DAISY MILLER: WHOSE GIRL OF THE PERIOD?

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In 1880 Eliza Lynn Linton wrote to Henry James telling him of a fierce argument she had had with a "most valuable intellectual friend" over the question of Daisy Miller's virtue: "Did you mean us to understand that Daisy went on her mad way with Giovanelli in defiance of public opinion . . . or because she was simply too innocent, too heedless and too little conscious of appearance to understand what people made such a fuss about?" (Layard 232). Rather disingenuously—in view of her remark about Daisy "going on" with Giovanelli in her "mad way"—she tells James she will not reveal her side of the argument.

James's reply is interesting because, for someone so averse to explaining himself, he was unusually, even crushingly clear. Feeling, he said, "very guilty at having excited such ire in celestial minds"—and here Linton may have begun to feel some misgivings (especially as he spelt her name wrongly)—James declared Daisy Miller:

> . . . above all things *innocent*. . . . She never took the measure really of the scandal she produced .. . she was too ignorant, too irreflective. .. . She was a flirt, a perfectly superficial and unmalicious one, and she was very fond, as she announced at the outset, of "gentlemen's society." In Giovanelli she got a gentleman . . . and she enjoyed his society in the largest possible means. When she found that this measure was thought too large by other people .. . she was conscious that she was accused of something of which her very comprehension was vague. . . . I fear I must declare that she was not *defiant*, in the sense you mean . . . being herself quite unaggressive." (Horne 122)

James's long letter—interestingly written in the past tense as if Daisy were real—concludes that *Daisy Miller* is "the little tragedy of a light, thin, natural, unsuspecting creature being sacrificed .. . to a social rumpus that went on quite over her head" (122). If Linton replied, there is no record.

This exchange seems to me to mark an intriguing moment in which several past and future literary events meet, and raises a minor mystery over just how aware the two were of an earlier brush they had had. I propose, therefore, to look at that earlier encounter, and at a possible—if tangential—reading of James's *Daisy Miller* and his later story, "Pandora," as critiques of Linton's diatribe against contemporary young women.

The two letters take us back twelve years to another social rumpus—the anonymous publication in the *Saturday Review* in 1868 of Linton's violently reactionary article, "The Girl of the Period." In this, and subsequent articles on varieties of modern womanhood, women, according to Linton, fell broadly into the category of what we

might now term "angel in the house" or "whore on the street." The magnitude of the rumpus can be measured, as Elizabeth Helsinger, Robin Sheets and William Veeder say in their book, *The Woman Question*, by "the number of participants and the variety of offspring"; it was "an epoch making essay" which "made a famous topic of conversation at dinner-tables" (113), and also made Linton a marketable author. Linton's article spawned a number of publications: *The Girl of the Period Almanac*, *G.O.P. Miscellany*, *G.O.P Songster*, as well as Parasols of the Period, Cigars of the Period, Poetry of the Period, and so on, ad nauseam. Linton's articles were swiftly published in America under the collective title *Modern Women*, and in 1869, the young Henry James—author of a respectable handful of short stories and reviews—reviewed them for *The Nation* in an unsigned article. *Modern Women* was also anonymous, but in 1869—jumping briskly onto her own bandwaggon—Linton brought out a second volume of essays, *Ourselves*, in which her authorship is acknowledged and which is more or less a repeat performance of the earlier collection—some of the phrases in the essay "Modern Maidens," for example, are almost lifted straight from "The Girl of the Period." It was published on both sides of the Atlantic, so James may well have read it. In his review, however, he merely remarks that though the essays in *Modern Women* may be from more than one hand, he detects what he calls, in a rather sexist remark, "the feminine *griffe*" (James, *Literary Criticism* 19).

James's review displays his own early talents with the claw, starting with comments on the author's "vulgarity of thought," and going on to "the absence of reflection, observation, and feeling, of substance, of style and of grace" shown by the essays. "These sacred essentials" have been replaced with the "crudest literary flippancy and colloquial slanginess" (19). These latter phrases would have been particularly painful for Linton to swallow (if she read the review), since she herself contrasts the slanginess and crudity of the Girl of the Period with the sacredness of her constructed ideal: "the fair young English girl" of some unspecified past time, "with her tender little ways and pretty bashful modesties," the recipient of "love and homage and chivalrous devotion"—"an Englishwoman's natural inheritance" (*Modern Women* 26, 32).

There is a strain of fairly crude xenophobia running through these essays. The Girl of the Period is English, but according to Linton (and in James's paraphrase) she is betraying her "natural inheritance" by attempting "an exact reproduction, in appearance and manners, of a Parisian *cocotte*" (James, *Literary Criticism* 21). This is "slightly plausible," James writes, since the "celebrities" and "obscurities" of the demi-monde are on show at Continental watering-places patronised by English tourists, but otherwise he finds the comparison groundless. American girls also receive a few scratches of Linton's claw: but what must really have annoyed James, as a regular reviewer of art exhibitions in America, is Linton's view that "the Americans [are] the worst judges of art and all matters of taste" (Linton, *Ourselves* 201). James makes sure that whatever else Daisy Miller lacks it is not taste.

National rivalries, however, are neither James's nor Linton's main concern. Skirting entirely issues of education, suffrage and employment—and therefore most of the current "Woman Question"—Linton's focus in "The Girl of the Period" is on dress and marriage and on a factitious relationship between the two. The Girl of the Period

dyes her hair and paints her face; her "sole idea of life is plenty of fun and luxury," and her dress "the object of such thought and intellect as she possesses" (26). She seeks to excel "in the extravagance of fashion ... and as she dresses to please herself, she does not care if she displeases everyone else—if a sensible fashion lifts the gown out of the mud, she raises hers midway to her knee" (27). From here Linton takes her G.O.P. down the primrose path: "With purity of taste she has lost also that far more precious purity of delicacy and perception ... no good girl can afford to appear bad" (28). The connection once established, the Girl's passion for dress "leads to slang, bold talk and fastness; the love of pleasure and indifference to duty," and in just a couple of lines we arrive at the "the most fatal effects arising from want of high principle and absence of tender feeling . . . the luxury which is bought by vice" (29). And naturally there is a price to be paid: men, "though they flirt with her, do not marry her" (32). What more can one say?

James's review of Linton's essay moves the other way from the question of marriage to that of dress, and given his later caustic view of the traditional novel's "distribution at the last of prizes, pensions, husbands, wives, babies, millions, appended paragraphs and cheerful remarks" ("The Art of Fiction" 190), he takes, as we might expect, a more open but also a more serious view of the marriage market:

> We find it reiterated . . . that to marry, and to marry well, is the one great object of young girls' energies and desires. According as a girl marries or not, life is a prize or a blank. ... The various tricks of the marriage market are enumerated [by the author] with a bold unpitying crudity. It is a very dismal truth that the only hope of most women, at the present moment, for a life worth the living, lies in marriage ... but to our mind there is nothing comical in the situation. (*Literary Criticism* 21)

As to female extravagance in dress, James refuses to subscribe to the Linton view that it is deeply wicked. Evoking New York's Fifth Avenue, he asks if it is really "a train of youthful Jezebels" one encounters? "A young girl of fashion dressed to suit her own taste," James concedes, "is no doubt not a very edifying spectacle," but nothing worse. This extravagance is part of a new increased freedom, he explains, nor is it confined to females—"We are all extravagant, superficial, and luxurious together." Between this, he says, and the sort of thing described in the *Saturday Review* there is a very wide gulf, and the author's fulminations are "a wanton exaggeration in the interest of sensationalism" (23, 24). As Valerie Sanders has pointed out in her study of Victorian anti-feminists, Linton's "Girl of the Period" is indeed "probably best viewed as another aspect of 1860s sensationalism" (138).

The various publications inspired by Linton's original essay were short-lived, but she continued to produce increasingly frenzied versions of her Girl of the Period throughout the '70s and '80s, painting, as Sanders puts it, "an apocalyptic scenario of sexual chaos" with Wild Women and Shrieking Sisters (139). None of them had quite the mileage of the G.O.P.; perhaps because in *Punch* and the G.O.P. journals and

pamphlets, the Girl had taken on a boisterously entertaining life of her own, very far from the loveless depravities suggested by Linton. In these illustrated publications it appears that her extravagance ran mainly to millinery, her vices to cigarettes and her activities to various forms of sport—usually those in which her abundant figure was shown to best advantage. Young men are in attendance, but most of her fun was had with other G.O.Ps. The final vignette on the cover of the *G.O.P. Almanac*, however, is of a wedding, and the advertisements on the last page are for baby linens and marriage outfits. Clearly they *do* marry. Linton's own novels were more ambivalent than her journalism on the Woman Question, but none brought her the fame of her sensation-mongering articles. So, in 1878, when the publication of *Daisy Miller* made something of the same splash as "The G.O.P." had done ten years before, and appeared to inspire further variations on the theme of the American Girl, both from James and W.D. Howells, one can see that Linton might want to make common cause with this respectable new writer and recruit Daisy Miller into the ranks of the G.O.P.s—a re-incarnation of her own prototype and, indeed, a justification for her own mounting hysteria on the topic. Daisy, after all, not only fails to marry, she *dies* as a result of her indiscretions.

While James almost certainly knew that Linton was the anonymous author of "The Girl of the Period"—she owned up quite quickly after her initial anonymity, as others were claiming credit for the article—Linton probably did not know that James was behind that devastating transatlantic review of her essays in 1869. James was still relatively unknown in England then, and it is only quite recently that many of his early review articles have been identified. Later they seem to have met socially in London, though apart from the exchange quoted above they do not appear to have corresponded. However, as only a small proportion of extant James letters have been published, it would be foolish to rule out the possibility of other letters. Linton had in truth some grounds for her coy attempt to solicit James's support for her attacks on the G.O.P and her successors. Concluding a review in 1879 of several of James's stories and novels, the American critic Richard Grant White predicted that "Daisy Miller will become the accepted type and her name the sobriquet in European journalism of the American young woman of the period." This is exactly what happened, and as Howells reported to James Lowell in the same year: "there has been a vast discussion in which nobody felt very deeply, and everybody talked very loudly . . . society almost divided itself into Daisy Millerites and anti-Daisy Millerites." Howells is pleased that this will make James "thoroughly known" (Gard 61, 74), but unfortunately the story, he said, had also been misconstrued and James's patriotism questioned.

Although James was surprised and pleased at the sudden fame of "this most prosperous child of my invention," he was unhappy at the misconceptions about Daisy that arose on both sides of the Atlantic. In some ways the story could have been said to have had more success in Britain, becoming a part of the transatlantic debate on American consumerism and American manners, whose existence had been in some doubt since Mrs Trollope's book on the subject. James had no wish, however, to feed British prejudices, nor was he happy with American accusations that he had cast a slur on American womanhood. The debate was nevertheless destined to continue along these

lines until James was heartily sick of it. It might be instructive, therefore, to turn to James's novella and to see first how far his conception of Daisy could be said to accord with Linton's prototype, and then examine James's own comments on and re-workings of Daisy's image in a later story, "Pandora"—possibly (though not certainly) with Linton in mind.

Extravagance in dress was the key to the moral degeneration of Linton's G.O.P. Dress, too, is the conspicuous outward aspect of Daisy Miller's moral code. A young American, Winterbourne, observing the comings and goings of stylish American girls in the resort town of Vevey, is struck by Daisy's prettiness: "dressed in white muslin, with a hundred frills and flounces, and knots of pale-coloured ribbon. She was bare-headed, but she balanced in her hand a large parasol with a deep border of embroidery." Winterbourne strikes up a conversation with her on tourist topics, and as she later turns to leave, his eye lingers on her stylish rear-view: "as she moved away, drawing her muslin furbelows over the gravel, [he] said to himself that she had the ***tournure*** of a princess" (*Daisy Miller* 11, 23). Winterbourne delights in her fashionable prettiness, her loveliness conveyed not by a description of an identifiable fashion garment but by using "ribbons, ruffles, patterns—unfocused finery" (Hollander 424). As Anne Hollander explains in her study of dress, this is a traditional novelistic preoccupation with extraneous costume detail; readers can guess at the dress itself. Winterbourne is also surprised and pleased by Daisy's immediate and friendly response to his overtures; surprised because, although he knows he is speaking out of turn, her response is innocent of "flutter" or embarrassment: her "glance was perfectly direct and unshrinking. It was not what would have been called an immodest glance, for the young girl's eyes were singularly honest and fresh" (14). James was aware of clothes as economic markers, but here he wants to foreground the innocence and spontaneity that is intrinsic to her taste and graceful beauty, rather than her conspicuous consumption of her father's wealth. Daisy's style is therefore not vulgarly ostentatious or attention-seeking (as Linton would have it); and, indeed, when she dresses for an expedition to the Castle of Chillon with Winterbourne, she appears "in the perfection of a soberly elegant travelling-costume" (39). As Winterbourne's aunt and arbiter of Vevey society, Mrs Costello, says, Daisy "dresses in perfection—no—you don't know how well she dresses. I can't think where they get their taste" (25).

A reviewer in *Woman's World*, contributing her bit to the Daisy debate in 1889, comments on the frivolity of the atmosphere of these tales, the "aimless flittings" about Europe, the feeble mothers, apathetic and helpless in the face of their daughters' pursuit "of a real good time" (Stewart 101,102). Similarly, in Mrs Sherwood's etiquette manual of 1884, we are told that "everybody laughed at the mistakes of Daisy Miller and saw wherein she and her mother were wrong" (8). Daisy may be James's "heiress of all the ages," but her freedom, bounded by naivety and ignorance, is a chimera in the class-conscious and convention-bound expatriate American society in which she finds herself. In his 1869 review James himself had referred to the American girl's extravagance as a part of her increased freedoms, but he makes it clear that by freedom he implies something more complex than the sexual variety which so obsesses Linton. In her study of ideals of femininity, *American Beauty*, Lois Banner points out that women were as

much a part of American "Go-Aheadism" as men: "they sought ways to carve out roles that would fulfil their own strivings and yet not violate cultural conventions about women's role. In their quest . . . they made the pursuit of fashion into a career" (23). Lucia Calhoun's introduction to the American edition of Linton's *Modern Women* also distances itself from Linton's narrow views on female self-adornment. Young American women now have money, Calhoun writes, but they also "have that feminine sensuousness which delights in color, and odor, and richness of fabric. . . their sense of beauty [however] is untaught. . . . [A] lack of culture confuses them as to the attributes of clothes. . . . It will not help [the American girl] very greatly," Calhoun concludes, in what seems to us now a tactlessly colonialist analogy, "to be criticised as if she were being tomahawked" (Linton, *Modern Women* 18,19, 23).

Tomahawking, however, is the treatment Daisy gets from the expatriate American colony when the scene moves to Rome and when, in pursuit of her real good time, she takes up with a young Italian, Giovanelli. "Was she obstinate and defying?" Linton asked in her letter of 1880 (Layard 232). Not at all, James replied; although he points out that Daisy becomes conscious of being accused of something "of which her very comprehension was vague" (Horne 122). Since innocence for the Victorians was synonymous with ignorance, and since she lacks maternal guidance, how is she to comprehend the "hieroglyphics" of behaviour (as Edith Wharton called them in *The Age of Innocence*) between the sexes? Daisy's problem is that, despite her intuitive aesthetic sense, she is comprehensively uncultivated by European standards, and socially unaware. She is therefore unable to assess her conduct in relation to others or to control any social situation in which she finds herself. Her taste in dress has deluded others into expecting more appropriate conduct. Money has in fact put within her reach attributes and a way of life of which she has only the dimmest perceptions and not the least ability to fulfil. But is she actually a sexual adventuress? Is she even a husband hunter? The answer to these questions seems definitely, no. Winterbourne's view of her as a "cheap little American flirt" is convenient and self-serving, but inaccurate. Even Giovanelli insists on her essential innocence, saying after her death "she would never have married me, I am sure" (87). Daisy's refusal to understand the codes of behaviour which Mrs Walker tries to force upon her can be seen as a denial—an unrealistic one perhaps—of the idea that her relations with young men might suggest some kind of sexual or marital calculation. Her belief in her own innocence is heroically consistent, but the problem is that she has no code to substitute for the one she rejects, and she is therefore finally and fatally isolated, dismissed by Winterbourne as "a young lady whom a gentleman need no longer be at pains to respect" (82). Daisy is sacrificed, as James said, to a social rumpus that went on quite over her head—a rumpus, indeed, to which one could say Linton's essay of ten years before had materially contributed. If James had not quite the nerve in his letter to point out to Linton her prurience and salaciousness, he certainly wished to make it as plain as he had ever made anything plain, that Daisy was neither of Linton's absurd Girls, neither whore nor angel, and that such "girls" were in fact figments of Linton's overheated brain, her attempt, "with a long lash and a good deal of bad language, to drive women back into the ancient fold" (James, *Literary Criticism* 24).

James's early Americans abroad had tended to be male. After 1878, however, his focus had shifted to the American Girl. Most of his American Girls (like Daisy and Isabel Archer) face forms of disaster. But in 1884 he re-examines the whole Daisy question in "Pandora" and comes up with some entirely different answers. In concluding this article I want to see what James does with this later Daisy. Works of fiction are, of course, multi-causal in inspiration, but "Pandora" is certainly a version of Daisy: Daisy now as the toast of society rather than its sacrificial lamb. In his notebooks James describes Pandora as "a rival to Daisy Miller," and, he says, "the point would . . . be to show the contrast between the humble social background of the heroine and the position which she has made" (24, 25). The point is indeed made with un-Jamesian clarity; and the story's "reflector," a stiff, class-obsessed German diplomat, Count Otto Vogelstein, against whom the point is made, is a something of a caricature compared to Winterbourne.

Vogelstein, sitting on board a European liner bound for America, is alarmed by the approach of a "slim, brightly-dressed, and rather pretty" girl, Pandora Day. He is unnerved "that such a nice-looking girl . . . should endeavour by acts so flagrant to attract the attention of a secretary of legation" (James, *Complete Stories* 820). In what is an extraordinary gesture of self-reference, inter-textuality and meta-textual comment, the man happens to be reading an American story "of a flighty, forward little American girl, who plants herself in front of a young man in the garden of a hotel"—*Daisy Miller*, of course (821). Pandora does address him, but she turns out to be interested not in him but his deck-chair, as her mother has mislaid hers. Nevertheless, he feels that this is "a long and even confidential speech for a young woman, presumably unmarried, to make to a perfect stranger," and intrigued by her departing back view, he wonders how he can pursue the acquaintance, determining to consult his novel to "discover what the hero did" (822). What kind of woman is this, then?

Although Vogelstein says little more to Pandora on the voyage, he observes her and applies to an American lady of the Mrs Walker-type, Mrs Dangerfield, for information on her. He decides Pandora has little in common with Daisy; she is "much more serious and preoccupied and not at all keen . . . about making the acquaintance of gentlemen" (825), because she does not flirt with him, or indeed seek him out further, despite the fact that, like Daisy, "the male sex was not terrible to her" (823). Pandora—or Daisy Redux—bent on self-improvement, sits on deck reading serious books, having realised that ignorance is a major obstacle to social success. She also competently organises her rather hopeless parents, "fat, plain serious people" (824)—another reminder of Daisy. Mrs Dangerfield, however, exhibiting the snobbery of New Money over even Newer Money, warns the class-conscious Vogelstein against the Day family as being "from the interior," effectively dampening his interest in Pandora (825). Indeed, he reflects that he had better be careful as "there appeared now to be a constant danger of marrying the American girl"; like the telephone, she is "one of the complications of modern life" (827). He finishes *Daisy Miller*, and concludes—with Linton—that Daisy was "a dreadful little girl" (826). Despite seeing analogies in the tale with his own situation, he misses the fact that in listening to Mrs Dangerfield, he is repeating Winterbourne's mistake in heeding Mrs Walker.

Pandora's provincial origins indicate a new American type—the Girl of the Golden West, heroine of post-bellum fiction, who was to evolve into the formidably elegant and cosmopolitan Gibson Girl in the 1890s. As the ship disembarks in New York, Pandora tells Vogelstein she intends to move the family from Utica, and is "working for New York" (830)—the future launching pad of the Gibson Girl. Before entering American society, Vogelstein presses Mrs Dangerfield to explain Pandora's social position to him. When she replies that Pandora has none, he concludes she is lower class: "Oh dear, she isn't of the lower class ... a girl like that, with such people—it's a new type" (831). Pandora then is a type—but an even newer and less European type than Daisy.

Some eighteen months later Vogelstein is at a reception in Washington which promises to be socially very grand. As he approaches the President of the United States, he sees him in conversation with a lady, "very prettily dressed in rose-colour"—Pandora Day. She is now "a person to be reckoned with ... brilliant in her rose-coloured dress: she was extracting promises from the ruler of fifty million people," and as such, strikes him now as "vaguely prettier" (844). As they leave, the crowd makes way "for the ruler of fifty millions and [looks] with a certain curiosity at the striking pink person at his side" (845). Pandora is first pretty in rose-colour, then "brilliant in her rose-colored dress," then "striking in pink"—the image gaining in brilliance and clarity as Vogelstein's surprise and respect grow in equal measure. Daisy's aesthetic sense, now fully realised in Pandora, receives the attention it merits: her style is not the man-hunting one of Linton's imaginary Girl of the Period. This is a kind of *fin-de-siècle* power-dressing; her appearance attracts attention, certainly, but unlike poor Daisy's case, this is the esteem given to the assured taste of an intelligent and competent woman. "The lovely Day," someone explains to Vogelstein, "is what they call her" (845). Pandora's "the new type . . . they have had articles about it in the papers" (846).

Explaining Pandora's "type" to the persistently obtuse diplomat, his hostess says she "is the latest, freshest fruit of our great American evolution. She is the self-made girl!" Although, she adds, "we all help to make her, we take such an interest in her" (850). It is tempting to see Mrs Linton rather than Vogelstein as the recipient of the explanation of Pandora's rise to social stardom: Pandora, James tells us, "was not fast nor emancipated nor crude nor loud, and there was not in her ... a grain of the stuff of which the adventuress is made. She was simply very successful. . .she had lifted herself from a lower social plane . . . by the simple lever of her personality" (851). She is the Gibson Girl, an example of American Go-Aheadism, Log Cabin to White House, and unlike the Mrs Walkers, Dangerfields—and indeed the Mrs Lintons—these Americans do not tomahawk but applaud her. Pandora the autodidact has none of Daisy's slanginess but all of her friendly spontaneity: when Vogelstein sees her again at a picnic he marvels at her manner "which was wonderfully fresh and natural" (857)—echoing Winterbourne's remarks of six years before. Mortified by her cheerful indifference to him, his cup of mortification overflows when he later learns that she is on her way to Europe as the wife of her childhood sweetheart, now the presidentially-appointed Ambassador to Holland—a station in life considerably above of that of a secretary of legation. This new Daisy is not tragic, not ignorant of social codes, but like Isabel

Archer has learnt them in order to be able to choose a course of action. She is, in short, a comprehensive refutation of Linton's absurd and luridly sensational points—and it is only sad to have to add that "Pandora" is not, as a matter of fact, one of James's most subtle or deeply interesting tales.

To Linton, Daisy Miller and the Girl of the Period were among the morally and maritally damned. Like the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, she had threatened her daughters of Zion with scabs, sackloth, baldness and burning for their indulgence in tinkling ornaments. This made for good copy, but was, in James's view, as we have seen, reactionary sensation-mongering. Daisy's problem was her unsuspectingness, her social and linguistic ignorance, symptomatic not of depravity but of a lack of sophistication. Her natural taste, her grace and friendly, democratic sponaneity—characteristics too of Pandora—were more telling pointers to her moral nature than her social blunders. The social rumpus was not hers but rather took place in the low minds of the Mrs Walkers, the Dangerfields and—I need hardly add—the Mrs Lynn Lintons of this world. Daisy, resurrected in Pandora, recreated herself as the self-made American girl, and recognised as a success by the highest in the land, goes forth into the Old World to represent Young America. To make the point there had to be at the last a very un-Jamesian distribution of husbands, millions and cheerful remarks. Yet it is nevertheless not Pandora, the new "type," but Daisy with all her crudities, whose pretty, girlish figure we continue to see "with a pang"—as the reviewer in *Woman's World* confessed—"decked out in its dainty furbelows and flounces, walk down into the grim Valley of the Shadow" (Stewart 102)—a girl beyond period.

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