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DAISY MILLER

A Study

By HENRY JAMES, Jr.



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English 213 – Term 2, Week 3  
Henry James *Daisy Miller*

“*Daisy Miller*, the archetype of American adolescent girls, was defined as an ‘inscrutable combination of audacity and innocence.’ Her emergence as a popular national type and her cautionary tale reflected an enthusiasm for the American maiden which amounted at times to ‘a girl fetish.’ The girl was exalted as the symbol of the nation while the American matron sat on the shelf and the American male built his bridges and his empires. Part of this ‘girl worship’ was the American love of youth and the child-centered home, but the cult expressed certain unique patterns, typically female and typically nineteenth century” (3)

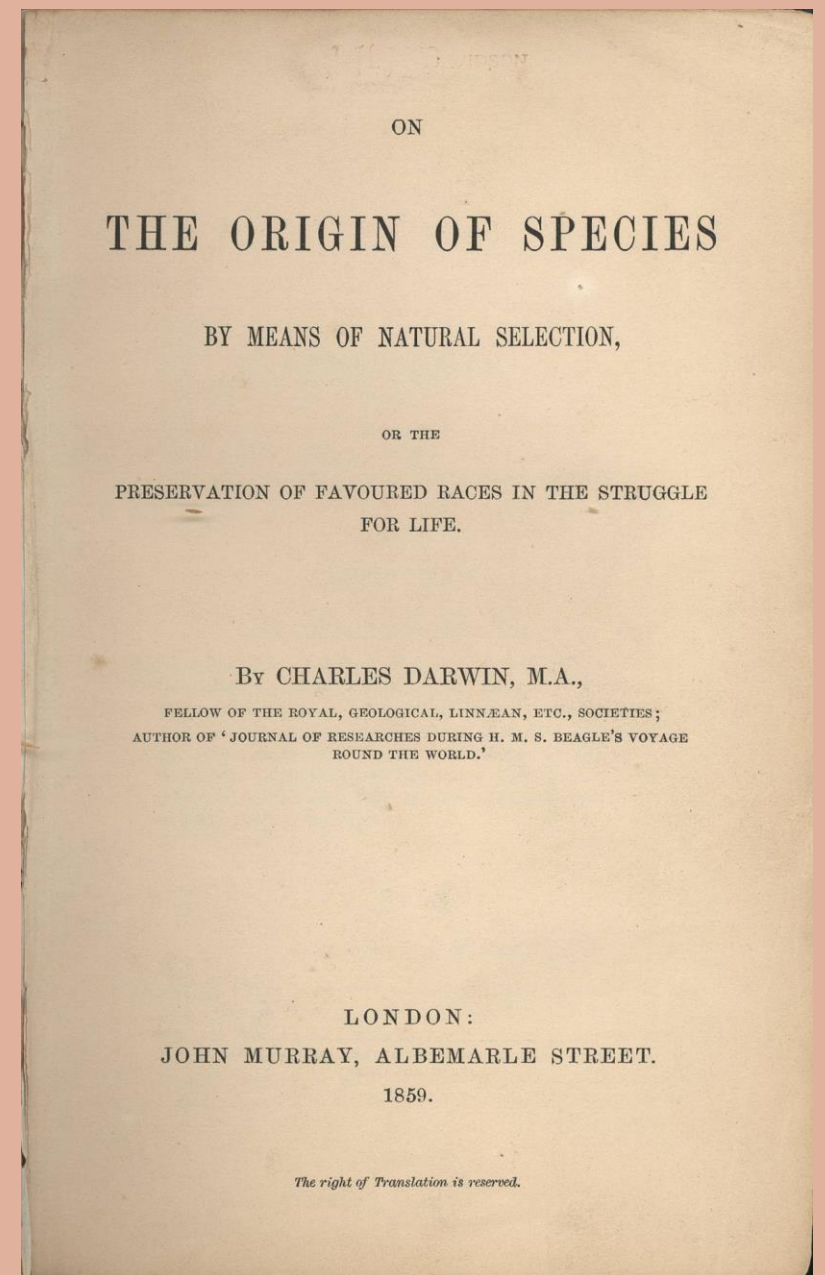
Barbara Welter *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, 21

- “Winterbourne had an old attachment for **the little metropolis of Calvinism**; he had been put to school there as a boy, and he had afterwards gone to college there” (9)
- “It’s this **old Europe**. It’s the climate that makes [my teeth] come out” (11)

“In Geneva, as he had been perfectly aware, a young man was not at liberty to speak to a young unmarried lady except under certain rarely occurring conditions; but here, at Vevey, what conditions could be better than those? – a pretty *American* girl coming and standing in front of you in a garden” (12)

“She gradually gave him more of the benefit of her glance; and then he saw that this glance was perfectly direct and unshrinking. It was not, however, what would have been called an immodest glance, for the young girl’s eyes were singularly honest and fresh” (14)

“One general law, leading to the advancement of all organic beings, namely, multiply, vary, let the strongest live and the weakest die.”



“According to the neo-Lamarckian evolutionary doctrine informing much of the optimistic nurture literature, proper habits instilled in children through proper training would gradually be organized as instincts, ultimately passing by transmission to the next generation as permanent improvements. The nature of the child's future - and the perfectibility of ‘the race’ - hinged on the process of the child's development, and no student”

-Lynn Wardley

“The naturalist author often describes his characters as though they are conditioned and controlled by environment, heredity, instinct, or chance. But he also suggests a compensating humanistic value in his characters or their fates, which affirms the significance of the individual and of his life. The tension here is that between the naturalist's desire to represent in fiction the new, discomfiting truths which he has found in the ideas and life of his late nineteenth-century world, and also his desire to find some meaning in experience which reasserts the validity of the human enterprise.”

– Donald Pizer *The Theory and Practice of American Literary Naturalism* (1993)



- But the disgust prevailed—all her **instinctive resistances**, of taste, of training, of blind inherited scruples, rose against the other feeling. Her strongest sense was one of personal **contamination**.
- As for Rosedale, she did not, after the first shock, greatly care what conclusions he had drawn. Though usually adroit enough where her own interests were concerned, she made the mistake, not uncommon to persons in whom the **social habits are instinctive**, of supposing that the inability to acquire them quickly implies a general dulness. Because a blue-bottle bangs irrationally against a window-pane, the drawing-room naturalist may forget that under less artificial conditions
- The fact that her immediate anxieties were relieved did not blind her to a possibility of their recurrence; it merely gave her enough buoyancy to rise once more above her doubts and feel a renewed faith in her beauty, her power, and her **general fitness** to attract a brilliant destiny. It could not be that one conscious of such aptitudes for mastery and enjoyment was doomed to a perpetuity of failure; and her mistakes looked easily reparable in the light of her restored self-confidence.

- “The girl goes about alone with her foreigners. As to what happens further, you must apply elsewhere for information. She has picked up half a dozen of the regular Roman fortune-hunters, and she takes them about to people’s houses. When she comes to a party she brings with her a gentleman with a good deal of manner and a wonderful moustache” (46)
- “ ‘You may go back to the hotel, mother, but I’m going to take a walk,’ said Daisy” (53)
- “ ‘If I didn’t walk I should expire’” (60)

“In a society where values changed frequently, where fortunes rose and fell with frightening rapidity, where social and economic mobility provided instability as well as hope, one thing remained the same – a true woman was a true woman, wherever she was found”

Barbara Welter *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, 21

The crowd is his element, as the air is that of birds and water of fishes. His passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd. For the perfect *flâneur*, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world—impartial natures which the tongue can but clumsily define. The spectator is a prince who everywhere rejoices in his incognito.

— *Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life", (New York: Da Capo Press, 1964).*

“Prostitution was indeed the female version of flânerie. Yet sexual difference makes visible the privileged position of males within public space. I mean this: the flâneur was simply the name of a man who loitered; but all women who loitered risked being seen as whores, as the term "street-walker," or "tramp" applied to women makes clear”

-Susan Buck Morss “The Flâneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering”

- “ ‘Will you give me a lump of sugar?’ he asked, in a sharp, hard little voice – a voice immature, and yet, somehow, not young” (9)
- “The girl goes about alone with her foreigners. As to what happens further, you must apply elsewhere for information. She has picked up half a dozen of the regular Roman fortune-hunters, and she takes them about to people’s houses. When she comes to a party she brings with her a gentleman with a good deal of manner and a wonderful moustache” (46)
- “ ‘You may go back to the hotel, mother, but I’m going to take a walk,’ said Daisy” (53)
- “ ‘If I didn’t walk I should expire’” (60)

“Such a vision of the solidarity of life had never before come to Lily. She had had a premonition of it in the blind motions of her mating-instinct; but they had been checked by the disintegrating influences of the life about her. All the men and women she knew were like atoms whirling away from each other in some wild centrifugal dance: her first glimpse of the continuity of life had come to her that evening in Nettie Struther’s kitchen”



No naturalist will doubt that the idea of a struggle for life carried on through organic nature is the greatest generalization of our century. Life is struggle; and in that struggle the fittest survive. But the answers to the questions “by which arms is the struggle chiefly carried on!” and “who are the fittest in the struggle!” will widely differ according to the importance given to the two different aspects of the struggle: the direct one, for food and safety among separate individuals, and the struggle which Darwin described as “metaphorical” – the struggle, very often collective, against adverse circumstances. [...] There is an immense amount of warfare and extermination going on amidst various species; there is, at the same time, as much, or perhaps even more, of mutual support, mutual aid, and mutual defense... **Sociability is as much a law of nature as mutual struggle**” -Kropotkin  
*Mutual Aid*