giovanelli—the beautiful Giovanelli."

"My dear young friend," said Mrs. Walker, taking her hand, pleadingly, "don't walk off to the Pincio at this hour to meet a beautiful Italian."

"Well, he speaks English," said Mrs. Miller. (25)

In this funny scene, James stresses that the Millers—the Americans—are unconscious of sexuality in contrast to the Europeanized Americans, who are well conscious of it.

In this way, James doubly represses sexuality to develop the international theme. He

absorbs Winterbourne's love story into the theme, and makes the heroine sexually unconscious to put the theme in the forefront. Even if this strategy was necessary for him to give unity to his novel, this dynamics of the text stands in the complicit relationship to the Europeanized-American society he depicts as a repressor of sexuality. The reason the Europeanized Americans repress sexuality is that they try to preserve the unity of their society, isn't it? Then, can the author alone be acquitted of the charge? The answer is no. As Daisy's "vulgar" innocence exposes the gender trouble in the Europeanized-American society, so the repressed sexuality returns in the climax of the story and criticizes the dynamics of the text.

Daisy, on her deathbed, asked her mother to tell Winterbourne that she is not engaged. This confession has three functions. First, it proves innocence about her sexuality. Second, it makes her a tragic heroine by suggesting her love for Winterbourne (Wood 37). Although we cannot be sure whether she really loves him, this melodramatic climax invites us to the conclusion (James himself wrote in a letter: "she had a little sentiment about Winterbourne" [Jobe 84]). Third, it makes Winterbourne realize his misunderstanding, which completes the differentiation between the author and the observer. Winterbourne's final conversation with his aunt foregrounds all of the three functions:

"She [Daisy] sent me a message before her death which I didn't understand at the time. But I have understood it since. She would have appreciated one's esteem."

"Is that a modest way," asked Mrs. Costello, "of saying that she would have reciprocated one's affection?"

Winterbourne offered no answer to this question; but he presently said, "You were right in that remark that you made last summer. I was booked to make a mistake. I have lived too long in foreign parts." (39)

To Winterbourne, the three functions seem to be performed in the way the author hopes. Does the tragic end of Daisy, however, work on the reader in the same fashion?

We have observed that the gender role represses one's sexuality and that Daisy's innocence is characterized by her unconsciousness of sexuality. The two observations, however, conflict with the author's intention and even with each other when we reach the climax of the novel. From the first observation, we should think that her tragedy is not her death itself but her final acceptance of the gender role she has rejected: a critic points out, "When she tells him she isn't engaged, she admits his right to ask the question he asked in the Pincian gardens, she allows his paternalistic reasons for asking that question, and she recognizes his right to a straight answer" (Cowdery 91). Viewed in this light, the more beautiful James makes her death, the more repressive of sexuality the text becomes. From the second observation, however, it is clear that the efforts to use her confession to beautify her death are ineffectual. Since her innocence has been constructed on her unconsciousness of sexuality, her sudden

confession of love would spoil the unity of her characterization. Thus her "beautiful" death causes troubles rather than concludes the story. Here we cannot be sure that the truth her death reveals to Winterbourne is really the truth: maybe she is unconscious of sexuality until her death and his obsession with sexuality misleads him into interpreting her innocent remark as a confession of love.

Now we can understand what is happening in the climax of the story. Daisy's sexuality, exactly because it has been repressed, resists the dynamics of the text. It resists the beautification of her death, under which James tries to conceal his complicity with the Europeanized-American society in the repression of her sexuality. Thus her "tragedy" resists being given a single interpretation. We should not regard this indeterminacy as a Jamesian ambiguity, for it is doubtless that the author tries to present her as a "type." Therefore, we can conclude that James could not keep her sexuality under control. Despite his efforts to make the relationship between Daisy and Winterbourne absorbed into the international theme, her sexuality, which is supposed to be repressed for the purpose, cannot be repressed fully, cannot be digested in the story, and deconstructs the dynamics of the text. The artificiality of her sudden death (Goodspeed 252) is an evidence that the author finds her sexuality unmanageable.

Seen in this way, James's relation to Daisy is not so different from Winterbourne's. Like Winterbourne, James tried to typify and desexualize her, and finally killed her. The idea "that Minnie was so alive she was better off dead," one critic writes, ". . . became one of those fixed formulas that James repeated again and again" (Habegger 144). Maybe he loved his heroine as he loved his cousin. The critic thinks that this kind of love is "inhumane and sinister" (145), but more important to us is that the love developed Daisy beyond his control even though she is still a "type."

It is unlikely that James was unaware of the lack of unity in this novel. His dramatization and revision of the story bear out this conjecture. In the play in 1882, he made the story into a melodrama: Daisy and Winterbourne go back to America to get married. When he revised the story for the New York Edition, James "emphasize[d] Daisy's charm, the disagreeableness of her critics, and the innocence of her conduct" (Dunbar 311-12; see also Horne 248). Thus the international theme was weakened, and the characteristic as a love story was strengthened (Cowdery 93-94). We can understand why James had to make the revision in that direction. Because he could not keep her sexuality under control in the original version, he tried to deal with it in the format of a love story both in the play and in the revised version. Maybe it is also because he felt guilty about his complicity with the Europeanized-American society. At any rate, both of his dramatization and revision turned out to be failures. Thus, figuratively speaking, Daisy, the heroine who is created as a "type," whose sexuality is repressed, and who is killed at the end, haunts and laughs at the author.

*Daisy Miller: A Study* is, after all, a "study" in many senses. Critics have explained the meaning of the subtitle in various ways: Winterbourne's study of Daisy (Grant 17; Weisbuch



86n3), “a euphemism for courting” (Page 591), “an investigation of a type or problem” (Lukacs 211), James’s intention to make “a work of scientific observation” (Bell 48), a sketch (Horne 229), “painting” (Funston 94), and “a preparation for future work” (Fogel 90). Since we notice the flaw of the novel and the author’s complicity with the repressor of sexuality, we can agree with all of these interpretations. We cannot, however, agree with James’s: “a certain flatness” which “was the very sum of [Daisy’s] story” (Preface, vi). Her story is never flat. James tried to make her a flat character, but the efforts made *Daisy Miller* an exciting drama not only among characters, but also between the author and his characters. It is true that his efforts were not perfectly fruitful in this novel, but they were not wasted. He must have learned complexities of creating characters and of keeping distance from the characters. He must have deepened his concern about gender and sexuality. And he must have noticed the danger in making a sub-plot absorbed into the main theme. Without these lessons, he could not have written so soon a masterpiece like *The Portrait of a Lady*.

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