Stories Beyond Words:

Free Indirect Discourse and the Raw Material of Narrative in *Daisy Miller*

Amos Karlsen

Haverford College

Advisor: Professor Christina Zwarg

April 7, 2022
I: Introduction

In introducing Frederick Winterbourne, *Daisy Miller'*s main character, Henry James' third-person narrator admits that "I hardly know whether it was the analogies or the differences that were uppermost in the mind of a young American, who, two or three years ago, sat in the garden of the 'Trois Couronnes', looking about him, rather idly" (4). Over the course of the novella, that narrator rarely reveals such a distance from Winterbourne, and rather than "idly" looking, the latter drives the plot through his attempts to see things clearly. However, the issues raised by this introductory remark—the difficulty of understanding the way people take in the world around them and the organization of their consciousnesses—remain. *Daisy Miller* lacks the chapter-long narrations of characters' inner thoughts seen in *The Portrait of a Lady* and in the dense prose of James' later novels, but it provides the foundation for those later works' explorations of narrative and the mind. Early critical responses to the novella focused largely on the question of Daisy's innocence and culpability in her untimely death; Sarah Marsh notes that the *New York Times*' review blamed Daisy's demise on her "impropriety" whereas the *Atlantic* did not fault her, arguing that her behavior would have been acceptable in America (Marsh 219). However, keeping in mind James' lifelong interest in ambiguity and consciousness, the question of Daisy's innocence becomes less important than the way the novella, and the characters within it, frame and seek to answer that question.

*Daisy Miller* never enters the consciousness of its title character, and instead sees everything through Winterbourne's eyes; although he is not the narrator, his thoughts and experiences give the text its shape. The plot revolves around the two episodes in which Winterbourne and Daisy interact. The first takes place in Vevey, Switzerland, where they meet and take a trip to the Château de Chillon. On the trip, there is an air of flirtation, but the
excursion ends somewhat acrimoniously when Winterbourne announces that he must return home to Geneva and Daisy accuses him of doing so out of devotion to an older woman who lives there. The second takes place several months later in Rome, where Winterbourne finds Daisy romantically involved with an Italian named Giovanelli. She dies of malaria at the end of this episode, shortly after a nighttime trip to the Colosseum with Giovanelli during which Winterbourne discovers and disavows her. Although the novella's last few paragraphs take place the summer after the Rome episode, they are set in Vevey; we never see Winterbourne at home. James also refrains from mentioning Winterbourne's parents, and although he makes occasional reference to the older woman in Geneva, he only indirectly confirms her existence and never describes her. Winterbourne is not a man of mystery—we know that he is an American raised in Geneva, and that he regularly visits his aunt, Mrs. Costello, an important character herself—and the ambiguous aspects of his background do not serve as important plot elements. However, those empty spaces take on great importance if one focuses on Winterbourne as a narrator within the narrative. Because James only hints at what leads Winterbourne to see the world the way he does, one must often look at the operations of his mind, so far as is possible, to figure out why he thinks what he does, rather than relying on biographical details.

*Daisy Miller'*s superficially simple structure and approachable prose disguise a complex doubled narrative, where the stories Winterbourne tells shape much of the plot but are, at key moments, undermined by the third-person narrator who relates them. As a result, the novella is ideal for investigating the development of the themes James explored over the course of his career: in employing a conventional narrative form while also critiquing narrative, it argues for the circuitous form of the later novels while also, to a limited extent, pursuing the same questions of consciousness they do. Critics have thus far provided useful insight into that critique of
narrative by analyzing Winterbourne's narrativizing tendencies, the sources of his inability to conclude his narratives satisfactorily, and the broader narratives which give form to his worldview and to the society in which he lives. They have also provided helpful models for understanding James' mode of narration and the overarching structures he uses in various works. They have not, however, fully unpacked how narratives, whether they be widely shared understandings of propriety or stories Winterbourne tells himself, work—how they originate, how they structure the mind, and how they themselves are structured. A brief survey of the critical work on *Daisy Miller* will thus provide a helpful grounding in the issues brought up by the novella and reveal the gaps my own reading addresses.

Critic Robert Weisbuch argues that Winterbourne does not really experience life but goes through it imagining himself as a character within a story; the lead-up to the trip with Daisy to the castle at Chillon illustrates this point. When Winterbourne first meets Daisy's mother, he begs permission to take Daisy to the castle at night, because "he had never yet enjoyed the sensation of guiding through the summer starlight a skiff freighted with a fresh and beautiful young girl" (25). Weisbuch sees this passage as an example of, on Winterbourne's part, an "emotional distancing that is horridly aesthetic, both prurient and affected"; Winterbourne "does not quite so much live as he watches the motion picture of his own living" (221). Indeed, the alliterative flourishes here suggest that Winterbourne is more taken with describing the prospect of the voyage to himself than with the actual trip. However, the emotional distancing Weisbuch identifies can be quite subtle. When Daisy meets Winterbourne to go the castle, "he felt as if there were something romantic going forward. He could have believed he was going to elope with her" (27). He detects the air of romance and imagines himself doing something daring but does not seem to feel any desire to do so, falling just short of real emotion. On the steamboat
over, he twice describes Daisy as "charming" and professes "satisfaction" with her behavior, but he is also "disappointed" (28)—a stronger emotion than satisfaction—in her failure to display the kind of anxiousness that would buttress his sense of the trip's daring nature. To modify Weisbuch's formulation, then, Winterbourne is not just a viewer of the film of his life but a critic; Daisy may be charming, but that is not enough to cancel out her failure to play along with Winterbourne's imagination.

Millicent Bell argues that the narrative through which Winterbourne understands Daisy is too simple to fit her character; as a result, she observes, Winterbourne flails about in trying to describe her. When he first encounters Daisy with Giovanelli, he is once again frustrated with her failure to play along with his story, but this time the frustration extends to her moral character. "That she should seem to wish to get rid of him would help him to think more lightly of her, and to be able to think more lightly of her would make her much less perplexing. But Daisy, on this occasion, continued to present herself as an inscrutable combination of audacity and innocence" (41). As Bell puts it, Winterbourne seeks to place Daisy within a "vulgar romance" (62), but as Daisy fails to show embarrassment at being discovered, it falls flat. Winterbourne also reveals another level of his investment in narrative: not only does he find Daisy confusing, but he indicates that he would prefer that she be bad—wholly audacious rather than partially innocent—than that she defy his attempts at categorization. As Bell points out, the English language itself fails him in his attempt to categorize Daisy; at one point, he reaches for the foreign concept of the coquette (Bell 58); at others, he uses "inconduite," "rendezvous," "têtes-à-têtes," and "amoroso" to describe Daisy and her surroundings. None of these words add substance to Winterbourne's understanding of Daisy but Bell argues that they demonstrate "his need to make imprisoning distinctions which have no labels in English" (58). On a linguistic
level, then, Winterbourne's task of classifying Daisy in a strict manner is unsuited to his tool—the English language. Later on, we will see that this same principle operates on a plot level: Winterbourne's discovery of Daisy and Giovanelli in the Colosseum, which he frames as the climactic moment that reveals her true character, fails to meet his narrative needs.

Lynn Wardley links Winterbourne's struggles to define Daisy with the shifting narratives of childhood that would have been available to someone with his background. Around the time James wrote *Daisy Miller*, she argues, progressive theorists had shifted away from "the Calvinist doctrine of innate depravity and its emphasis on conversion" (233) to a more "plastic" view of children, where the influence of others was more important than a person's essential inner nature. James himself, she notes, gave some credence to the plastic view, writing that he "picked up" (233) an education during his unsupervised childhood travels in Europe. Winterbourne shares much of James' background, having also moved to Europe at a young age and been educated at Geneva; he would thus have been exposed to the Calvinist outlook of his home city, but also to James' own experience of learning indirectly through travel. As I will discuss later, Winterbourne's interaction with Daisy's younger brother (another American youth traveling in Europe) evinces his influence by both the Calvinist and plastic views of children. The context provided by Wardley is thus useful in identifying the strains of thought contributing to Winterbourne's view of the world, but it provides more questions than answers—if contradictory views of childhood both have a hold in his mind, what determines how he looks at a child, and what mental processes allow those views to coexist? Embedded societal narratives, then, are important in *Daisy Miller*, but identifying them yields limited insight; the novella is more concerned with how these narratives shape people's views of the world than it is with what the narratives say.
Peter Brooks' idea of ethical melodrama provides a model for James' stories, although we will see later that *Daisy Miller* questions the merits of that model even as it employs it in certain ways. Melodrama, as Brooks defines it, means a plot featuring "the confronted power of evil and goodness, the sense of hazard and clash, the intensification and heightening of experience" (155). James, he argues, uses melodrama to "make ethical conflict, imperative, and choice the substance of the novel, to make it the nexus of 'character' and the motivation of the plot" (159). Evil can be "dissimulated under layers of good manners or even beneath the threshold of consciousness in the evildoer himself" (169), but its presence is still important. As I will discuss later, this formula fits *Daisy Miller* in some ways: the leaders of high society cruelly exclude Daisy while mostly avoiding the appearance of rudeness, and Winterbourne fails to intervene but thinks he is doing what is best for her. However, James does not dedicate many words to the ethical significance of these actions; the story typically moves forward rather than slowing down to heighten the stakes of important scenes. Instead, the melodramatic element comes from Winterbourne, who turns his uncertainty about Daisy's moral character into a quest, complete with a grand climactic revelation of her wickedness, which the third-person narrator undermines in several ways. I will discuss the workings of ethical melodrama in my reading of Winterbourne's narrativizing and its moral consequences, but for now the important thing is that in *Daisy Miller*, James exhibits an ambivalent attitude toward the form which he would continue to hone. The novella is thus the ideal place to study his development of ethical melodrama; it reveals that form's advantages and pitfalls.

Dorrit Cohn's characterization of free indirect discourse, a technique which James uses to narrate much of the novella, helps explain on a micro-structural level how *Daisy Miller* explores individual consciousness and provides a key tool for my own reading. Free indirect discourse,
which Cohn calls "narrated monologue," is "a transformation of figural thought-language into the narrative language of third-person fiction" (100)—a paraphrase of a character's thoughts related by the third-person narrator. An author can thus explore thoughts that a character does not put into words by employing free indirect discourse. As Cohn puts it, "by leaving the relationship between words and thoughts latent, the narrated monologue casts a peculiarly penumbral light on the figural consciousness, suspending it on the threshold of verbalization in a manner that cannot be achieved by direct quotation" (103). In other words, free indirect discourse can be not just a smooth way of relaying a character's interior monologue but also a method of translating nonverbal mental actions into language. James uses this latter function relatively infrequently; Winterbourne's thoughts often come through as explicit attempts at building his own narrative, and at other moments, like the introduction of Winterbourne, the narrator withholds or cannot access his mind's nonverbal contents. Perhaps as a result, critics have largely focused on the explicit thoughts the narrator relays, as discussed earlier in the context of Winterbourne's narrativizing, and I will discuss that aspect of the narration further in my own reading of Winterbourne's storytelling. However, there are also moments that hint at what is happening beneath the surface—at the wordless structures that build narratives and shape the way people see the world. Investigating those moments is necessary to understand what Daisy Miller has to say about narrative and consciousness.

Critics have provided insight into Winterbourne's flaws as narrator, of the structures and tools that James uses to build Daisy Miller, and to a certain extent, of the narratives that drive the action within the text. To take the next step and examine how narratives work within the novella and how it suggests they should work, I will begin by further characterizing Winterbourne's narrative technique and its significance to the novella as a whole. His lack of self-awareness,
invocations of evil, and the way James undermines his narrative while also giving it primacy in the novella itself are all important. With that understanding in hand, I will be able to investigate *Daisy Miller*'s insights into the structure of narrative, the way it originates, and its role in the mind. One particularly important aspect will be a reading of James' tentative explorations, using free indirect discourse, of the non or pre-verbal aspects of thought—the raw material out of which people build their worldviews and the processes which they use to build. Finally, I will discuss the significance of the many ways in which Daisy disrupts narratives, and the implications for James' future works.

II: Winterbourne's Narratives: Characteristics and Implications

The inaccuracies in Winterbourne's imagined version of the trip to Chillon shed light onto the reason for Daisy's failure to play along. Critical reading of his thoughts, which reach us via free indirect discourse, reveals that he is unable to accurately describe his own behavior in the narratives he creates for himself, and even seems to mischaracterize his own feelings. On the boat ride to the castle, he imagines himself as a placid observer of "his pretty companion's distinguished air," a gentleman pleased with the lady connected to him as he sits "smiling, with his eyes upon her face" (28). Reality, though, is different: after a page-long description of his observations of and feelings toward Daisy and their trip together, she asks him, "what on earth are you so grave about?" (28). His response—"I had an idea I was grinning ear to ear" (28)—evinces not just a total lack of self-awareness but also a peculiar focus: rather than protesting that he is enjoying himself greatly, he simply refers to the expression he thought was on his face. Two phenomena which will continue to be important are present here. First, Winterbourne appears to be unaware of the emotional distancing Weisbuch refers to—while his frown indicates that he is not enjoying himself, his imagined smile tells us that he narrates for his own pleasure.
Second, he misapprehends the situation, casting himself in a role he does not fit, but the third-person narrator does not intervene to correct him; instead, it is Daisy who alerts us to the inaccuracy of his telling, calling into question the previous page.

Winterbourne's conversation with Daisy at Chillon makes clear the extent to which his consciousness dominates the novella, but it also compromises his narrative and further reveals his lack of self-awareness. Toward the end of their tour of the castle, Winterbourne informs Daisy that he must soon return to Geneva. The narrator gives no indication that he must leave before the dialogue begins; Winterbourne's narrative leading up to the trip does not involve his imminent departure, and neither does the narrative voice supplied by James. In response, "Daisy opened fire on the mysterious charmer in Geneva," prompting confusion on Winterbourne's part: "how did Miss Daisy Miller know that there was such a charmer in Geneva? Winterbourne, who denied the existence of such a person, was quite unable to discover" (30). On a micro-narrative level, James employs free indirect discourse here—the third person narrator relays Winterbourne's reaction as if it were his own—but also, as with the framing of the entire trip, defers to Winterbourne's consciousness on a macro-narrative level as well. This scene comes just before the midpoint of the novella, so based on this conversation a reader might expect the second half to take up the question of the mysterious lady in Geneva, but instead the next chapter picks up with Winterbourne's trip to Rome. We can thus see that Winterbourne has a good degree of power over the novella, but of an equivocal sort: while he avoids giving Daisy a satisfactory answer here, her question remains in the air, adding a dimension to the story of their trip that Winterbourne himself, in denying his mysterious lover's existence, seeks to exclude. We can thus apply the same principles gleaned from his misapprehension of his own facial expression more broadly: *Daisy Miller* will largely follow the path Winterbourne chooses for it
but will also poke holes in his story. The climactic Colosseum scene provides the best example
of this principle: it represents the height of the novella's conflict, but Winterbourne's own
framing of the situation falls flat, employing generic conventions that fit the situation as poorly
as his selected French words fit Daisy.

Jeffrey Meyers' observations of the connections between *Daisy Miller* and Romantic
poetry reveal that the Colosseum is poorly suited for Winterbourne's narrative purposes—it is too
complex a setting for his designs. Meyers notes that Winterbourne treads the same ground as
Byron, Shelley, and other Romantics, who wrote about the history of torture and death at both
the Colosseum and Chillon. Winterbourne does not mention Chillon's literary significance,
seeing it instead as an officially sanctioned travel destination and a good setting for his would-be
romance with Daisy. He does note the Romantic writings on the Colosseum, but once again
elides the ugly history with which they deal. Shortly after Winterbourne enters the Colosseum,
"he began to murmur Byron's famous lines, out of 'Manfred'; but before he finished his quotation
he remembered that if nocturnal meditations in the Colosseum are recommended by the poets,
they are deprecated by the doctors" (59). Winterbourne thus makes the decision to enter the
Colosseum inconveniently complicated—he provides no criteria for choosing between the
recommendations of the poets and of the doctors—and his chosen poet also fractures the ground
on which he stands. His reading of Byron as simply recommending the Colosseum to tourists,
rather than also exploring the violence that took place there, makes his propensity for
oversimplification part of the setting of his narrative. Once again, Daisy, who has already entered
the Colosseum with Giovanelli, catches him in error, joking that "he looks at us as one of the
lions or tigers may have looked at the Christian martyrs!" (59). Unlike at Chillon, Daisy reveals
Winterbourne's unpleasant aspect before he can unspool all of his reflections; we thus know to look for the holes in those reflections as he provides them.

Winterbourne's supposed realization of Daisy's true nature at the Colosseum actually undermines his capacity for insight and reveals the extent of his propensity to stretch facts into a narrative that does not fit them. Brooks' idea of ethical melodrama allows us to see Winterbourne's narrative as a failed version of James' preferred technique. Whereas, per Brooks, James elevates ethical conflict to melodramatic stakes, here Winterbourne uses melodrama to play up the importance of Daisy's ethically unremarkable behavior. Immediately after Daisy notes his predatory stance, "Winterbourne stopped, with a sort of horror, and, it must be added, with a sort of relief. It was as if a sudden illumination had been flashed upon the ambiguity of Daisy's behavior, and the riddle had become easy to read. She was a young lady whom a gentleman need no longer be at pains to respect" (59-60). Winterbourne's narrative of horror is difficult to justify here. Though he sets his epiphany in a dramatic location, Daisy and the Romantics complicate that location enough to make it unsuitable for a decisive revelation; though he catches Daisy and Giovanelli together in private, they do nothing worse than make a fairly lighthearted joke at his expense. Winterbourne's narrative thus becomes a parody of ethical melodrama, creating a grand revelation of evil out of very little. The moral implications of Giovanelli's decision not to discourage Daisy from coming to the Colosseum are complex, as I will discuss later, but on Daisy's part there is really nothing there. She displays some recklessness, but that is nothing new, and certainly nothing that should inspire horror and an entire revaluation of her character; indeed, later on Winterbourne will revise this supposedly final judgment. However, in one sense Winterbourne is right: this scene, followed as it is by Daisy's quick death and the end of the novella, is the climax of *Daisy Miller*. His narrative may
be flawed in many ways, but it exerts great power, over the narrative and, perhaps, over Daisy herself.

The mysterious details of Daisy's death, as pointed out by Sarah Marsh, both create the possibility that Winterbourne's words are the proximal cause of Daisy's death and introduce a layer of inescapable uncertainty to the story. The obvious reading is that Daisy contracts malaria in the Colosseum and dies as a result, meaning that whoever or whatever led her there deserves the blame for her death. Marsh, however, points out that there is considerable ambiguity. The course of Daisy's illness—she gets sick a day after the scene in the Colosseum and dies a week later—is faster than would be expected with malaria, and Marsh (232) points out that James, who had malaria himself as a child, would know that. Daisy's quick time to death suggests that she may have refused treatment—from his own experience, James knew malaria could be treated with quinine. The text offers some support for this theory: before leaving the Colosseum, and just after telling Daisy he does not care whether or not she is engaged, Winterbourne reminds her to take quinine pills; in response, she says, "I don't care...whether I have Roman fever or not!" (61). There is nothing here that allows one to conclude that she refuses treatment, but neither can one rule it out, since she phrases her defiant statement as a response to Winterbourne's medical advice. The implications for narrative thus point toward both profound strength and profound weakness. On the one hand, the story Winterbourne dreamt up may have led him to utter the words that killed Daisy, indicating that narrative is an extremely powerful force. On the other, it is impossible to know, through James' narrative, what actually happened, suggesting that narrative cannot be relied upon to summarize events.

Put together, the implications of Winterbourne's possibly destructive narrative understanding of Daisy point toward a reading of the novella which examines, on multiple levels,
the narratives embedded within it. If Winterbourne’s oversimplified story of Daisy’s character actually killed her, then one must ask what other narratives might be at play within the novella, and what drastic consequences they might have. However, if Daisy would have died even without Winterbourne’s intervention, then to condemn him would be to repeat his error—to impugn him with evil when in reality all he did was say a few unkind words. To avoid Winterbourne’s mistakes, then, James must pay close attention to the other narratives which structure the world of his story, having, through Winterbourne, established how powerful they can be even while occupying shaky ground. However, as shown by the ending, one cannot find all the answers simply by tracing narrative arcs; the questions of right and wrong, and even, as seen with the climax, of cause and effect, are often too complex to be gleaned from the events of the plot, and trying to definitively answer them can obscure, rather than elucidate, the truth. The novella, then, must look not just at the events that happen between characters but also the mental events that produce actions—must not just illustrate the flaws and consequences of narratives, but their structures and ultimate sources. To analyze this dimension of the narrative, one must examine interactions between characters on three levels: first, the narratives which shape their thoughts; second, the shape, within the individual consciousness, those narratives take, and the way they exercise their power; third, the raw material of those narratives and the operations by which they become part of a person’s mind.

III: Principles of Narrative and Consciousness in *Daisy Miller*

Winterbourne’s first conversation with Daisy’s younger brother Randolph reveals his awareness of the old and new models of childhood but does not make clear which he subscribes to. Sociological analysis of embedded narratives will thus not suffice to explain his perspective. Randolph speaks first, asking Winterbourne for a lump of sugar “in a sharp, hard little voice—a
voice immature, and yet, somehow not young" (5). Randolph is a child, but apparently in a complicated sense: he exhibits the subjective (immature) but not objective (young) aspect of childhood, despite being objectively a child. If we read this phrase as free indirect discourse—a reasonable decision given that it more closely resembles a character's reaction than an author's description for the benefit of a reader—we can say that something about the sharpness or hardness of the voice does not fit Winterbourne's idea of childhood. Something hard is fixed in its shape—one cannot mold it further—and something sharp is capable of violence. Randolph's voice would then violate Wardley's "plastic" model and hint at some kind of inherent capability for wrongdoing; Winterbourne's objection thus indicates that the plastic perspective influences him. However, Winterbourne's upbringing would have steeped him in a much more fixed view of children. In the paragraph before the conversation, James mentions Geneva, "the little metropolis of Calvinism" (4) where Winterbourne was educated, five times, making clear that the Calvinist doctrine, whose emphasis on "innate depravity" (Wardley 233) I noted earlier, makes up an important part of Winterbourne's background. Winterbourne thus appears to have a foot in both camps: the Genevan perspective, where sin is the essential condition of children as well as of adults, and the plastic perspective, where the moral character of the adult depends on the inculcation of the right tendencies in the child. His further interaction with Randolph heightens, rather than resolves, the conflict.

Winterbourne's conflicting words and actions in giving Randolph the sugar indicate that he does not have a clear understanding of childhood, so rather than defining his worldview, we must instead seek to understand how his contradictory understandings interact. He allows Randolph to take a sugar cube but also opines, "I don't think sugar is good for little boys" (5). Winterbourne's speech here fits with the plastic notion of children: if their moral development
beyond religious matters is important and changeable, then instantly gratifying their desires might cause problems down the road, creating adults who fail to suppress their base instincts. His deed, though, fits better with the Calvinist view: if children, like all people, are essentially sinful, and can only atone for their fallenness through proper religion, it probably does not matter how much sugar they eat. There is nothing here to reconcile these perspectives: the narrator does not tell us why Winterbourne accedes to Randolph's request nor why he thinks sugar is bad for children. One way of explaining this conundrum is to see the competing worldviews as narratives rather than as arguments one must accept or reject. As a child in Geneva, Winterbourne took in the story of innate sinfulness; in his travels, he took in the story of plasticity; they thus both exist as templates in his mind which may guide his thoughts one way or another but which he has never weighed against each other. The fact that he does not explain his actions or analysis to Randolph or the reader, but rather acts and straightforwardly presents his beliefs, suggests that he has never explicitly considered either of these models, but simply taken them up sufficiently that they can come out of him in social situations. Indeed, we will see that his consciousness is structured by contradictory narratives which can present themselves at the same moment in time.

Winterbourne's reaction to Randolph's American accent reveals that conflicting narratives guide not only his behavior but also his sense of self. After taking a bite of the sugar lump, Randolph reacts: "'Oh, blazes; it's har-r-d!' he exclaimed, pronouncing the adjective in a peculiar manner. Winterbourne had immediately perceived that he might have the honour of claiming him as a fellow-countryman" (5). Logically, it does not make sense that Randolph's pronunciation would strike Winterbourne as "peculiar" but also mark the boy as a fellow American; the word seems to connote strangeness and familiarity at the same time. However, taking both of
Winterbourne's impressions as products of narrative and noting the shift from free indirect discourse to detached narration within this passage provides an explanation. There would be a contradiction if Winterbourne explicitly believed both the European idea that American accents are strange and the American idea that they are the mark of a countryman, but not so if he has only implicitly taken in both perspectives. Indeed, James suggests that the two narratives operate on different levels of consciousness here. "Peculiar" comes to us through free indirect discourse, so the narrator is relaying Winterbourne's instantaneous reaction; the recognition of Americanness comes through what Cohn calls "psycho-narration"—a detached account of Winterbourne's explicit thoughts. One might see this two-level consciousness as a reasonable adaptation to life in Europe—the alternatives would be to fail to notice out-of-place Americans or to see his own country as strange, neither of which seem sustainable as a mode of identity formation. Still, the implications are significant: Winterbourne's idea of himself is not actually an idea but a patchwork of narratives of normal and unusual that directly contradict each other and, explicitly considered, even mark him as strange, and which he does not always consciously recognize. The moral system of such a person would then likely be less an application of any particular philosophy than a copying of behaviors picked up. Indeed, James tells us that Winterbourne "had imbibed at Geneva the idea that one must always be attentive to one's aunt" (16)—not come to believe that doing so satisfies any moral principle but rather drunk the idea straight down and accepted it without thought.

The pivotal scene where Winterbourne, after failing to get Daisy to give up her walk with Giovanelli, sides with Mrs. Walker and gets in her carriage makes clearer the moral implications of the jumble of narratives which comprise his consciousness. After Mrs. Walker tells Daisy she must get into her carriage and leave Giovanelli behind, Daisy asks Winterbourne what he thinks
of the matter. He reflects that "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" (43). This is one of Winterbourne's most thought-out decisions of the novella, but he is really just stacking empty ideas on top of each other: gallantry is truth, and truth is what Mrs. Walker, an established member of society, says. The narrator says that "indications" given elsewhere ought to explain why Winterbourne makes the judgment he does, but there are no other instances where he reflects on the meaning of truth or gallantry. It thus seems that there is no moral philosophy beneath Winterbourne's decision here, and that as with Randolph and the sugar or with his attentions to Mrs. Costello, he is acting based on what he has passively absorbed. The question of what comprises that absorbed morality thus becomes key.

emyer Wilkinson, drawing on a deconstructive framework, uses the carriage scene to posit that Winterbourne's ethical uncertainty stems from the slipperiness of language. He argues that this moment is "indecidable" in part because in all cases, moral laws are too "fragmented" by "the endless figurality of language" (168) to solve ethical dilemmas. Winterbourne's inability to come up with anything even approximating a satisfying moral law here thus represents a failure as a reader on his part, and the thing that he has passively absorbed is language—the words he regurgitates. Synthesizing Wilkinson's perspective with my own earlier analysis could point toward a model of Winterbourne's consciousness as structured by language, and the failures of his narrative would then flow directly from language's limitations. However, although the aforementioned aporetic effect of "gallantry" and "truth" is convenient for this analysis, Wilkinson's reading does not hold true when taking into account the novella's narrative
technique. As I will now discuss, the use of free indirect discourse throughout the novella challenges any purely language-based interpretation of its commentary on morality.

James' narration of Winterbourne's implicit thoughts indicates that, generally speaking, one can use language to describe the mental processes which a person does not form into language. Narrative, understood as a structure not purely reducible to words, is thus a better candidate than language for the thing lurking at the bottom of morality and consciousness. On its face, this separation of language and narrative does not make sense—stories are made of words. However, by using the narrative of *Daisy Miller* to elucidate the implicit thoughts of the novella's characters, James indicates that narrative can be a mental structure which, though only comprehensible through language, is not necessarily made out of language in its original instantiation. To give one example: Winterbourne himself does not describe Randolph's pronunciation as "peculiar," but the third-person narrator finds Winterbourne's thoughts coherent enough to be described with that word. This reading brings up its own problem, though: if narrative can exist in people's minds, independent of language, what is it made of—if it structures consciousness, what is its structure? James suggests that it can come out of the way people create meaning together in conversations, not just by sharing words but also by interpreting the tones of each other's voice's and drawing on past instances of shared meaning. The true drama of James' narrative, then, is the mental act of interpretation, but interpretations are always dependent on previous such acts. Winterbourne's first conversation with his aunt demonstrates how this process functions.

Winterbourne's first discussion of Daisy with his aunt shows the recursive nature of narrative-building—the way it depends on people's backgrounds as well as how they say the things they do. If one examines only the dialogue in the scene, it jumps straight from Mrs.
Costello's statement that she has seen the Millers—"seen them—heard them—and kept out of their way" (16) to Winterbourne's judgment that "Miss Daisy Miller's place in the social scale was low" (17). Mrs. Costello's words do not suffice to build the image in Winterbourne's head: whereas she depicts a horizontal plane of existence, including her and the Millers, which requires her to actively avoid them, Winterbourne imagines a vertically organized structure, where the traits of the Millers keep them below Mrs. Costello without the latter needing to hide. The reader might then turn to the description of Mrs. Costello and her influence on Winterbourne that separates her statement and his interpretation. It offers a source for Winterbourne's imagined scale: "her picture of the minutely hierarchical constitution of the society" of New York City, which Winterbourne finds "almost oppressively striking" (17). The word "striking" suggests that Winterbourne reacts instantaneously, without consideration, to his aunt's words, and so it is here. He does not evaluate Daisy's place but "immediately perceived it" from Mrs. Costello's "tone" (17). Mrs. Costello's words evoke the hierarchy she has already described to him; the act of interpretation, then, is not a parsing of those words but the way Winterbourne's mind links their tone to Mrs. Costello's previously revealed "picture." Still, James is evasive here, pointing back from one image to another without revealing the origins of the latter—we do not see the act of painting the hierarchical "picture"—and refraining from describing the tone that catches Winterbourne's ear. We can thus describe how narratives propagate themselves once established but cannot yet say where they come from or what signals the presence of any given recursive narrative to the interpreter.

Winterbourne's final comment to his aunt at the end of the novella reveals the emptiness at the bottom of narrative, but also its intimate ties to shared experience. A year after the fateful events in Rome, he tells Mrs. Costello that he has recently come to understand a message from
Daisy, shortly before her death, which originally confused him: "she would have appreciated one's esteem" (64). Winterbourne refers here to a message given to him by Daisy's mother: that Daisy was not engaged to Giovanelli, and that she wanted to know if he remembered their trip to Chillon. It is thus tempting to follow Wilkinson and make Winterbourne's narrative a pure act of reading, but the complicated nature of the text he works with undermines that conclusion. Daisy herself does not tell him anything, and indeed her mother disavows having carried her message—"I said I wouldn't give any such messages as that" (63)—at the same time as she delivers it, so Winterbourne has only a paraphrase of Daisy. However, while the mediation of her mother linguistically separates Daisy from Winterbourne, her reference to Chillon calls upon a shared history known to no one but the two of them. That shared history makes a rough analogy to the "picture" of New York society given to Winterbourne by his aunt: it is not actually one definable thing, but it does form a basis for understanding between the two of them.

As discussed earlier, however, in a meaningful sense, Winterbourne and Daisy did not share that experience, but rather inhabited two separate realities; the root of shared understanding thus remains enigmatic. Winterbourne experienced the trip as a narrative, with himself as narrator, that did not match Daisy's perception of events; it also ended in disappointment for both of them, but for different reasons. The comment about her engagement also calls on a moment of shared history—the meeting in the Colosseum, where Winterbourne said he did not think it mattered whether or not Daisy was engaged—characterized by misunderstanding and conflict. We can thus see that there is nothing solid at the bottom of Winterbourne's narrative: it is an understanding built out of previous moments of limited understanding. At the same time, however, it is not just made up, but rather a product of his time with Daisy. The limits of narrative, then are not set by language but by understanding of the other—not of description but
of wordlessly comprehending shared meaning in the moment. However, Daisy's absence from this scene makes it impossible to dig far into the nature of that moment of comprehension. That impossibility is particularly conspicuous because of the frequency of free indirect discourse in the novella: James is not categorically opposed to translating unarticulated thoughts into language, but he stops short of narrating that most important process here. For all of the power of psychologically attentive narration, then, one source of impenetrable uncertainty remains. Instead of directly addressing that uncertainty, James further elucidates the nature of narrative by showing how it can break down.

Mrs. Costello does not understand, or does not accept, Winterbourne's final characterization of Daisy, setting up a re-reading of the ways Daisy disrupts the embedded narratives of the novella from beginning to end. She sees something else behind his words: "'is that a modest way,' asked Mrs. Costello, 'of saying that she would have appreciated one's affection?'" (64). As Winterbourne understands Mrs. Costello by tone in their first conversation, here she hears a hidden meaning in his "modest" way of speaking, but her interpretation seems unlikely. If Daisy had wished to profess her love before dying, she could have done so, whereas it would have been difficult to better express her wish for a moral kind of consideration than by conveying to Winterbourne that it should have mattered, contra his biting statement in the Colosseum, that she was not engaged. Winterbourne does not correct Mrs. Costello, but that fits with my interpretation: their communication was always based on a shared history that allowed them to understand things beyond each other's words. As such, he has no way to explain something to her that depends on a different set of shared experiences—a different iterative meaning-building process—and does not try to clarify his meaning. We can thus see the consequences of the bottomlessness of narrative: Winterbourne cannot give Mrs. Costello a
"picture" of Daisy's character like the one she gave him of New York in one fell swoop because such a picture would depend on momentary apprehensions of meaning in which she did not participate. This extension of the logic is too extreme; if all meaning were wholly dependent on pairs of people's intimately shared experiences, communication would be impossible. However, the novella demonstrates that larger narratives have the same iterative structure and the same weaknesses as the one Winterbourne fails to convey to his aunt here; Daisy brings them down as well.

IV: Daisy as Disruptor of Macro-Narratives

The first conversation between Winterbourne and Mrs. Costello hints at the shape of the narratives the two use to communicate, but it also demonstrates the way Daisy threatens the larger narratives that hold together the society depicted in the novella. About Daisy, Mrs. Costello tells her nephew, "she dresses in perfection—no, you don't know how well she dresses. I can't think where they get their taste" (17). Wardley argues that Mrs. Costello's "discomfort in Daisy's presence stems not from the fact that the girl is incorrigible but rather that she learns only too easily how to emulate and to replicate the likes of Mrs. Costello" (249). In the sketch of Mrs. Costello and Winterbourne's history, we learn that the former is "exclusive," so Daisy's malleability poses a threat to her preferred mode of socializing. If someone like Daisy can simply pick up the taste that is supposed to separate those Mrs. Costello includes from those she excludes, then her whole classification scheme is imperiled on two levels. In a practical sense, there is the threat of invasion by the well-dressed but not truly refined, who she would want to screen out but who she cannot easily recognize. On a theoretical level, there is also a crisis of meaning: if the tools Mrs. Costello uses to separate the worthy from the unworthy turn out not to
work, then she must ask herself in what the distinction is truly grounded—whether taste can ever really stand for anything other than an easily learned aesthetic sense.

The inclusion of aesthetics in Mrs. Costello's confusion heightens the deconstructive effect of Daisy's good taste and reveals that Mrs. Costello has her own frustrated narrative quest with respect to Daisy—trying to figure out what she means as a representative of a group. Mrs. Costello does not name any particular instances in which Daisy's good taste in clothes impressed her, but merely states it as a fact of her character. The aesthetic judgment, then, becomes another layer of the self-supporting narrative: to dress well is to dress in the way Mrs. Costello recognizes as denoting good society, which is itself marked by dressing well. In other words, the judgment supporting the narrative is as bottomless as the narrative itself; there is no accounting for taste. Mrs. Costello's description of Daisy evinces some recognition of that fact. She finds Daisy's good taste striking but offers no sign that she appreciates it aesthetically; instead, her remarks about how well Daisy dresses posit taste as a game Daisy has won. Unlike Winterbourne, Mrs. Costello is not just concerned with Daisy as an individual: to her, Daisy is not particularly lovely but rather "has that charming look they all have" (17), and Mrs. Costello wonders where "they," not just Daisy, get their taste. Daisy is thus not just a puzzling person but the embodiment of a new type that challenges the ideas on which polite society rests. The only thing more threatening to Mrs. Costello's system of exclusivity than Daisy's having good taste is her being unremarkable in that respect—her ability to internalize the right aesthetic sensibilities being common to others like her.

Returning to the scene with Mrs. Walker's carriage reveals that Mrs. Costello's fears are well-founded: Daisy's presence undoes the association between good manners and good morality which society normally uses to justify its prestige and exclusivity. Although Mrs. Walker, a
member of Mrs. Costello's circle, prevails upon Winterbourne to take her side and thus implicitly criticize Daisy, in doing so she bares the ugliness of exclusivity—an ugliness that people like her normally disguise with manners. When she tells Winterbourne to leave Daisy and get in the carriage, "the young man answered that he felt bound to accompany Miss Miller; whereupon Mrs. Walker declared that if he refused her this favour she would never speak to him again" (44).

Here, we have the flip side of James' initial description of Mrs. Costello, who admits to exclusivity but does not name any methods for enforcing it: Mrs. Walker, unable to persuade Winterbourne with appeals to propriety, is reduced to an explicit threat. We have already seen that, generally speaking, Winterbourne lives according to the rules; we have examined the process by which he absorbs social norms, and know that he is fond of Geneva, that metropolis of strictness; as such, the fact that society nearly loses its grip on him here makes clear that the damage wrought by Daisy is significant. The carefully built-up narrative that to follow society's rules is to be good fails, and there is a rich irony here. While one might expect a man choosing between a pretty woman and an older acquaintance to be torn between self-interest and morality, respectively, here the dilemma is inverted. While Winterbourne does not explicitly recognize his siding with Mrs. Walker as wrong, he certainly responds to a threat to his personal well-being, and his use of the word "bound" indicates that he feels a moral obligation toward Daisy. This reversal goes beyond his comportment in society: Winterbourne's final conversation with Giovanelli reveals that his time around Daisy has eroded his trust in the narratives at the core of his moral system.

Winterbourne's inability to accuse Giovanelli of anything reveals the weakening of his Calvinist moral foundations, giving a sense of how deeply unmoored he has become. Pericles Lewis argues that James draws on his brother William James' idea of the healthy (Catholic)
versus sick (Protestant) soul: "the healthy-minded individual tends toward pluralism" and sees evil as "not central to human experience" whereas for Lutheran or Calvinist "sick souls," evil is "the essential fact of this world, surmountable only by appeal to supernatural forces" (249).

Winterbourne seems predisposed toward the latter: he comes from the center of Calvinism, and his obsessive need to categorize Daisy as good or bad evinces an interest in good versus evil and an aversion to pluralism. Giovanelli, then, makes a perfect foil: his decision to take Daisy to the Colosseum at night could be construed as evil, or as trivial—a simple case of bad luck. Their conversation stages this conflict fairly directly: "why the devil," Winterbourne asks, "did you take her to that fatal place?" (63). Although the accusatory tone here is clear, as buttressed by "devil" and "fatal," it is significant that Winterbourne phrases it as a question: he is sufficiently uncertain of his moral world to not feel confident directly accusing Giovanelli of evil. The latter holds up his healthy soul end of the bargain: "for myself, I had no fear; and she wanted to go," Giovanelli answers, to which Winterbourne retorts, "that was no reason!" (63). Once again, Winterbourne occupies his designated side of the conflict, but rather half-heartedly. Giovanelli's answer is hardly a robust defense of relaxed morality, and yet Winterbourne still cannot accuse him. Indeed, as he only rejects Giovanelli's stated reason for going to the Colosseum, he is really declaring confusion here: he cannot understand Giovanelli's perspective, but neither can he condemn it. His pursuit of Daisy's true nature, instead of yielding a clear answer, has given him questions he never entertained before, and instead of determining her moral stature, he has lost trust in his measuring stick.

Winterbourne's final words, however, push back on the radical possibilities of Daisy's disruptions, indicating that perhaps, for all the theoretical instabilities underlying high society, it has a strong grip on things because no alternative narrative can easily replace it. Earlier, we saw
that by the time of Winterbourne's final conversation with his aunt, he has come around to a view of Daisy as seeking moral esteem, thus rejecting the condemnation he delivered in the Colosseum. In addition, that more favorable view of Daisy's character weakens his aunt's ability to communicate with him—she is unable to accept the idea that he speaks in earnest. However, his final words to her complicate this breakdown of communication. "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" (64), he tells her. To a certain extent, he subverts Mrs. Costello here, using the words she employed to warn him off of Daisy to reflect that he should have been kinder to her. That extent is not far, however: he remains within the broader narrative of which Mrs. Costello is still author: that people acculturated to European society like himself ought not expect to understand Americans like Daisy. Even if he believes that he should have been kinder to Daisy, the principle he espouses here would likely prevent him from being so with another like her in the future. Similarly, although his admission that he was "booked to make a mistake" acknowledges the folly of his quasi-authorial attempt to classify Daisy and place her within a story of his own making, it also exempts him from blame—as he sees it, he could not have been expected to understand Daisy well enough to be a better friend to her.

The final sentence makes clear that Winterbourne turns away from the unknown and returns to the narratives that previously guided his life; at the same time, it reintroduces the question of evil that Winterbourne himself misread so badly. "Nevertheless, he went back to live at Geneva, whence there continue to come the most contradictory accounts of his motives of sojourn: a report that he is 'studying' hard—an intimation that he is much interested in a very clever foreign lady" (64). If Winterbourne's words did not suffice to make clear that he planned to return, without modifications informed by his experience with Daisy, to his previous way of
life, then his actions as described here remove any remaining doubt. The narration is also jarringly distant: whereas James uses free indirect discourse, through Winterbourne's perspective, for much of the novella, here Winterbourne's perspective is gone and even the facts of his life are suddenly uncertain. There is a hint of the sinister—after sharing his thoughts with the narrator for so long, Winterbourne suddenly disappears behind a curtain of uncertainty, from beyond which only "contradictory accounts" can be obtained of his doings. Taking a step back, one could certainly see a hint of evil in his actions. After seeing society, in the form of Mrs. Walker, reveal its capacity for aggression, and then seeing that capacity carried to its full extent, if indirectly, in Daisy's death after being shunned, Winterbourne "nevertheless" returns to that society.

Revisiting Brooks' idea of ethical melodrama suggests that Winterbourne's return to society is a turn toward politely masked evil but also cautions against making that conclusion with certainty. As discussed earlier, Brooks argues that James elevates internal conflicts to battles between good and evil; however, as we saw in Winterbourne's narrativizing, evil is not always easy to identify. In James's own work, broadly speaking, Brooks argues that although evil can be hidden by manners and unknown to those who practice it, it is present, and it intensifies the ethical choices James puts at the center of his stories. As mentioned earlier, this hidden evil seems to be at play in *Daisy Miller*: people like Mrs. Costello disguise their cruel exclusion of Daisy with appeals to propriety, Winterbourne sides with them in the end, and Daisy, unable to recognize the difference between silly customs and real dangers like the vespertine Colosseum, perishes as a result. Additionally, in the carriage scene, the façade of manners drops, making the real stakes even clearer. Winterbourne's decision to return to Geneva, then, is not just a return to comfort but arguably an acceptance of evil—he makes his peace with the people who drove
Daisy to her death and brushes off his own role in the affair. Brooks' paradigm thus helps us glimpse the depth of James' social critique—of the sinister power which underlies narratives of propriety and exclusivity. However, as discussed earlier, the novella often fails to heighten its ethical conflicts, and demonstrates an ambivalence toward the melodramatic form; as a result, the question of evil becomes difficult to resolve.

Winterbourne's failed ethical melodrama and the final scene's stylistic deviation from that form, informed by the other insights into narrative developed in the novella, give evil a shadowy presence: it is impossible to conclude that it is there, but neither can one ignore the possibility of its presence. Although the carriage scene features an intensified ethical choice which becomes central to the plot, the end of the novella does not fit Brooks' formula—the distant narration de-intensifies Winterbourne's decision to go back to Geneva rather than heightening its importance. By contrast, as mentioned earlier, Winterbourne's quest to discover Daisy's true nature fits the ethical melodrama paradigm quite nicely: a moral question which the Colosseum scene brings to a dramatic climax. Winterbourne's ethical melodrama was also poorly written, failed to provide him with useful insights, and contributed to Daisy's demise. Furthermore, the novella calls into question the use of evil as a narrative device in general: Winterbourne's final conversation with Giovanelli gives the unconcerned-with-evil perspective a fair hearing and no clear rebuttal. The end of the novella thus must strike a strange balance: on the one hand, it reveals the power of narrative, showing how Mrs. Costello's ideas, even after being undermined, have enough purchase to keep Winterbourne within the fold that more or less killed Daisy. On the other, it remains cognizant of the limitations of narrative: presented as contradictory hearsay, and without any drama, the novel's ending resists grand conclusions about evil even as it suggests them. Evil might be present in the novella but creating stories with evil at their centers can itself do great
harm; a narrator must then always be on the look-out for evil but also beware becoming its conduit in doing so.

V: Implications for James’ Later Works

The double-bind unveiled by James' investigation of narrative both compels and forbids storytelling and invoking evil; it thus does not point a way forward for narrative so much as it encourages writers to constantly double back on themselves. If narrative drives people's decisions, and if writing stories is the best way to get at the mental processes by which those narratives exercise their power, then one must write; if those narratives conceal evil, one must write about evil. Furthermore, as Winterbourne's turn back to society at the end of the novella reveals, it is not enough to see the folly of the narratives that guide one's life if one seeks to become more morally enlightened—without creating new stories, one falls back into the old ones. The problem, of course, is that one could end up like the Winterbourne of the Chillon and Colosseum scenes, grafting narratives onto a world that does not match them and accusing people of evil while the real thing goes one behind one's back. There is no way out of this trap, but the way *Daisy Miller*’s end mirrors its beginning hints at a way through: one must always return to the issues one has brought up earlier, elucidating them by degrees but then bringing the uncertainty back in.

*Daisy Miller* cannot write the prescription and fill it, since demonstrating the pitfalls of oversimplified narratives requires one to produce them, but it compensates to a certain extent with its ending. The final sentence, on levels of structure—its repetition of the novella's opening—and of content—its highlighting of irreconcilable, indeterminate narratives—represents a strong turn toward uncertainty. As a result, however, it leaves a pressing question open: is evil an important part of everyday life, and if it is embedded in seemingly innocuous
customs, how can one hope to identify it? In doing so, it sets up the form of James' later novels: the question of evil becomes a vitally important subject, but also one it is deadly to answer directly. *Daisy Miller* is thus, in a sense, an unfinished work: in seeking to understand narrative, it discovers a fundamental moral question; its form is ideal for presenting that question but insufficient to fully answer it. James thus leaves himself one theme largely unfinished, and one technique—of approaching, through narration, the key moment of cognition, of reaching shared understanding and accepting narratives—largely unused. The later novels thus answer *Daisy Miller's* call in two ways. First, their intricate prose echoes the novella's uncertainty at the level of syntax, making them suitable for treatment of evil. Ethical melodrama makes hidden evil a suitable subject for narrative, but not when it resembles Winterbourne's tales; it requires layers of language that frustrate simplistic conclusions. Second, their laborious explorations of characters' consciousnesses investigate the mental processes James only briefly addresses in this novella. *Daisy Miller* thus produces great insight into the power and limitations of narrative, and the insights that evade its reach are the ones James' mature works pursue most vigorously.
Works Cited


