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Clothing and gender assignment/identification in *Gabriel* and *Daisy Miller*

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ABSTRACT

Pur variando con il tempo e la cultura, gli standard d'abbigliamento hanno mantenuto nel corso della storia un carattere normativo e performativo strettamente legato all'identificazione e assegnazione di genere. Il presente lavoro ha per oggetto l'articolazione tra vestiario e identificazione/assegnazione di genere sviluppata nel XIX secolo rispettivamente dall'autrice francese George Sand in *Gabriel* e dall'americano Henry James nella novella *Daisy Miller*. La comparazione si divide in tre macro sezioni e, con l'ausilio dei *Gender* e *Dress Studies*, analizza la rappresentazione dell'abbigliamento femminile e maschile presente nelle due opere in rapporto alla società e al contesto storico di riferimento. Sottolineando analogie e differenze, l'indagine mira a evidenziare come entrambi gli autori problematizzino e contestino il concetto di "ruolo di genere" veicolato dalle norme sociali attraverso il vestiario, con particolare attenzione alla posizione della figura femminile in contrasto con la sua controparte maschile e con i dettami borghesi e aristocratici.

Keywords

Gender Studies, *Dress Studies*, identificazione di genere, ruolo di genere, Henry James, George Sand.

Introduction

The present work is based on the study of the role that clothing plays in gender assignment and identification in Henry James' short story *Daisy Miller* and George Sand's *roman dialogué Gabriel*. The analysis, both analogical and contrastive, was carried out by comparing the way in which the different occurrences of the characters' clothing contribute to establishing and/or reinforcing their gender identity and assignment in relation to their contemporary society.

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We collected all the *loci* considered particularly relevant to this research and then we analysed them using the tools provided by the theories developed by Dress Studies and Gender Studies during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. A theoretical section, entitled *Fashion as a system: at a crossroad between semiology and Gender theory*, brings together some of the fundamental definitions and concepts in Fashion studies and Gender theory, giving a brief retrospective of the debates that have developed since the last century. In particular, we focused on the studies conducted by Roland Barthes during the '70s and the relationship established between fashion, gender and femininity in its various declinations. The investigation is divided into three parts: *Point of view and gendered assignment*; *Clothing and gender roles*; *The death of gender*, corresponding to as many thematic nuclei, which question specific aspects through which the symbolic function of clothing is revealed in the texts. The first section starts from the narrative point of view relating to the individual works to highlight that the meaning conveyed by clothing arises and changes depending on the observer. In this way, the analysis will show how James and Sand construct their characters by emphasising the narrative focus in the first place and how this, combined with the aesthetic element, contributes to shaping (and therefore limiting) the protagonists' agency. The second section is the core of the study: the relationship between clothing as a signifier and gender role as a collateral resultant (and meaning). In particular, the investigation will aim to identify how the physical and aesthetic attributes of individuals match not only their corresponding social position, but also to the underlying gender assignment/identification. Furthermore, both authors show how the male-female opposition, based on birth sex alone, contrasts (and sometimes even contradicts) other factors such as education (*Gabriel*) or culture of origin (*Daisy Miller*). Finally, the last section is dedicated to the death of the protagonists and the ideological fallout it has within the works and the critical reflection the two authors establish with the gender question. The stories of the two women – although so different – end up converging towards the same fate. Both die as a result of their conflict with prevailing gender norms, but at the same time undergo a metamorphosis that elevate them to the role of heroines, claiming instead the guilt of the society (especially the men) around them.

The conclusions present a summary of the results obtained from the previous analysis and attempt to integrate them to give a comprehensive and coherent view of the subject. The nexus between clothing and gender assignment/identification, although differently declined, is strategically relevant not only for the narrative construction of both the works, but for the position it holds within a much broader historical and socio-political reflection on the role of women and (especially in James' *novella*) the relationship between the Old and the New World at the end of the 19th century.

I. Fashion as a system: at the crossroad between semiology and Gender theory

Système de la mode is the title of a work by the French semiologist and literary critic Roland Barthes, published in 1973, in which he uses the tools of linguistics and semiology to analyse the notion of Fashion. In 1967, during an interview, he declared that…

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> …le vêtement est l'un de ces objets de communication, comme la nourriture, les gestes, les comportements, la conversation, que j'ai toujours eu une joie profonde à interroger parce que, d'une part, ils possèdent une existence quotidienne […] et parce que, d'autre part, ils possèdent une existence intellectuelle et s'offrent à une analyse systématique par des moyens formels (Brochier 1975, 45).

What will interest Barthes from this point on is precisely the intellectual existence of clothing. This is a fundamental turning point: moving from real fashion to 'written' fashion, that is, to the discourse constructed around fashion as an object of language, whose meaning does not exist outside of it. Like language, clothes are a system that we tend to perceive as being part of a natural order, an idea that Barthes opposes:

> Certaines personnes veulent faire dire aux sociologues que la mode des cheveux longs pour les garçons est due aux Beatles ; c'est exact, mais il serait faux de faire une caractérologie du jeune homme moderne à partir de là et d'induire des traits caractériels de féminisation, de paresse à partir de cheveux longs. Si les cheveux sont devenus longs, c'est parce qu'ils étaient courts auparavant. Je résume ainsi et d'une façon un peu brutale ma pensée parce que je suis partisan d'une interprétation formaliste du phénomène de mode. [...] Il n'y a pas de trait naturellement féminin dans le vêtement; il n'existe que des rotations, des tournages réguliers de formes (Barthes 1967, 124).

By virtue of their communicative function, clothes are signs, and as such their signification is a construction, erroneously accepted as organic to mankind rather than (a specific type of) society:

> On peut attaquer le monde, et l'aliénation idéologique de notre monde quotidien, à bien des niveaux: *Système de la Mode* contient aussi une affirmation éthique sur le monde, la même d'ailleurs que dans les *Mythologies*, à savoir qu'il y a un mal, un mal social, idéologique, attaché aux systèmes de signes qui ne s'avouent pas franchement comme systèmes de signes. Au lieu de reconnaître que la culture est un système immotivé de significations, la société bourgeoise donne toujours des signes comme justifiés par la nature ou la raison (Delanghe 1967, 67).

In his article *Langage et vêtement*, Barthes takes into account the articulations of what Philippe Perrot called a history of the histories of costume, traced back to the beginning of the century, while recognising that it has an older substratum. Since the Renaissance, clothing has given rise, on the one hand, to archaeological work and, on the other hand, to dress reviews: a kind of lexicon which establishes a correspondence between clothing systems and anthropological or social status (sex, age, marital status, social condition). But the history of costume itself appears in the Romantic period, particularly among theatrical figures. In the second half of the 19th century, works appeared by scholars whose main aim was to treat the costume as an addition of theatre *pièces*. But the history of *pièces* does not lead to the history of systems. For historicism, the *pièce* is an event whose appearance and disappearance must be dated. These two approaches lead to difficulties: one can date the appearance of coins by reconstructing the circumstances of their origin, but we cannot infer the birth of *modes*. Moreover, the end of a fashion is very spread out

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over time and some clothes continue to be worn even though they are no longer the object of any and therefore hardly appear in literature or in reproductions (drawings, engravings, sculptures, etc.). The methodological insufficiency of historicism lies primarily in its very object of study: facts. What interests Barthes instead, like our research, are the values attributed to these same facts:

> Sur le plan de la différence interne, aucune histoire du costume ne s'est encore préoccupée de définir ce que pourrait être, à un moment donné, un système vestimentaire, l'ensemble axiologique (contraintes, interdictions, tolérances, aberrations, fantaisie, congruences et exclusions) qui le constituent (Barthes 1957, 431).

Barthes denies that fashion is a historical or anthropological fact, i.e. that its temporal unity is dependent on the corresponding historical-political one or on the *Zeitgeist* (the spirit of the age) to which it seems to be linked.

Another interesting contribution for us is the work of Flügel *The Psychology of Clothes*. The function of clothing is analysed "against" three traditional motives: protection, modesty and adornment. While we reject here the underlying Freudian symbolism, Flügel's hypotheses highlight the relationship between clothing and role. For the first time, clothing was freed from the triangle of motivations in which it had been confined, and it attained the status of a message, of an element belonging to a semiological system: in this sense, Flügel makes clothing much more a communication than an expression. Once dropped into the realm of communication, clothing can be subjected to the same treatment as language. Barthes proceeds in this direction once again, exhuming the Saussurean categories of "langue" and "parole". According to him, there is a triple homology: langage-vêtement, langue-costume and parole-habillement (Barthes 1957, 435). The application of the Saussurean distinction between langue and parole allows to describe the dialectical movements that regulate the exchanges between the institutional fashion and the personal clothing. These exchanges take place in both ways: the facts of costume become facts of dress, for example in women's fashion and in the institutions that disseminate it (catwalks, patterns, fashion magazines), and the facts of dress are in turn transformed into facts of costume (individual uses imitated collectively). Clothing is thus an institution and a "social model" that is a more or less standardised image of expected collective behaviour in a context of public representation (Ibid., 440). It is a sign of integration into a group and a mean of communicating the social status, roles, values and identity of the bearer and his society. In the section dedicated to the categories of *signifiant* and *signifié*, Barthes points out that:

> Le rapport de l'habillement et du costume est un rapport sémantique: la signification du vêtement croît au fur et à mesure que l'on passe de l'habillement au costume: l'habillement est faiblement significatif, il exprime plus qu'il ne notifie; le costume est au contraire fortement signifiant, il constitue une relation intellectuelle, notificatrice, entre le porteur et son groupe (Ibid., 437).
>
> Le système en lui-même n'est qu'une forme, il ne peut rien signifier, sauf à recourir à des considérations extra-sociologiques (philosophie de l'histoire ou psychanalyse). C'est le degré de participation au système (soumission totale, écarts, aberrations), qui est significatif; la valeur du système (c'est-à-dire son valant-pour) ne peut être saisie qu'au niveau

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> de ses consécrations ou de ses contestations. Le vétement n'est en fait que le signifiant d'un seul signifié principal, qui est le mode ou le degré de participation du porteur (groupe ou indi-vidu) (Ibid., 440).

Clothing is a language that communicates and shares specific signs with a set of groups. It marks by difference an identity (sexual, social, ideological...), personal or collective at the same time, in a metonymic way and in a metaphorical way. In *Le signe vestimentaire* Yves Delaporte states:

> Plutôt qu'un individu communiquant avec le groupe, le modèle pourrait être celui d'un groupe communiquant avec lui-même par l'intermédiaire de chaque individu (Delaporte 1980, 110).

Hence the performative function of fashion: clothes enter into a special relationship with the body and the identity. Where the body, sensitive and pure, cannot mean, clothes ensure the transition from the sensitive to the meaningful. If, just like the linguistic one, the vestimentary sign is also arbitrary and motivated,

> …pour une société donnée qui, à un moment déterminé, a opté pour l'un ou l'autre des divers types possibles d'association [between clothes and meaning], le caractère symbolique est flagrant (Ibid., 116).

Fashion not only connotes its sensitive object, but is able to shape and transform it to its liking: it claims that it can subject any 'real' body to the structure it has advanced, and that it can convert any object into the sign it has chosen, asserting an unlimited power of signification. In this way, clothing acts from outside the subject's will, drawing him into a formal web in which he remains entangled and over which he has no power. On the level of sexual and gender identity, we shall see that this has fatal implications for our characters: like economic status, clothing defines the individual and subjugates him to the internal logic of the social group to which he belongs. Such transformative power is two-way, who realises this can use it to his or her advantage, make it an instrument of ascent. In fact, our protagonists are the only ones with this awareness, while the figures gravitating around them are constructed like mannequins, immobile and without a will of their own. However, the aim of both works we analysed is not to act on the outcome of the imposition resulting from clothing, but to bring to light its consequences.

"Gender" as a construction denies that the stereotypical masculine or feminine qualifications are characteristics of individual men and women, but that these last ones are representations of gender based on what society expects of each sex. These expectations organize the gender identity on a social level, building a strong frame of reference which not only defines boys and girls, but within which they *must* fit. Consequently, the interpretation of the Self-image created through clothing is a social phenomenon, because the collective body image triggers an individual responsive behaviour. Gender – especially femininity – is worn through clothes. But although clothes allude to persons as sexual beings, they do not automatically denote sexuality (Craik 2005, 54). Fashion, especially with the birth of the capitalistic society,

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> …contributes to the process of self-formation by offering ideal images of femininity as goals to be worked towards. The female body is constructed as a surface to be worked on and a volume to be sculpted and moulded, through 'beauty' regimes, clothing and lifestyle (Ibid., 71).

Roles of gender have influenced clothing and vice versa, but fashion was not always gender scarred. Until the 18th century there were no significant differences in the dressing of both sexes; the dress was the signifier of the social class: the more elaborate it was the higher the social class. Fashion became "feminized" only in the 19th century, when the expression of sexual difference became more important than the social one.

This process started with the fall of the aristocracy and the rise of the bourgeoisie, and was accelerated by the French Revolution. Concretely and symbolically, this shift reflected the roles accorded to the sexes: while men competed in the arena of politics and business, women were given the "decorative" part to reflect the social status via their appearance. One particular conflict interests us: the evolution which took place between the 19th and 20th centuries, and the two opposed sights of the Old World and the New one. While the social and fashion model for Europe was the Victorian 'True Woman' (whose femininity was displayed in wide skirts and petticoats), on the other side of the ocean a revolution was rising: the so-called 'New Woman', who was modern and youthful in a shirtwaist and bell-shaped skirt. Moreover, many late 19th-century 'New Women' wore masculine clothing to signal their affinity for same-sex relationships, though this code was not recognised by the public.

Fashion studies are a dynamic field. More and more fashion and dress scholars favor a perspective focused on the link between clothing and identity: in their collective work, González and Bovone (2012, 67) underlined the importance to consider the «dressed body» as a «basic element of identity» and dress choices as «personal narratives» for individuals (Ibid.).

> The objects we choose (such as clothes) are […] opportunities to place ourselves socially via a situated practice, to communicate with the outer world our belonging or exclusion, or even our ambivalence and instability. (Ibid.).

The body is one of the vectors through which we express the gender *facet* of our identity. Here, we conceive femininity as a "gender role" (later we will also talk about an aesthetic gender role), echoing the definition of "social role" by Martuccelli:

> The role establishes a link between social structures and the actor, linking patterns of behavior to different statuses or social positions, thus ensuring the stability and predictability of interactions, as it signals the expected behavior of individual depending on the place [here the gender] it occupies in a given social system (Martuccelli 2002, 141).

The conceptualization of femininity with the theoretical tool of "role" enables to study the aesthetic practices of women as an expression and a construction tool of their gender identity, without underestimating the importance of the "gendered" normative framework of beauty. Whether they are in a

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process of adequacy or distance with the gendered beauty standards, their practices reveal how the construction of a certain appearance via clothing is a central element of their identity building. The main opposition lies between the aesthetic power (to use one's body as an asset), and the injunctions about restricting visibility (controlling the limits of this power). According to their position towards this nexus, women can experience different types of femininity. One particular declination that interests our work is what Cogérino and Mansey defined as "hegemonic (aesthetic) femininity": women who testify their desire to construct an appearance in adequacy with the culturally dominant femininity form. Others scholars – like Braizaz – prefer the expression "successful femininity", a term that underlines the feeling of pride felt by women who manage to coincide with the normative aesthetic models (although due to the internalization of the gender role imposed on them). At the opposite side of the spectrum we can find those women who use clothing as a resistance tool against aesthetic models and gender roles. Not only fashion, but also manners are implied in this negative responsive practice. It is important to highlight the potential discomfort caused by this stance: as Martucelli (2002, 235) states, they want to «experience a distance to the role, (but this distance) destabilizes them in an intimate way». In other words: they refuse to perpetuate a "tyranny" or a feminine "masquerade", but they are nonetheless affected by the consequences of this choice in the social sphere.

II. Point of view and gendered assignment

A first fundamental distinction lies in the narrative point of view used by the authors. In *Daisy Miller* the only point of view we are given is that of the male protagonist. The girl and the novella are configured as a case study, which «assembles a hierarchical construction with Daisy as subjected and Winterbourne himself as subjugator» (Duncan 2020, 2). From this perspective, «it is not so much Daisy Miller who is depicted, nor her actions, but Winterbourne's attitudes regarding her actions as a woman» (Ibid., 4). Instead *Gabriel*, as a dialogue novel, allows the reader to know Gabriel/elle primarily through her own eyes, thanks to the many monologues and soliloquies present in the text. Although purely formal in nature, this difference can give rise to an initial reflection on what we will encounter in the clothing of the two protagonists. While the latter is described in a polyphonic way and appears to us as a round character, whose thoughts and elucubrations we can follow along the path traced by the work, the image we are given of Daisy is that of a person «whose existence is contingent on Winterbourne's observations of her, corresponding to her lack of insight» (Ibid.), a kind of simulacrum, a static effigy presented to the reader as she is.

I.i First appearances: the equivocation of gender

Already from the first meeting between Daisy and Winterbourne in Switzerland, we can see that the girl's clothes contain fundamental elements of her gendered identity:

> The young lady meanwhile had drawn near. She was dressed in white muslin, with a hundred frills and flounces, and knots of pale-colored ribbon. She was bareheaded, but she balanced in her hand a large parasol, with a deep border of embroidery; and she was strikingly, admirably pretty. "How pretty they are!" thought Winterbourne, straightening himself in his seat, as if he were prepared to rise (James 2007, 6).

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We immediately see that Winterbourne is attracted to Daisy because of the effect her appearance has on him and the expectations she raises. The words 'white', 'frills' and 'pale-coloured' belong to the semantic field of the colour white and thus suggest the idea of innocence, purity and virginity, traditionally female qualities. Daisy's personality is thus inferred and to some extent equated with her clothing. From these ideas, others of a sexual and social nature flow down: Winterbourne portrays Daisy almost as a child, innocent, inexperienced and in need of protection. Duncan (2020, 5) highlights how «Daisy's sexuality is, in fact, a primary component of her adherence or non-adherence to the patriarchal metric that Winterbourne feels she must abide by», also underlined by the use of the plural subject 'they', which implies that she belongs to a category of women with already fixed characteristics (i.e. a certain gendered type). It is also interesting to note that, during the conversation between Winterbourne and his aunt, James inserts a detail about the protagonist's appearance: «said Winterbourne, smiling and curling his moustache» (James 2007, 18), the moustache being a physical indication of sexual maturity and a metonymic symbol of virility.

In parallel, at the end of the first chapter, when the protagonist proposes to Daisy to accompany him to Chillon Castle, we find another description of the young woman:

> She put up her parasol and walked back to the inn beside Eugenio. Winterbourne stood looking after her; and as she moved away, drawing her muslin furbelows over the gravel, said to himself that she had the tournure of a princess (Ibid., 15).

After the image of the 'virgin' comes that of the 'princess', associated here with the concept of beauty constructed from the undulating movement of the muslin furbelows, a very light and soft fabric made of fine threads (cotton or wool) in warp and weft, which echoes the delicacy suggested by the presence of the colour white in Daisy's first entrance. As a product of male fantasy, she is painted as a princess, a woman ideally educated to be passive and waiting to be saved by a man. On the contrary, Winterbourne does not need to be qualified in any way: as a man, he enjoys freedoms and privileges unknown to a woman, and the responsibility for what is considered dishonourable – such as the trip to the Castle – falls entirely on her. It is precisely from this structural discrepancy that the perfect image of the young girl is immediately corrupted. In a relentless attempt to find a formula that synthesises her extraordinary beauty and inappropriate (and implicitly masculine) behaviour, Winterbourne defines her as an "American flirt" (Ibid., 12), a pejorative term that designates a negative model of women who flirt with any man.

Similarly, the presentation of Gabriel/elle is twofold. In the second scene, before the character even appears, her preceptor and her grandfather the Prince of Bramante speak of her in these terms:

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> LE PRECEPTEUR : Il aime l'étude, et il aime aussi les violents exercices, la chasse, les armes, la course. En lui l'adresse, la persévérance et le courage suppléent à la force physique. Il a des goûts sérieux, mais il a aussi les goûts de son âge: les beaux chevaux, les riches habits, les armes étincelantes.
>
> […]
>
> LE PRINCE : La poussière qu'il soulève me dérobe ses traits... Cette belle chevelure, cette taille élégante... Oui, ce doit être un joli cavalier... bien posé sur son cheval; de la grâce, de l'adresse, de la force même… (Sand 2019, 43 e 46).

The two perpetrators of the deception are discussing the success of their enterprise: Gabriel/elle is a young knight, perfectly educated, full of a sense of duty, towards whom they have high expectations. It is interesting to note that, in the description of the perfect knight, more external characteristics, related to Gabriel's physical appearance, find their place next to others of a spiritual type that help to identify him/her as a man. However, in the third scene, the dialogue between the preceptor and the protagonist immediately shows the latter's tormented nature. In a discussion about the differences between masculine and feminine qualities, she confuses both her interlocutor and the reader:

> GABRIEL : J'ai rêvé que j'étais femme.
>
> […]
>
> Dans mon rêve, je n'étais pas un habitant de cette terre. J'avais des ailes, et je m'élevais à travers les mondes, vers je ne sais quel monde idéal. Des voix sublimes chantaient autour de moi; je ne voyais personne; mais des nuages légers et brillants, qui passaient dans l'éther, reflétaient ma figure, et j'étais une jeune fille vêtue d'une longue robe flottante et couronnée de fleurs. (Ibid., 52-53)

To which the preceptor replies: «Alors vous étiez un ange, et non pas une femme» (Ibid., 53). We can begin by reflecting on the word 'angel': as opposed to the two terms analysed in *Daisy Miller* – 'virgin' and 'princess' –, which incorporate a certain vision of the feminine, angels are asexual beings, neither male nor female, belonging to a perfect world, prior to original sin, where the dominant figure is the androgynous, which has nothing to do with the human. On a superficial level, he wants to dissuade Gabriel/elle from her dream, lest she discover the truth before its time, but, on the other hand, the woman-angel pairing – here in opposition, contrary to what literary tradition teaches – is a prefiguration of what will happen in the course of the story: Gabriel/elle does not identify with either of the two genders, but places herself in the middle and above them, in a space that does not belong to this world and where she can therefore find neither place nor expression. The mention of the "floating dress" (*robe flottante*) and the crown reinforces this idea, recalling the Christian imagery of the Virgin Mary: the dress – a feminine attribute – is combined with the crown of flowers, traditionally associated by its circular shape with the concepts of cyclicity, death and rebirth. However, the dream narrative does not end there; other elements reveal that Gabriel/elle does not paint herself as an angel, but specifically as a woman:

> J'étais une femme; car tout à coup mes ailes se sont engourdies, l'éther s'est fermé sur ma tête, comme une voûte de cristal impénétrable, et je suis tombé, tombé... et j'avais au cou une lourde chaîne dont le poids m'entraînait vers l'abîme (Ibid.).

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By guessing the truth about her sex, the protagonist also guesses the alienating condition that follows (not coincidentally represented through the image of the fall), namely that of «la femme esclave, propriété, conquête» (Ibid., 44).

Clothing and gender roles

Both protagonists are women, but the reflection on the relationship between their biological sex and their gender identification is problematised from different instances, for which clothes play the role of signifiers. In *Daisy Miller*, they have an eminently social function: the girl uses her beauty and her apparel to elevate her social status and to sneak into high society, also exploiting men if necessary. Daisy bursts into the picture of high society as a transgressive figure: she is a woman who identifies herself as such (today we would say 'cisgender'), but who no longer wants to conform to the expectations and restrictions that society would like to impose on her. The gender role assigned to her is thus made to implode from within: we do not witness the discovery and creation of an identity, Daisy is presented from the beginning as an already accomplished character who knows who she is and what she wants, but rather the conflict between her and the diktats of her time, still unprepared to embrace the revolution she embodies. Gabriel/elle, on the other hand, is a more complex character: she is a woman raised as a man who, upon discovering the truth about her biological sex, plunges into a full-blown identity crisis. The confrontation here takes place on the terrain of upbringing and the resulting power: as a woman, Gabriel/elle nevertheless retains the masculine education that has been passed on to her, recognises its merits and advantages and does not want to give them up. When she chooses to take on a female 'form', she is soon forced to take on another role, unknown to her, and is unable to find a synthesis between the two. At the beginning of the novel she says: «quant à moi, je ne sens pas que mon âme ait un sexe» (Ibid., 49); this is an initial denial of the binary relationship between sex and gender: even when she discovers that she is a woman, she continues to think that she has an asexual soul, and it is this particular characteristic that prevents her from fitting into a defined role.

II.i A tragedy of manners: a question of power

In the scene on the day of the excursion, as Winterbourne waits for Daisy in the lobby of their hotel, the girl's arrival is described as a real 'apparition':

> She came tripping downstairs, buttoning her long gloves, squeezing her folded parasol against her pretty figure, dressed in the perfection of a soberly elegant traveling costume. Winterbourne was a man of imagination and, as our ancestors used to say, sensibility; as he looked at her dress and, on the great staircase, her little rapid, confiding step, he felt as if there were something romantic going forward (James 2007, 27).

Immediately afterwards, the narrator mentions how «he passed out with her among all the idle people that were assembled there» (Ibid.) and notes how «they were all looking at her very hard» (Ibid.). Daisy's presence is always distinguished by her clothes, her accessories and, more generally, by her appearance, which not only excites Winterbourne's fantasies, but also attracts the attention of others. That «dressed in the perfection» is not only an indication of the care with which the girl dresses, but also a subtle emphasis of the kind of gaze with which Winterbourne (and the male gender he serves) looks at her. He's attracted

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to the unknown world of 'American flirts', but he does not realize that Daisy's beauty does not reflect her power as a woman. Michael Foucault (1978, 5) highlights that the 19th century tended to include a range of different meanings under the term 'sex', cultural constructs representing the ideas of power, knowledge, and identity, labeling their correlation through gender. Daisy's role in the novella represents the opportunity for women to showcase power outside of the private sphere. The author often insists on the details of her outfits (he often mentions the fan, the parasol and the ribbons, which she arranges almost obsessively), using the aesthetic dimension to show exactly how, through the mere fact of being seen in public, she assumes a masculine role and exercises a certain power over those around her. At the same time, most of the descriptions point out how she fidgets with her clothes. The reader's first assumption could be that this detail hides the anxiety of her way of acting. Indeed, what it really does is drawing attention to the fact that she is being watched. All the descriptions of Daisy rearranging her clothes are contained in the larger context of Winterbourne staring at her, analysing her, or judging her. Their aim is rather to reveal the implicit predatory nature of his gaze, and at the same time activate a short-circuit between beauty and clothing: as we said, Daisy uses her external appearance to assume agency over her image, but in doing so she is made 'subject' to the society's gaze.

A similar impression is found in the first pages of chapter four. The story has already moved to Rome; Mrs. Walker is giving a party and Daisy is late. The young woman's behaviour provokes reactions of indignation, not least from Mrs. Walker herself who, a few pages earlier, had had an argument with her about the girl's inappropriate attitudes. However, when she joins the other guests, the narrator describes her as follows:

> Daisy came after eleven o'clock; but she was not, on such an occasion, a young lady to wait to be spoken to. She rustled forward in radiant loveliness, smiling and chattering, carrying a large bouquet, and attended by Mr. Giovanelli. Everyone stopped talking and turned and looked at her. […] Of all this Daisy delivered herself with the sweetest, brightest audibleness, looking now at her hostess and now round the room, while she gave a series of little pats, round her shoulders, to the edges of her dress (James 2007, 48).

Here we see an obvious friction between the grace and beauty attributed to Daisy's appearance and the unseemliness of her behaviour (a judgement she does not care about). The mention of the bouquet and the edges of the dress suggests the attention to detail that the young woman has put into the composition of her outfit for the evening, and, at the same time, what can be inferred to be her goal, namely, to be noticed. James constructs Daisy to represent a new type of woman and uses her to stage a face-off between the old and new world ideals of femininity (the only one that could produce it). The oppressive conception of Winterbourne and Victorian Europe clashes here with the new function assigned to fashion (later crossed with feminism) in the USA, which can become a liberating force.

It is worth returning to the second chapter to see where the author sows the first seeds of this struggle. Winterbourne is still in Switzerland and has gone to visit his aunt, Mrs. Costello. The lady, described as «a person of much distinction» (Ibid., 16) with «a long, pale face, a high nose, and a great deal of very striking white hair, which she wore in large puffs and rouleaux over the top of her head» (Ibid.), is presented as the symbol of a respectable woman, the opposite of Daisy and therefore her 'judge' *par excellence*. This is why the first thing Winterbourne does is to ask her if she has noticed Daisy's family, to which she replies that

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she has seen, heard and avoided them, a comment from which the young man deduces that «Miss Daisy Miller's place in the social scale was low» (Ibid., 17). In a few lines, the dialogue quickly turns to Daisy's appearance:

> "The young girl is very pretty," said Winterbourne in a moment.
>
> "Of course she's pretty. But she is very common."
>
> "I see what you mean, of course," said Winterbourne after another pause.
>
> "She has that charming look that they all have," his aunt resumed. "I can't think where they pick it up; and she dresses in perfection — no, you don't know how well she dresses. I can't think where they get their taste." (Ibid.).

Despite the social disapproval («she's very common»), Mrs. Costello cannot ignore the girl's good taste in dress, nor can she avoid praising her for it. It is not by chance that James chooses to use the same locution we found at the end of the first chapter – «to dress in perfection» – to contrast Winterbourne's positive judgement with his aunt's negative one, thus emphasising that the link between the two actually lies in the dress factor. The author stages a moment of transition: women like Daisy are part of a new age and a new worldview that women like Mrs. Costello or socio-political realities like Europe cannot yet comprehend; it is the beginning of an evolution that will mature a few decades later – after the end of the First World War – and that the old high society is still under the illusion of being able to stop.

As far as Gabriel/elle is concerned, it is in the relationship with her cousin Astolphe that the protagonist's existential drama unfolds, and it is thanks to, or because of, him that she decides to return to women's clothing. The whole novel is punctuated by the alternation between 'Gabriel-dressed as a man' and 'Gabrielle-dressed as a woman'. From a certain point on, the reader is confronted with a double name: he is no longer just 'Gabriel' but also 'Gabrielle', in the feminine, since his first name – as a homophone word – already encapsulates her double identity. The soliloquy that occupies the whole of Scene IV of Part II, when Gabriel/elle dresses as a woman for the first time, shows the protagonist's suffering in the face of her new clothes:

> GABRIEL, seul, s'approchant de la glace.
>
> Que je souffre sous ce vêtement! Tout me gêne et m'étouffe. Ce corset est un supplice, et je me sens d'une gaucherie!... Je n'ai pas encore osé me regarder. L'œil curieux de cette vieille me glaçait de crainte!... Pourtant, sans elle, je n'aurais jamais su m'habiller. (Il se place devant le miroir et jette un cri de surprise.) Mon Dieu! est-ce moi? Elle disait que je ferais une belle fille... Est-ce vrai? (Il se regarde longtemps en silence.) Ces femmes-là donnent des louanges pour qu'on les paie... Astolphe ne me trouvera-t-il pas gauche et ridicule? Ce costume est indécent... Ces manches sont trop courtes!... Ah! j'ai des gants!... (Il met ses gants et les tire au-dessus des coudes.) Quelle étrange fantaisie que la sienne! elle lui paraît toute simple, à lui!... Et moi, insensé qui, malgré ma répugnance à prendre de tels vêtements, n'ai pu résister au désir imprudent de faire cette expérience!... Quel effet vais-je produire sur lui? Je dois être sans grâce!... (Il essaie de faire quelques pas devant la glace.) Il me semble que ce n'est pas si difficile, pourtant. (Il essaie de faire jouer son éventail et le brise.) Oh! pour ceci, je n'y comprends rien. Mais, est-ce qu'une femme ne pourrait pas plaire sans ces minauderies? (Sand 2019, 118).

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The experience turns out to be traumatic: at first, the protagonist is reluctant to dress as a woman, she has been brought up as a man and cannot conceive of her image in any other way, which even seems sinister and ridiculous, and revolts her. She does not understand how she can be loved dressed like that, nor what the necessity is for a woman to wear certain things. It is clear that the initial «Tout me gêne et m'étouffe», which here refers to clothing, is indeed part of a wider reflection: as we have seen, by virtue of its performative nature, clothing is one ofthe fundamental features through which the construction of sexual and gendered identity passes and, as such, it symbolises here all the constraints and deprivations imposed on women in the 16th (and veiledly by reflection in the 19th) century. Confronted for the first time with what being a woman implies for the society to which she belongs, Gabriel/elle is unable to accept it. Throughout the play, despite her success due to her beauty and elegance, the protagonist will never be able to accept…

> …de se trouver brusquement prisonnière de l'étroite condition féminine, réduite au maniement de l'aiguille, à quelques rudiments de savoir et de religion, à l'attente patiente d'un maitre qui sera nécessairement obéi (Raid 2019, 21).

In the second part, the first signs of failure appear. First, she declares: «je vais me retirer et dépouiller ce dangereux travestissement pour ne jamais le reprendre» (Sand 2019, 128), and then...

> …Ôtons vite la robe de Déjanire, elle me brûle la poitrine, elle m'enivre, elle m'oppresse! Oh! quel trouble, quel égarement, mon Dieu!... Mais comment m'y prendrai-je?... Tous ces lacets, toutes ces épingles... (Il déchire son fichu de dentelle et l'arrache par lambeaux.) (Ibid., 142-143).

The use of the term *travestissement* implies the fictional nature that Gabriel/elle attributes to it, while the adjective *dangereux* designates it as something capable of harming her. What we read in the following soliloquy is then nothing more than a cry for help: trapped by her clothes in a role to which she does not feel she belongs, she feels trapped («elle m'enivre, elle m'oppresse!»). The sex-gender binarism is broken: the education she is given prevents her from seeing herself only as a woman and instead shows her what she is not prepared to give up in order to conform to what social conventions impose on her, namely subjugation (symbolically represented by the "laces" and "pins"). The gesture of tearing the kerchief to shreds, parallel to the gesture described in one of the captions in the previous soliloquy («Il essaie de faire jouer son éventail et le brise»), is significant: frustration quickly turns to anger, generating contempt for her own image and for the material symbols of this imprisonment. The mention of Dejanira's dress is noteworthy because it suggests and condenses the tragic condition of women represented by the figure of Dejanira: a princess in Greek mythology who, fearing that the princess Iole wants to take her husband (Hercules) away from her, makes her put on a tunic coated with an ointment against infidelity, but ends up killing him and herself.

It is in the final dialogue of part three that Gabriel/elle herself reveals all this to Astolphe:

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> GABRIELLE. Ces outrages ne m'atteignent pas. Vois-tu, Astolphe, lu m'as fait redevenir femme, mais je n'ai pas tout à fait renoncé à être homme. Si j'ai repris les vêtements et les occupations de mon sexe, je n'en ai pas moins conservé en moi cet instinct de la grandeur morale et ce calme de la force qu'une éducation mâle a développés et cultivés dans mon sein (Ibid., 172).

The opposition between the two gendered identities is radically exposed here: clothes and occupations on the one hand, that instinct of moral greatness and that calmness of strength on the other. In contrast to Daisy, who uses her beauty and appearance to travel around Europe, attend parties and manipulate men, Gabriel/elle's femininity corresponds to a total abdication of power and freedom. As the notion of androgyny had suggested from the start, the protagonist would like to subsume both genders onto herself while belonging to the female sex, synthesising the masculine and the feminine in a way that was unique and unprecedented for her time; she is a woman, but this does not mean that she has to renounce being a man, a man and a woman, as integrated parts of a single identity.

The death of gender

The most obvious analogy between the two works is the ending: both protagonists die, and their death is a direct consequence of the relationship with their gender identification/assignment. Daisy dies of Roman fever for spending her evenings with Giovanelli in risky places; Gabriel/elle dies murdered at the hands of a man hired by her grandfather. It is important to note that both are conscious deaths: Daisy chooses to break the rules to be with her suitor, even though she knows she is in danger: «I don't care,» said Daisy in a little strange tone, «whether I have Roman fever or not!» (James 2007, 61); Gabriel/elle allows herself to be killed peacefully: «Merci! Je meurs en paix» (Sand 2019, 267), wishing to be freed from her torment, which had already led her to consider suicide: «Le suicide!... Cette pensée ne me sort pas de l'esprit» (Ibid., 263). However, there is a profound difference between the two: Daisy's death is a punishment, whereas Gabriel/elle's is a resolution. Daisy's transgressive charge is portrayed from the outset as excessive and chaotic: her beauty and the sophistication of her clothing, contrasted with her disregard for existing social norms, make her a mad monad, an alienated and foreign element in the social panorama in which she finds herself and which she punctually ignores, and for this she can only be punished. Through her death, James denounces the fact that there is (still) no place for women like her. Gabriel/elle's death, on the other hand, is the extreme realisation of her consciousness, i.e. the impossibility of being part of the society she was born into because of her unwillingness to identify with the prevailing gender roles.

As already mentioned, Daisy dies because, contrary to social convention, she spends her evenings with Giovanelli in unhealthy places and becomes ill. The way James narrates her death creates an aura of heroism around her figure: almost as if she were a sacrificial victim, the young woman's struggle against patriarchal society and its iron laws ends in tragedy, but in doing so she reaffirms her freedom. If the whole story can be read as a representation of male oppression, Daisy's independent choice makes her death a victory, almost an ascension. Indeed, the author does not give space to the death narrative: she dies suddenly and most of the last chapter is dedicated instead to the reflections of the two main male characters, Winterbourne and Giovanelli:

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> [Giovanelli] "She was the most beautiful young lady I ever saw, and the most amiable"; and then he added in a moment, "and she was the most innocent." (James 2007, 63).
>
> In the interval Winterbourne had often thought of Daisy Miller and her mystifying manners. One day he spoke of her to his aunt - said it was on his conscience that he had done her injustice (Ibid., 63-64).

Even her death is told from the point of view of the oppressor, her legacy is described by Giovanelli through her appearance. However, the patriarchal superstructure seems to give way here: ostracized and judged throughout the novel, Daisy is now defined as «the most innocent» and Winterbourne himself comes to recognize his behaviour towards her as unfair, especially because his romantic hopes and dreams die with her. Winterbourne eventually realizes that trying to break the status quo made this happen, because gender and cultural norms are only valid if the individuals follow the rules.

In contrast, Gabriel/elle's death is explicitly staged in Part V: we are in Rome, during the Carnival, and she is given up for lost or dead. From the very first scene, the garment is a premonitory sign of her fate:

> GABRIEL, *en homme.*
>
> (Costume noir élégant et sévère, l'épée au côté.) (Sand 2019, 208).

Not only has she returned to her male 'form', but her costume for the occasion is «black», «elegant and severe», and accompanied by the sword. The implicit symbolism of the colour of the costume is evident if we consider that Astolphe and Faustine wear blue and pink dominoes respectively, the two colours traditionally associated with the male and female genders: «ASTOLPHE, en domino bleu; FAUSTINA, en domino rose» (Ibid., 231). The protagonist's black is thus further proof that her identity cannot be pigeonholed into any gender and foreshadows the tragic outcome of the novel as the colour of death. But black is also the colour associated with leaving childhood, and thus with adulthood and the self-awareness that comes with it. Representing an absence – as opposed to the vivid totality of the colour white – it has the power to absorb everything and, just as in a black hole, to make everything reappear. Gabriel/elle's entire journey is thus summed up in her black domino: she has finally become aware, she has understood who she is and, in so doing, she has also understood that she cannot belong to the world into which she has been thrown. Her death thus denounces the oppression that the very notion of 'gender' imposes on the individual, forcing him or her to assume a predefined identity with certain characteristics and prerogatives from which he or she is not allowed to escape. We believe that Sand's choice of placing the death of her protagonist during the Carnival has a deeper meaning. The importance of carnivalesque symbolism in literature was first highlighted and rigorously studied by Michail Bachtin. According to him,

> Carnival is a spectacle without limelight and without division into performers and spectators. During the carnival everyone is an active participant, everyone takes part in the carnivalesque action. Carnival is neither contemplated nor acted: one lives in it, one lives according to its laws, as long as these laws are in force, that is, one lives the carnivalesque life. But carnival life is a life taken off its normal track, it is to some extent a 'life backwards', a 'world upside down' ('monde à l'envers'). The laws, prohibitions and limitations that determine the regime and order of normal, i.e. extra-carnival life, during carnival are abolished; first and foremost, the hierarchical order and all related forms of terror,

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> devotion, piety, etiquette and so on, i.e. everything that is determined by hierarchical-social or any other kind of inequality (including that of age), is abolished. All distance between people is abolished and a particular carnivalesque category, the free familiar contact between men, comes into force (Bachtin 1968, 160)[1].

What does this tell us about the author's choice? The meaning of Gabriel/elle's death changes radically if we see it in the light of Bachtin's definition. Is the male costume the reality she has chosen or the mask? Remember the: «je vais me retirer et dépouiller ce dangereux travestissement pour ne jamais le reprendre»; which is the disguise then? To answer this question, it is necessary to point out another characteristic of the carnivalesque sense of the world: its ambiguity and indefiniteness, i.e. the absolute negation of dialectical synthesis and the celebration of opposites as such.

> The ambivalent nature of carnival images needs to be addressed again in a special way. All carnival images are unique and twofold at the same time, they combine in themselves both poles of approach and crisis: birth and death (the image of death filled with life), blessing and curse (the blessing carnival curses with the simultaneous wish for death and rebirth), praise and insult, youth and old age, high and low, face and dere-dane, foolishness and wisdom (Ibid., 164)[2].

There is no fusion, it is the very moment of 'crisis' that the carnival stages: Gabriel/elle's death – here critically opposed to the binary definition of Astolphe and Faustina, who remain alive – is thus confirmed as the final representation of her ambivalent and unresolvable nature. It is in fact possible to see the whole novel under the sign of carnival. From the outset we are made aware of Gabriel/elle's indefiniteness, we are given clues as to what her end will be, and her person represents carnivalesque ambivalence in itself; her clothing is the scaffolding, the structure that supports the outward façade of the broader carnivalization that is the girl's whole identity crisis.

Conclusions

As the analysis has shown, the symbolic function entrusted to clothing in the two works examined is a motif that is part of a circumstantial paradigm that allows us to discern in the different descriptions of the protagonists' clothing both the outward sign of their social status as women and a kind of negative mirror of the struggle against the gender stereotypes they embody, aiming to demonstrate how gendered identification/assignment is – as Simone de Beauvoir pointed out – a historical and social construction and not something linked to one's birth sex.

The first section highlighted how the point of view of the narrative and the resulting description of the clothes contribute to the formation of an initial image of the protagonists that conforms to societal dictates and is then challenged in the rest of the work. The importance of the point of view adopted by the authors is evident: James constructs the narrative in an exogenous way, putting Daisy in the

[1] My translation.
[2] My translation.

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background compared to the expectations and rules that the external gaze (both male and female) imposes on her; Sand, on the other hand, starts from the interiority of his protagonist and then moves outwards, giving greater prominence to Gabriel/elle's intimacy and the conflictual relationship he establishes with his own "nature(s)". In this way, the characters turn out to be true embodiments of the "types" assigned to them by the system, acting more by inertia than by will; and this is how Daisy and Gabriel/elle become revolutionary symbols, being the only ones to act outside the schemes provided to them.

The second paragraph has shown how the two protagonists relate differently to the link between clothing and gender roles. The difference in the starting situation is fundamental: while Daisy identifies with her biological sex, Gabriel/elle is, on the contrary, a woman who rejects the superposition between sex and the resulting gender assignment. Clothes thus assume two profoundly different functions: in the first case, they sanction the divarication between sexual identification and gender assignment; in the second one, on the other hand, they represent the signifier of the protagonist's existential struggle based on the impossibility of synthesising the two gender roles she finds herself playing from time to time.

Finally, the last paragraph underlines the importance of the death of the two protagonists in the authors' critique of gender stereotypes. Indeed, despite the differences we have highlighted, the death unites Daisy and Gabriel/elle in a common struggle, transforming them from victims to heroines and instead casts a sinister shadow on the society responsible for the tragedy and its members, especially the male protagonists. In different ways, both James and Sand accord the death of the protagonists a metaphorical, even allegorical value: when Daisy and Gabriel/elle die – beyond their physical disappearance –, the dreams, fantasies and illusions of those around them, fuelled by their own transgressive nature, also disappear. Through them, we catch a glimpse of both the final stage of the society described in the two novels and the hoped-for rebirth (remember Gabriel/elle's black domino) that will lead it to evolve shortly thereafter.

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