Narrative Causalities

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CHAPTER 4

THE COMFORTS THAT FUNCTION C BRINGS:

Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Racine’s *Phaedra*, and James’s *Daisy Miller*

During the great floods in the Midwest in the summer of 1993, the local television newscasts in St. Louis devoted seemingly inordinate attention to sandbaggers: announcements of locations where sandbaggers were needed, interviews with sandbaggers, pictures of areas that sandbaggers had saved—and of other areas that in spite of the sandbaggers’ efforts had succumbed to the flooding. Watching the nightly news, I wondered why a medium that aspires to satisfy a broad audience would devote more time to sandbaggers than to flood victims. Turning to narrative theory to find an answer, I began to analyze the function of the activities of the sandbaggers in the narratives that the evening newscasts constructed from each day’s events. A function analysis of these stories leads me to suggest two ways—as a thematics and as a hermeneutic device—that function C brings comfort to viewers (listeners, readers). In the first section of this chapter I analyze the pivotal position of function C in a narrative sequence and describe the two forms of comfort that I am proposing that function C brings. Then I look at several literary examples that have been received with broad success to examine how function C is represented and the ways it brings comfort in each.

In the narratives about the flooding that the evening newscasts recounted repeatedly over a period of weeks, the sandbaggers are C-actants. A C-actant is a person (in our world, or in a narrative about our world), or a human or anthropomorphic character (in a fictional world), who decides (function C) to take action to try to alleviate a function-A situation.
A rising flood waters threaten homes and businesses
B authorities put out a call for sandbaggers
C prospective sandbaggers decide to sandbag to try to protect homes and businesses
C' sandbaggers go to announced meeting places where buses await them
G sandbaggers arrive by bus at sites where the rising water threatens homes or businesses
H sandbaggers sandbag
I (or I_\text{neg}) sandbaggers succeed (or do not succeed) in protecting the site they sandbagged

Becoming a sandbagger is an easily understood three-stage process. To become a sandbagger, one decides to be a sandbagger (function C), makes the journey to a place where sandbagging is needed (function C'), and begins to sandbag (function H): to put sand in bags, and then place the bags along a segment of the perimeter of the rising waters. The word \textit{sandbagger} is not the one we choose when we want to describe someone who aimlessly puts sand in containers—in a sandbox, for instance. Rather, \textit{sandbagger} denotes someone who engages in all three stages: the decision to sandbag and the journey to a site, as well as the activity of making and positioning sandbags. Sandbagging is an intentional act.

In addition, when we speak of someone as a sandbagger, we are indicating that the person’s function-C decision to become a sandbagger is a response to her or his interpretation of the flooding as a disruptive function-A situation to be alleviated. A function-C decision is motivated by a function-A situation. The narratives about the sandbaggers that the evening newscasts constructed illustrate the pivotal position of function C in a narrative sequence. The decision to become a sandbagger links the activity (sandbagging) to the motivation (the flooding), and links the motivation (the flooding) to the activity (sandbagging). Function C creates the causal link between the C-actant’s intentional action (functions C' through H) and the situation that motivates that action (function A). This characteristic of function C—that it is the pivotal event, or fulcrum, between function A and functions C' through H—is the basis of both forms of comfort that I am proposing function C brings.

But before looking at the ways that function C brings comfort to viewers (listeners, readers), I want first to rule out any simple correlation between a successful outcome and the comforts that
function C brings. The narratives that the newscasts reported often ended in failure. For that matter, during the worst of the flooding only two outcomes were possible: a given endangered area was flooded (function $I_{neg}$) or provisionally spared (tentatively, function $I$). Even in the segments of the newscasts devoted to the sandbaggers, as much attention was given to those whose efforts had been insufficient as to those whose work had thus far restrained the rising flood waters. Assuming, as I do, that the newscasts succeeded in appealing to a broad audience, clearly a successful outcome is not necessary to the success of a narrative—a position that is corroborated by the pleasure that readers and viewers so often take in novels and stories that end with the protagonist’s death, in tragedies played out on the stage, and in biographies that cover a subject’s life to its end.

Moreover, if the outcome were the only consideration, the newscasts could have focused on the A-experiencers—the many individuals whose lives were disrupted and whose property was endangered by the flooding—rather than the sandbaggers. The difference between narratives about victims or potential victims and narratives about sandbaggers is not in the outcome: some people lost their property; others did not. The difference is in the lingering attention given, in the narratives about sandbaggers, to the functions performed by the C-actant: the sandbaggers.

In chapter 1, I describe Tzvetan Todorov’s idea that the underlying pattern of narrative is the movement from an equilibrium (EQ), through a period of imbalance (in my terms, a function-A situation), to another equilibrium (EQ). Alternating periods of equilibrium and imbalance provide a pattern to interpret events in the world, as well as in narratives. But in the world, it is a given that both shifts—the disruptive move from an equilibrium to a function-A situation and the ameliorative move from a function-A situation to a new equilibrium—may happen as a result of unmotivated events. Both moves can be brought about by random forces (heavy rains cause flooding, heavy rains bring a forest fire under control), by unintentional actions (someone’s campfire causes a forest fire, someone’s campfire provides a beacon that draws a lost child to safety), or, for that matter, by actions motivated by someone other than the doer (an army destroys a city, a chain gang builds a road).1

The cognitive theorist Mark Turner points out, in The Literary Mind, that interpreting unmotivated events as intentional acts is a very common human thought process. In Turner’s usage, “[a]n
action is an event with an actor”; the pattern that he and George Lakoff name “events are actions” denotes interpreting unmotivated events as motivated actions (26). As Turner perceives, we regularly use the pattern “events are actions” to turn “everyday event-stories [that] lack causal actors . . . into action-stories: We complete the event-story to include a causal actor by projecting the actor in the action-story onto a nonactor in the event-story. . . . The sun becomes a torturer. The wind becomes a savage and merciless beater” (28).

Turner describes “events are actions” as one of the “fundamental patterns of parable that are essential to everyday thought, reasoning, and action.” He claims, moreover, that these fundamental patterns—including “events are actions”—“show up in literary examples for the reason that literature takes its instruments from the everyday mind” (26). Without doubt, in narratives about our world as well as in literary narratives, events are often represented as the result of motivated action. Moreover, I find convincing Turner’s explanation that there is a correlation between the human predilection for interpreting events as motivated actions and the prevalence in literary narratives (and, I add, other narratives too) for explaining events as motivated actions.

But I want to develop the idea by differentiating between the two moves—the disruptive move from an equilibrium to a function-A situation and the ameliorative move from a function-A situation to a new equilibrium. In the case of a flood, the waters rise and then they recede. A factual narrative about a flood may tell us no more than that. But the St. Louis newscasts introduced into this narrative the sandbaggers. In doing so—in interpreting the disruptive move as the result of random forces (the flooding) and the ameliorative move as potentially the result of motivated action (by the sandbaggers)—the newscasts, I suggest, were following an extremely common pattern. Both in literary narratives and in narratives about events in our world, the ameliorative move is represented as the result of motivated action more often than the disruptive move is. We can speculate that the reason for this is that random forces are, in fact, more often disruptive than ameliorative, whereas motivated actions are (or so we hope) more often ameliorative than disruptive. A further reason, I suggest, is that we find it comforting to interpret motivated action as contributing to an ameliorative—but not to a disruptive—move.

Let me explain. Sandbagging is undertaken by men and women who assume that by their actions they may be able to control the
spreading water during a flood. As we have seen, the pivotal function-C decision links the subsequent intentional action (functions C’ through H) to the function-A situation that motivates it. By including the sandbaggers in the narratives reported, the television newscasts reminded viewers that the ravages of a flood can sometimes be contained by human action. For viewers of the newscasts, the representation of the sandbaggers’ activities is comforting because it suggests that even randomly caused function-A situations are at least potentially responsive to human behavior. This is the way that as a thematics, I am proposing, function C brings comfort to viewers (readers, listeners): by encouraging belief that intentional acts by human beings can improve the circumstances of individuals, a community, our world.

Assuredly, human action that causes function-A situations has some of the appeal of human action intended to resolve function-A situations. Gerald Prince perceives that “the extent to which [a narrative] fulfills a receiver’s desire” depends, in part, on its being “meaningful in terms of a human project and a humanized universe” (Narratology, 160). Numerous examples suggest that a desire to believe in the efficacy of human intentional action—for good or for bad—is shared by people of many cultures and times, and various levels of sophistication. The title of this chapter, in fact, is inspired by a phrase in a National Public Radio commentary: “the comfort of letting us think that somebody is in control.” According to the commentator, conspiracy theories are popular because (in contrast to floods, fires, droughts, and accidents) they posit human intentional actions as causes of what I call function-A disruptive situations.3 Although I am using the word comfort in my argument to describe the effects of function C (and only function C), I find the ramifications of the commentator’s argument compelling. Conspiracy theories would be attractive because they permit interpreting human intentional actions as causes of disruptive events. If disruptive events were thought to be caused by human intentional action, they would seem easier to counteract than if thought to be caused by random forces, the power of which sometimes seems unlimited. A complementary example is found in the conflicting accounts of a crime in the story from which the film Rashomon is developed. All three main characters each report having been the person who killed the samurai Takehiko: the bandit, Takehiko’s wife, and the dead man himself (who speaks through a medium).4 In this instance, all three characters choose to claim the criminal act as his or her own, rather
than to ascribe the power to carry out such an act to someone other than him- or herself. Even in the case of the flooding, although newscasts at the time ascribed the cause of the rising waters to an un governed random force (heavy rainfall, in conjunction with a rapidly melting snow cover), later accounts after the flooding had ended speculated about the role of the government agencies that determine the placement and the operation of dams, and of farmers who plant crops and build homes in areas known to be subject to flooding.

The science fiction and fantasy writer Ursula K. LeGuin proposes in a recent interview (in the context of a discussion of fictional wizards in novels made into films) that “[r]ather than being primarily about good and evil . . . a lot of fantasy is an exploration of what power is” (quoted by James Gorman, “Which Wizard Beats ’Em All?” B37). I suggest that narratives of many genres are often explorations of power: the power of intentional actions in relation to the power of random forces, and the power that causes a function-A disruption in relation to the power that a C-actant needs to resolve it. Not all function-A situations can believably be presented as the effects of human intentional acts. But as the newscasts about the flooding suggest, the introduction of a C-actant who undertakes action in response to a function-A situation is common in narratives and, I argue, a thematics that comforts viewers (listeners, readers). Perhaps one of the purposes of narratives—fictional narratives and accounts of events in our world that, like the newscasts about the sandbaggers, adopt patterns that include C-actants and their efforts—is to provide a site to explore the interplay between powerful forces and human intentional action, to reduce our fear of the world in which we live, and to give us the courage to undertake function-C decisions ourselves, even in situations in which we cannot be assured of success.

In addition to bringing comfort as a thematics, by encouraging belief in the efficacy of intentional action, function C also brings comfort, I propose, as a hermeneutic device. Representations of function C comfort viewers (listeners, readers) by guiding hermeneutic activity. Interviews with sandbaggers and pictures of sandbagging in the evening newscasts not only establish, as we have seen, that intentional acts to contain the flooding are ongoing. In addition, and perhaps as importantly, the pictures and interviews indicate to viewers that the many people stacking bags are in agreement with, and thus confirm, the television reporters’ interpretation that the flooding is a disruptive situation to be alleviated. At the
beginning of this chapter I described function C as the pivotal event that creates the causal link between the motivating situation (function A) and the intentional action it motivates (functions C' through H), and I noted that that pivotal position is the basis of both forms of comfort I propose that function C brings. As we saw, that link between intentional action and the situation that motivates it underlies the thematics that intentional action is potentially effective. Similarly, that link enables an indication of a function-C decision to incite hermeneutic interest in identifying the function-A situation to which it is a response, and the C-actant’s actions (functions C' through H) that it motivates.

During the process of interpreting events (in the world or in narratives), the coming-into-being of intent at function C is often the keystone element that permits us to construct a causal sequence. Even in situations in which information becomes available to us in chronological sequence, we often cannot immediately identify an event as a function-A disruption, largely because what constitutes a function-A disruption depends, in our world or fictional worlds, on who is interpreting it, and in addition, in narratives, on how a representation is guiding readers (listeners, viewers) to interpret it. Thus a function-C decision to attempt to fix a given situation establishes that situation retrospectively as one that needs to be fixed. In chronological accounts, if a function-C decision is revealed at the time it is made, it will also incite prospective speculation about the means and the outcome of the intentional action we are led to expect. The function-C decision that the word sandbaggers denotes, guides attention both to the flooding and to the activity of sandbagging and its outcome.

In more complex narratives, readers may not know which in a series of potentially disruptive events will be sufficient to motivate a potential C-actant to decide to act (a drought curtails the corn harvest, a fungus contaminates the remaining stored grain, and then the bull becomes ill and dies) until a C-actant takes action (the farmer applies for a full-time job in the local grocery store). Similarly, we may interpret a situation as a restored equilibrium (the neighborhood park is suddenly very clean), and then consider whose activities brought about that result (who are the C-actants who picked up the litter and mowed?), and what aspect of the park’s previous state led the C-actants to decide to undertake the task (e.g., what, for them, was the motivating function-A situation?). As pivotal as function C is to interpretations of causal relations among events and situations, often the coming-into-
being of intent that it marks is nowhere stated in so many words and can only be surmised. Whichever events we attempt to interpret first—those that in the end we will interpret as function C, as function A, or as functions C’ through H—our interpretation of one of these sites complements and furthers our interpretations of the other two. Information about what someone is doing guides our attention to whether we can ascertain from those actions an intent. Information about intent guides our attention both to the action to be undertaken and to the function-A situation to be corrected. Information about a function-A situation that needs to be corrected guides our attention to whether someone is intending to correct it. When a function-C decision is revealed, in our world or in a narrative, we find it comforting because we can use it as a lodestar in relation to which we can locate our position in the ongoing causal logic.

In Reading for the Plot, Peter Brooks proposes that the desire for the ending that carries readers of narratives “forward, onward, through the text” (37) is a passion for meaning that can be satisfied only retrospectively, with the knowledge that the ending brings: “those shaping ends . . . that promise to bestow meaning and significance on the beginning and the middle” (19). Surely Brooks is correct, as I argue elsewhere (see chapters 3, 5, and 6), that endings inspire reinterpretations of events previously revealed. But function C, I suggest, provides meaning that is not dependent on the ending. As the newscasts about the sandbaggers indicate, a function-C decision (both as a thematics and as a hermeneutic device) gives meaning to the ongoing action that is not contingent on the success of the intentional action the decision inspires. Moreover, when extended or repeated, function-C decisions offer, I propose—presumably because of the thematic and hermeneutic comforts they bring—among the most satisfying ways of filling middles.

Thus far in this chapter I have made no distinction between the representation of a narrative (the words or images we perceive) and the fabula (the chronological account we assemble from explicit and implicit information in a representation). In analyzing the role of the C-actant this distinction is necessary, in part because the C-actant’s function-C decision that establishes intent may be directly revealed in the representation or indirectly revealed by the action that the C-actant undertakes (functions C’ through H). If we learn that potential flood victims are attempting to acquire sand and bags, we will probably interpret their action as indicating that they have made the function-C decision to sandbag—that
they have become C-actants. The comfort that function C brings as a thematics requires that a representation reveal or at least imply that a function-C decision has been made. The comfort that function C brings as a hermeneutic device depends on when—as well as whether—a representation reveals or implies that a function-C decision has been made. To serve as a lodestar to guide interpretations, function C has to be understood to have occurred while readers (viewers, listeners) are still in the process of discovering where they are in the ongoing action.

Further, the relative duration of the events interpreted by a given function (function H, for instance, or function A, or function C) varies tremendously from narrative to narrative, sometimes influenced by genre. In detective fiction, for example, generally the detective’s function-C decision to investigate takes place during the first chapter, the function-A crime is summarized as part of the exposition, and most of the pages of the novel are devoted to the detective’s function-H activity designed to uncover information about the crime. A typical detective novel, in other words, has an extended function H. In the newscasts about the sandbaggers, pictures of sandbaggers sandbagging represented function-H activity and pictures of neatly sandbagged perimeters, and broken sandbagged walls represented respectively (tentatively) successful and (clearly) unsuccessful outcomes (functions I and Ineg). Interviews with sandbaggers, however, tended to extend function C. These interviews lingered over elements of the decision-making, asking people’s reasons for undertaking sandbagging and encouraging people to describe the circumstances that allowed them to be available day after day during weekdays to engage in sandbagging.

In analyzing the duration of function C, I am considering that the process of decision-making (in my terms, function C) begins when a potential C-actant interprets a situation as a function-A situation to be alleviated, or hears a function-B request to alleviate a situation that the requester considers a function-A situation to be alleviated, and continues until a C-actant, having decided to act, begins to act (function C'). I emphasize again: in our world these interpretations are made by people, and in fictional worlds by fictional characters. In response to narratives, readers (listeners, viewers) make their own interpretations (guided, of course, by the representation) about when characters in fictional worlds or people in our world interpret situations as needing to be alleviated and decide to attempt to alleviate them. The duration of func-
tion C can be measured in a fabula by the time (minutes, weeks) that it takes a C-actant to reach a decision, and in a representation by the number of pages (for readers) or minutes (for viewers or listeners) devoted to the function-C decision-making process.

If function C brings comfort, both as a thematics and as a hermeneutic device, as I am proposing the newscasts about the sand-baggers indicate, then representations that emphasize function C by extending or repeating it may give particular satisfaction. To examine in detail how function C is emphasized in several exemplary representations, and to consider the possibility of a correlation between a narrative’s very successful reception and an emphasis in its representation on function C, I look first at two plays, *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare and *Phaedra* (Phèdre) by Jean Racine, and then a novel, *Daisy Miller* by Henry James. The two plays are equally famous in their respective traditions—*Phaedra* holds the same position in the francophone canon as *Hamlet* does in English-speaking parts of the world—and both have been found eminently successful by audiences over the centuries. During James’s lifetime, *Daisy Miller* was the most popular of his narratives—in James’s words, “the ultimately most prosperous child of my invention” (*Daisy Miller*, 18: vi). While still read, it is not viewed at present as James’s crowning accomplishment. I analyze interpretations of the novella at four historical periods, looking for correlations between the importance of function C in an interpretation and the reception of the novella at the times of the various interpretations.

*Phaedra* was given its first performance on January 1, 1676, approximately seventy-five years after *Hamlet*, which we cannot date as precisely. A similarity in the shape of the two plays has previously drawn attention. William Kerrigan comments that “[t]he peculiar structure of the revenge plot, in which a determining crime has taken place before the opening of the play, makes *Hamlet* itself seem like the conclusion of a tragedy already under way” (*Hamlet’s Perfection*, 124). In “Racinian Spaces,” Thomas Pavel notes that “[o]f the several sub-genres of English Renaissance drama, only [the revenge tragedy, exemplified by *Hamlet*] typically opens ‘late.’” Except for that sub-genre, Pavel theorizes, Elizabethan and Jacobean “tragedy has not yet managed to free itself from the strangle-hold of the narrative genres,” whereas as early as the 1630s, in French classical tragedy, “there is
a noticeable effort to remove everything epic, everything that can be narrated as well as enacted, from the stage.” For Pavel, who points to Phaedra as an example, it is “precisely at the juncture when the excess of silent—pre-tragic—suffering crystallizes into language that the tragedy proper begins” (120–21).

The continuing emphasis in both plays on the event or events that protagonists and playgoers interpret as function C is arguably one of the reasons that both plays seem to begin “late.” In both Hamlet and Phaedra, the events that represent function C are extended over nearly five acts. Although the two plays are often at function C, the patterns that keep or bring them there are different. I will argue that Phaedra’s function-C decisions lead to action—action that worsens her situation, thus requiring further function-C decisions—whereas Hamlet’s situation worsens while he remains at or near function C.

Hamlet’s indecisiveness, as it is often called, is perhaps the most commonly recognized feature of the play. In Act 1, in the interchange between Hamlet and the dead king’s Ghost, the Ghost demands revenge. As soon as the Ghost reveals that the old king has been murdered, and even before he identifies the murderer, Hamlet immediately indicates that he has already made a function-C decision to undertake the revenge that the Ghost demands:

\[
\text{Haste me to know’t, that I, with wings as swift}\\ \text{As meditation or the thoughts of love,}\\ \text{May sweep to my revenge. (1.5.29–31)}
\]

Again at the end of their interchange, after the Ghost names the murderer, describes how he was poisoned, and departs saying “Remember me” (1.5.91), Hamlet confirms that he considers the C-actant promise he has made to the Ghost a vow:

\[
\text{Now to my word.}\\ \text{It is ‘Adieu, adieu, remember me.’}\\ \text{I have sworn’t. (1.5.110–12)}
\]

At this point in the play, most playgoers will interpret the function of the primary events that have been revealed like this:

A  old king murdered by his brother Claudius
B  old king’s Ghost speaks to Hamlet, demands revenge
C  Hamlet vows to avenge his father’s murder
The events that bring this sequence to a conclusion do not occur until the last scene of the play, and only after Hamlet becomes aware that his mother, Laertes, and he himself have been fatally poisoned as a result of a plot that Claudius has approved and helped plan. At that point Hamlet wounds the King with the poisoned sword and forces him to drink from the poisoned cup (function H), and thus avenges his father’s murder (function I).

This is a familiar reading of the play. In my terms, the play extends the representation of events that Hamlet and playgoers interpret as function C from the last scene of Act 1 to the last scene of Act 5. I am saying that the play projects—as Hamlet’s interpretation of where he is in an ongoing action—that he stays at function C, or at least that he is never very far from function C, throughout nearly the entire play. I argue moreover that playgoers tend to interpret the function of events as Hamlet does: for act after act he remains at function C. Given this interpretation, I want to look at how Shakespeare so successfully extends function C throughout nearly the entire play. My theory is that by establishing so clearly for Hamlet and for playgoers that the action is remaining at the pivotal position that function C marks, the play can and does freely accumulate additional events that Hamlet and we interpret as creating the function-A situation. Thus the ongoing function C holds playgoers’ fascinated attention because we see it in relation to an ever-expanding set of function-A events. Since a function-C decision is made in response to a function-A situation, if the function-A situation changes, then the function-C decision to be made must also at least subtly change.

Already in Act 1, before Hamlet meets the Ghost, he is unhappy (and we know he is unhappy) about the death of his father, the immediate remarriage of his mother, and (we learn later) his not having been chosen as his father’s successor as king. The information that his father was murdered, which he hears from the Ghost, provides one more entry in the accumulating set of events disrupting Hamlet’s life, although it is the first of these events that requires (or is presented as requiring) that Hamlet take action in response. By the end of Act 1, it may seem (and it is often interpreted) that Hamlet’s pretending to be mad is his initial action (function C’) toward carrying out the Ghost’s demand for revenge.

A1 death of Hamlet’s father
A2 Hamlet’s mother’s remarriage, so soon
A3 Claudius—not Hamlet—becomes the next king
In Act 2, the function-A disruptions in Hamlet’s life continue to accumulate. First (function A₅), following her brother’s advice and her father’s orders (in scenes that playgoers hear in Act 1), Ophelia denies Hamlet access to her presence. Whatever Hamlet’s intentions in regard to Ophelia (if in fact he has analyzed his intentions), he must surely find this change in their relationship an additional destabilizing element in his situation. Second (function a₆), and even more central to the progress of the action, Hamlet begins to doubt whether he can give the same credence to the Ghost’s message as he would to words spoken by his father. As a result, Hamlet’s intellectual focus shifts from considering how to avenge his father, at the end of Act 1, to something closer to a detective’s form of ratiocination, made famous by Poe more than two centuries later, by the end of Act 2. Hamlet’s speech at the conclusion of Act 2 expresses a function-C decision, but it is a different decision from the one that the Ghost and playgoers think he has made in Act 1, and he makes it in response to an expanded set of function-A events:

If [Claudius] do blench [in response to the play Hamlet arranges],
I know my course. The spirit that I have seen
May be a devil, and the devil hath power
T’assume a pleasing shape, yea, and perhaps
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
As he is very potent with such spirits,
Abuses me to damn me. I’ll have grounds
More relative than this. The play’s the thing
Wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the King. (2.2.593–601)

At the end of Act 2, Hamlet’s situation (as I interpret it) looks to him like this:

A₁ death of Hamlet’s father
A₂ Hamlet’s mother’s remarriage, so soon
A₃ Claudius—not Hamlet—becomes the next king
A₄ Hamlet’s father murdered by Claudius (according to the Ghost)
A5 Ophelia denies Hamlet access to her presence
a6 Hamlet recognizes that the Ghost may be a devil, using
deception to urge Hamlet to sinful action
C Hamlet decides to determine for himself whether Claudius
is guilty

In Act 3, Claudius’s response to the play confirms for Hamlet
his guilt (a6 is resolved). But Hamlet’s situation is once more dis-
rupted and his action postponed when he recognizes that he must
kill Claudius unshriven (function a7; otherwise, Hamlet assumes,
he would be sending Claudius directly to heaven, whereas
Hamlet’s father’s sudden murder, according to the Ghost, by not
allowing him time for confession, has required him to endure pur-
gatory [3.3.76–79]). At this point just past the middle of the play,
Hamlet acts, but his action goes awry.

A1 death of Hamlet’s father
A2 Hamlet’s mother’s remarriage, so soon
A3 Claudius—not Hamlet—becomes the next king
A4 Hamlet’s father murdered by Claudius
A5 Ophelia denies Hamlet access to her presence
a6 Hamlet recognizes that the Ghost may be a devil, using
deception to urge Hamlet to sinful action
a7 Hamlet recognizes that revenge requires that Claudius be
killed unshriven
B Ghost demands revenge
C Hamlet decides to kill Claudius unshriven
H Hamlet stabs man spying from behind curtain
I neg dead man is Polonius, not Claudius

Shortly thereafter the Ghost appears again to Hamlet, in Hamlet’s
words “to whet [his] almost blunted purpose” (3.4.111), and
Polonius’s death confirms that Hamlet will have to leave for
England, with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. This is how I inter-
pret Hamlet’s situation at the end of Act 3:

A1 death of Hamlet’s father
A2 Hamlet’s mother’s remarriage, so soon
A3 Claudius—not Hamlet—becomes the next king
A4 Hamlet’s father murdered by Claudius
A5 Ophelia denies Hamlet access to her presence
a6 Hamlet recognizes that the Ghost may be a devil, using
deception to urge Hamlet to sinful action

- Hamlet recognizes that revenge requires that Claudius be killed unshriven
- Hamlet must leave for England
- Ghost demands revenge
- Ghost returns to whet Hamlet’s purpose

During Act 4, playgoers (in 4.3) and Hamlet (before writing the letter Horatio receives in 4.6) learn that Claudius has sent Hamlet to England to have him killed there (function A9). By the end of Act 4, Ophelia is dead (function A10). For playgoers, during Hamlet’s absence from the court (and from the stage) during most of Act 4, the twin poles of action apparently available to him are played out by Ophelia (who goes mad) and Laertes (who conspires with Claudius to avenge his father’s murder). By the end of Act 4, Claudius and Laertes are firmly committed to their plan of action to kill Hamlet. But even as late as Act 5, Scene 2, Hamlet is still trying to bring himself to a firm function-C decision to kill Claudius, this time by reciting to Horatio a litany of what I call function-A events:

Does it not, think thee, stand me now upon—
He that hath kill’d my King [function A4] and whor’d my mother [function A2],
Popp’d in between th’election and my hopes [function A3],
Thrown out his angle for my proper life [function A9]
And with such coz’nage—is’t not perfect conscience
To quit him with this arm? [5.2.63–68]

With by now (by my count) ten function-A disruptive events now accumulated, four of which he lists himself, Hamlet still continues to question whether he should act. By the time that Hamlet kills Claudius, later in the scene, he makes his function-C decision to act in response to a set of function-A events that includes two new events (A11 and A12).

- death of Hamlet’s father
- Hamlet’s mother’s remarriage, so soon
- Claudius—not Hamlet—becomes the next king
- Hamlet’s father murdered by Claudius
- Ophelia denies Hamlet access to her presence
- Hamlet recognizes that the Ghost may be a devil, using
deception to urge Hamlet to sinful action
a_7 Hamlet recognizes that revenge requires that Claudius be killed unshriven
A_8 Hamlet must leave for England
A_9 Claudius has sent Hamlet to England to have him killed
A_10 Ophelia is dead
A_11 Hamlet’s mother is poisoned and dies
A_12 Hamlet is poisoned and dying
B Ghost demands revenge
B_2 Ghost returns to whet Hamlet’s purpose
C Hamlet decides to kill Claudius
F Hamlet still has sufficient strength to kill Claudius, but not for long
H Hamlet stabs Claudius and forces him to drink poison
I Claudius dies unshriven
EQ Hamlet’s father’s murder is avenged

As I interpret the function of the events, three changes occur between Hamlet’s still-indecisive speech to Horatio near the beginning of Act 5, Scene 2, and the moment when Hamlet kills Claudius at the end of Act 5, Scene 2: (1) There are two additional function-A events (functions A_11 and A_12). The accumulated weight of disruptive events is perhaps sufficient to bring Hamlet to action. (2) Hamlet’s mother has been killed. This event not only allows Hamlet to kill Claudius to avenge her death, but frees Hamlet to kill Claudius without earning her disapproval. (3) Hamlet himself is near death. Since Hamlet has known for some time that Claudius wants him dead (function A_9), Claudius’s obvious animosity does not alter the situation. What is changed (and greatly curtailed) by Hamlet’s being about to die is how much time he has left in which he can expect to retain the physical strength he will need (function F) to be able to kill Claudius. Hamlet himself draws attention to the function-F “strength, and means” he needs, in a speech in Act 4 in which he offers an interpretation of his position in the ongoing action that resembles a function analysis:

I do not know
Why yet I live to say this thing’s to do [function H has not been accomplished],
Sith I have cause [function A], and will [function C], and strength, and means [function F]
To do’t. [4.4.43–46]
The purpose of my analysis is not to argue that one or another of the three changes I identify brings Hamlet to action, nor, for that matter, that the possibilities are limited to these three. The very number of function-A events that are relatively easily identified helps to explain, and perhaps even to corroborate, the many different interpretations the play has attracted. My purpose in this context is, first, to draw attention to the greatly extended duration of the period in which Hamlet and playgoers interpret his position in the ongoing action as at or near function C; and, second, to demonstrate the degree to which the five acts are filled by an accumulating number of events—an additive increase in the set of events—that Hamlet and playgoers interpret as function A or function a: more and more disruptive events occur as the play progresses, of which few are resolved until the last scene.

In Hamlet, then, as a hermeneutic device, function C comforts almost unremittingly. Hamlet’s inaction and his repeated commentary (in soliloquies and to Horatio) about his inaction serve as the lodestar that guides playgoers to recognize that Hamlet remains at or near function C nearly throughout. In this respect—as a hermeneutic device—function C brings comfort almost exactly as it does in the newscasts about the sandbaggers.

As a thematics, however, function C comforts in Hamlet less simply and less obviously than in the newscasts about the sandbaggers—as one would expect, since the newscasts and the play are of course not comparable aesthetically. (I look at them together because the simpler illuminates the more complex.) In the newscasts, the sandbaggers’ function-C decision is immediate and immediately put into action, and comforts by suggesting throughout the period of the flooding that intentional acts may be effective. The play holds playgoers’ interest through five acts that remain at or near function C, as a function analysis indicates, by the increasing tension between the expanding function-A situation and Hamlet’s function-C (in)decision in response. That is, while the additive accumulation of function-A events makes the need for action increasingly apparent, Hamlet’s continuing inaction as the play progresses makes it seem increasingly a possibility that he will not be able to decide to act. By forcing playgoers to confront the issue of whether the function-C decision will occur, the mounting tension between function A and function C holds playgoers’ attention on function C for act after act. This emphasis on the need for a function-C decision, in combination with the postponement of the decision until the final scene, intensifies, I suggest, the
thematic comfort that function C brings: even Hamlet ultimately can bring himself to carry out intentional action to resolve a disruptive situation.

In this most successful and perhaps most satisfying play written in English, nearly the entire play is given over for playgoers to question whether the protagonist will act to alleviate a situation that is increasingly obviously disruptive. In my terms, by so clearly indicating that Hamlet remains at or near function C for nearly five acts, the play provides hermeneutic comfort throughout and in doing so focuses playgoers’ attention on the withholding of thematic comfort until the final minutes. In the end, after five acts of indecision, Hamlet acts. When he stabs Claudius with the envenomed sword and forces him to drink the poisoned potion, playgoers understand—from his actions, not from anything he says—that Hamlet has now made a function-C decision and that the play has now moved beyond function C. Whatever individual playgoers’ feelings about the mass slaughter on the stage, Hamlet’s interpretation of the function of events, which has guided us throughout, here too leads playgoers to interpret the effect of his actions as he does. His final speech, which is a request to Horatio to report what has happened, suggests that he considers the outcome as (at least relatively) successful; he wants his story told. For playgoers, the effect of this pattern is that the long-awaited, intensified thematic comfort that function C brings is followed within minutes (even seconds) by the satisfaction of seeing intentional action brought to a successful conclusion. The extension of function C and near juxtaposition of function C and function I in part explains, I suggest, the enormous success of the play over the centuries.

Racine’s *Phaedra* has long been understood to be a meditation on the relation between human and random forces. A function analysis brings new clarity to demonstrating the interplay in the drama of the effects of chance and of Phaedra’s own intentional acts. In *Phaedra* as in *Hamlet*, playgoers are led to assume in Act 1 that an event is about to occur that does not take place until the end of the play. When Phaedra first comes on stage in Act 1, she is emerging from indoors to see the sun one last time. She has previously decided to die; she is dying. At the very end of Act 5, she dies.

Phaedra’s initial words when she enters express a function-C decision: “No further. Here, Oenone, Let us stay” (1.3.153).
Because Oenone, Phaedra’s attendant and former nurse, has reported just a few lines previously that Phaedra is “dying from a hidden malady” (1.2.146), Phaedra’s expressed decision not to walk further is easily heard as a metaphor for her decision not to live longer. That function-C decision—Phaedra’s decision to die—plays the pivotal role that function-C customarily does in guiding hermeneutic activity. Like Oenone, playgoers who recognize that Phaedra has decided to die will focus their attention both on whether Phaedra will die (function I) and on what has happened to make her want to die (function A).

Oenone soon succeeds in getting Phaedra to tell her (and us) why she has decided to die. Shortly after her new husband, Theseus, brought her to Athens, Phaedra explains, she met Theseus’ son (from a previous marriage) Hippolytus. Phaedra describes the effect:

As I beheld, I reddened, I turned pale.
A tempest raged in my distracted mind.
My eyes no longer saw. I could not speak.
I felt my body freezing, burning; knew
Venus was on me with her dreaded flames,
The fatal torments of a race she loathes. (1.3.273–78)

To whatever combination of divine intervention and the blind chance of passion Racine’s sophisticated seventeenth-century audience (and playgoers today) ascribe the power that Phaedra refers to as “Venus,” the grip of passion under which Phaedra suffers is presented in the play as the same kind of awful and awe-inspiring function-A event as the rising of the flood waters during the floods in the Midwest. As I read the play and as the play is often interpreted, Phaedra is no more responsible for the onset of her passion than the sandbaggers are for the rising of the flood waters. Phaedra has struggled against her passion, moreover, she tells Oenone and us, in every way she knows, including planning to die without speaking of it:

Dying, I could have kept my name unstained,
And my dark passion from the light of day. (1.3.309–10)

Given this information, playgoers can reconstruct retrospectively Phaedra’s interpretation of the situation at the moment when the play begins.
A1 Phaedra's incestuous passion for Hippolytus
C1 Phaedra decides to die to protect her and her ancestors’ honor
C' Phaedra stops eating

Still in Act 1, however, the news arrives that Theseus is dead. Oenone argues that the news makes Phaedra’s love for Hippolytus no longer incestuous, and that in fact the news requires that Phaedra live to protect her son’s chances of inheriting his father’s political power. At the end of Act 1, Phaedra responds: “Your counsels have prevailed. / I’ll live” (1.5.363–64), a statement I interpret as a new function-C decision, which she immediately puts into action. In Act 2, Phaedra sends for Hippolytus, and when he arrives she asks him initially to protect her son, then—apparently overcome by his presence—admits to him her passion for him. Thus in Act 3, when the report of Theseus’ death proves inaccurate and Theseus returns, Phaedra immediately recognizes that by confessing her love to Hippolytus she has dishonored her husband and herself:

My husband lives. Oenone, say no more.
I have confessed a love that soils his name. (3.2.832–33)

At this point in the play, if Phaedra’s son no longer needs her political guidance (function A2), the initial function-A situation is as problematic as ever, and now Phaedra’s own actions have brought about the very situation—Theseus’ and her own dishonor—that she had hoped at the beginning of the play to avoid by dying.

A1 Phaedra’s incestuous passion for Hippolytus
C1 Phaedra decides to die to protect her and her ancestors’ honor
C' Phaedra stops eating
A2 with Theseus dead, Phaedra’s son needs her (and her incestuous passion perhaps seems to her less guilty)
C2 Phaedra decides to live
C' Phaedra sends for Hippolytus
H1 Phaedra asks Hippolytus to protect her son
H2 Phaedra admits her love to Hippolytus
A3 Theseus is alive, and Phaedra has dishonored herself and him

For the onset of Phaedra’s function-A1 passion I have argued that Phaedra is not responsible. For the function-A3 situation, she holds
herself responsible. Nonetheless playgoers will recognize that although Phaedra has acted rashly in admitting her love to Hippolytus, the exceedingly unfortunate situation she is now in has as its primary cause the inaccurate chance-driven rumor that reached her about Theseus’ death.

But worse is yet to come. In her shame, Phaedra permits Oenone to carry out a plan that Oenone has devised: Oenone will falsely accuse Hippolytus to Theseus of having forced himself upon Phaedra, which at the beginning of Act 4 Oenone does (function A4). Then when Phaedra, regretting this, goes to Theseus to attempt to alleviate its effects, she learns from him that Hippolytus loves Aricia—information that playgoers have had since the first scene of the play but that for Phaedra reveals for the first time that “Hippolytus can love but loves not me” (4.5.1203). For Phaedra this information leads her to break off her attempt to save Hippolytus’ life and to reevaluate her situation (function a5).

A1 Phaedra’s incestuous passion for Hippolytus
C1 Phaedra decides to die to protect her and her ancestors’ honor
C’ Phaedra stops eating, becomes ill
A2 with Theseus dead, Phaedra’s son needs her (and her incestuous passion perhaps seems to her less guilty)
C2 Phaedra decides to live
C’ Phaedra sends for Hippolytus
H1 Phaedra asks Hippolytus to protect her son
H2 Phaedra admits her love to Hippolytus
A3 Theseus is alive, and Phaedra has dishonored herself and him
C3 Phaedra decides to accept Oenone’s offer to falsely accuse Hippolytus
C’ Phaedra gives Oenone permission to accuse Hippolytus to Theseus
A4 Oenone falsely accuses Hippolytus with Phaedra’s permission
C4 Phaedra decides to defend Hippolytus
C’ Phaedra asks Theseus to spare Hippolytus
a5 Phaedra learns from Theseus that Hippolytus loves Aricia

At this point Phaedra turns on Oenone, punishing her for tempting Phaedra to act in ways that have made Phaedra’s situation worse now than at the beginning of the play:
Wretch! Thus it is that you have caused my doom.
You, when I fled from life, you called me back;
At your entreaties duty was forgot;
It was you made me see Hippolytus.
You meddling fool. Why did your impious lips,
Falsely accusing him, besmirch his life?
You may have killed him, if the gods have heard
A maddened father’s sacrilegious wish.
I’ll hear no more. Hence, loathsome monster, hence.
Go, leave me to my pitiable fate. (4.6.1309–18)

Oenone dies (she drowns herself; function \( A_6 \)). Hippolytus dies (function \( A_7 \)). Phaedra takes poison and then speaks to Theseus to clear Hippolytus’ name before dying herself. In my analysis of the function of the primary events in the play,\(^{14}\) I indent in each sequence function C and the actions it motivates, to draw attention to how often Phaedra’s motivated actions cause subsequent function-A situations, a topic that I will discuss in some detail below.

\( A_1 \) Phaedra’s incestuous passion for Hippolytus

\( C_1 \) Phaedra decides to die to protect her and her ancestors’ honor
\( C’ \) Phaedra stops eating, becomes ill

\( A_2 \) with Theseus dead, Phaedra’s son needs her (and her incestuous passion perhaps seems to her less guilty)

\( C_2 \) Phaedra decides to live
\( C’ \) Phaedra sends for Hippolytus
\( H_1 \) Phaedra asks Hippolytus to protect her son
\( H_2 \) Phaedra admits her love to Hippolytus
\( H_3 \) Phaedra sends Oenone to tempt Hippolytus by offering political power

\( A_3 \) Theseus is alive, and Phaedra has dishonored herself and him

\( C_3 \) Phaedra decides to accept Oenone’s offer to falsely accuse Hippolytus
\( C’ \) Phaedra gives Oenone permission to accuse Hippolytus to Theseus
Chapter Four

A4 Oenone falsely accuses Hippolytus with Phaedra’s permission

C4 Phaedra decides to defend Hippolytus
C’ Phaedra asks Theseus to spare Hippolytus

a5 Phaedra learns from Theseus that Hippolytus loves Aricia

C5 Phaedra decides to punish Oenone for tempting her
C’, H Phaedra berates Oenone, sends her away

A6 Oenone drowns herself
A7 Hippolytus dies

C6 Phaedra decides to clear Hippolytus’ name and then die
C’ Phaedra takes poison
H Phaedra explains to Theseus that—and why—Oenone falsely accused Hippolytus
I Phaedra dies

Like Hamlet, Phaedra seems barely to move. Both plays introduce in Act 1 what playgoers initially hear as a firm function-C decision—Hamlet’s to avenge his father, Phaedra’s to die—and both postpone action to carry out that decision until the final scene of Act 5. Throughout the three middle acts and the larger part of Act 5, Phaedra like Hamlet is often at or near function C. In both plays too, function-A situations accumulate as the action progresses. But the patterns by which Phaedra and Hamlet emphasize function C and accumulate function-A events are not identical. I call attention to three ways they differ.

First, although function C is emphasized in both plays, in Hamlet it is extended (Hamlet makes one decision slowly) and in Phaedra it is repeated (Phaedra makes a number of decisions). In Hamlet, as we saw above, Hamlet seems to have made a function-C decision before the end of Act 1, but considers and reconsiders until the end of the last act how and whether to take action to carry out that one putative decision. Phaedra, in contrast, is constantly making decisions; I draw attention to six in the function analysis above. Moreover, Phaedra’s function-C decisions all lead to action (each function C in the analysis above is followed by a function C’). And each of her actions worsens the situation in
which she finds herself. A function analysis supports the traditional reading of Racine’s play: that perhaps we do not hold Phaedra responsible for her love for Hippolytus, but we do hold her responsible for her actions during the play that cause her dishonor. By dying at the beginning of the play as she had planned, Phaedra could have preserved her honor and her ancestors’ honor. But instead, from the end of Act 1 to the final scene of Act 5, Phaedra makes a series of function-C decisions that each motivate action that makes it increasingly difficult and finally impossible for her to escape dishonor. If we look at her function-C decisions that I number from C_2 through C_5, she decides to live (function C_2), which leads her to confess her love to Hippolytus. Because by this confession she has dishonored herself and Theseus, when Theseus returns she agrees to Oenone’s plan (function C_3) and sends Oenone to accuse Hippolytus. Because she has permitted Hippolytus to be falsely accused, she decides to defend him to Theseus (function C_4), but stops without doing so when she learns from Theseus that Hippolytus loves Aricia. Forced to recognize at last that under no circumstances could she have obtained Hippolytus’ love, Phaedra decides to punish Oenone (function C_5), who drowns herself.

Second, although function-A events accumulate in both plays, in *Hamlet*, none are the result of Hamlet’s intentional acts. In *Phaedra*, however, Phaedra’s intentional acts contribute to or cause all the disruptive function-A events that occur after the play begins. Of the seven function-A events I identify, the first, Phaedra’s incestuous passion for Hippolytus, which is reported in the first act but has occurred earlier, can be ascribed to Venus (in the context of the play). The second (Phaedra’s interpretation that with Theseus dead, her son needs her political guidance) is an effect of a combination of chance misinformation, Oenone’s well-intentioned but ultimately misguided pleading, and Phaedra’s decision to listen to Oenone. For the third (Phaedra’s having dishonored Theseus and herself by confessing her love to Hippolytus), Phaedra holds herself fully responsible and is, but playgoers may see her responsibility as somewhat mitigated by her having been misinformed about Theseus’ death. The remaining four function-A events are all directly effects of Phaedra’s intentional acts: the false accusation of Hippolytus, the information that Hippolytus loves Aricia, Oenone’s death, Hippolytus’ death.

Third, function-A events accumulate in both plays, but with different effect. In *Hamlet*, the accumulation is additive. As the play
progresses, the number of disruptive function-A situations increases. But the change is quantitative, not qualitative. The primary motivating situation (the murder of Hamlet’s father) is not fundamentally altered—it remains neither more nor less horrifying—from the first act to the concluding scene, when it is finally avenged. In *Phaedra*, on the other hand, the accumulating function-A events make a qualitative change in the initial disruptive situation. In Act 1, Phaedra’s death would have resolved her incestuous passion for Hippolytus, with her reputation intact and with damage to no one other than herself. By the end of the play, the acts that her passion has led her to engage in make her responsible for the deaths of Hippolytus and Oenone, for depriving Theseus and Aricia of son and prospective husband, and (most important to Phaedra) for her own irreparably damaged reputation. This intensification of the criminality of who she is and of the function-A situation she finds herself in at the end of the play is thus far beyond what her confession and death in the final scene can resolve.

As it is in *Hamlet*, the comfort that function C brings as a hermeneutic device is pervasive. Phaedra’s repeated function-C decisions are as effective as Hamlet’s extended decision in identifying for playgoers a lodestar in relation to which to gauge where they are in the ongoing action. As a thematics too, the repeated function-C decisions in *Phaedra* are as effective as the extended function C in *Hamlet* in holding playgoers’ attention for act after act on the issue of the effectiveness of human intentional action. But just as the comfort that function C brings as a thematics is less easy in response to *Hamlet* than to the newscasts about the sandbaggers, the response that function C as a thematics brings in *Phaedra* is more complicated than in *Hamlet*.

In *Hamlet*, I argued, the thematic comfort that function C brings is in effect intensified by a representation that guides playgoers to expect it and then withholds it until the final scene. To the degree that we become unsure that Hamlet is capable of intentional action, it is all the more comforting to learn that he is. In *Phaedra*, while the repeated function-C decisions hold our attention to the issue of the effectiveness of intentional action, “comfort” is not a word one easily uses to describe our response. In *Phaedra*, intentional action is all too effective; each of Phaedra’s decisions leads to action that intensifies the already painful situation we find her in at the beginning of the play.15

Yet even in *Phaedra*, as we watch Phaedra take her fate into her
own decisive control, we find satisfaction in being shown just how effective intentional action can be, even when its effects are not what Phaedra, or playgoers, would wish. Often understood as a study of the effects of random power (Venus) and human intentional action (Phaedra’s), the play is satisfying because Phaedra’s tragedy is to such a degree of her own making. The respect we develop for Phaedra is not for her lineage, or the familial curse visited upon her, but for how hard she tries: her function-C decisions and the intentional actions to which they lead. And yes, even if comfort may seem far removed from Phaedra, I will use the word. Do we not find comfort in recognizing that Phaedra’s terrible fate is not solely the result of blind chance but rather, in part—even largely—of her own making? And if we do, it is because of the comfort function C brings as a thematics: that human intentional action can be effective.

In the Preface to the volume in the New York Edition that includes Daisy Miller, Henry James reports that after Leslie Stephen published the novella in The Cornhill Magazine in 1878, it was “promptly pirated in Boston—a sweet tribute I hadn’t yet received and was never again to know” (18: vi). The “tribute” from Boston must have seemed the sweeter because the Philadelphia publisher to whom James initially offered the novella rejected it, James writes:

with an absence of comment that struck me at the time as rather grim—as, given the circumstances [James’s previous publications in this publisher’s magazine], requiring indeed some explanation: till a friend to whom I appealed for light, giving him the thing to read, declared it could only have passed with the Philadelphia critic for “an outrage on American girlhood.” (18: v)

At the time of its publication and for several decades afterward, Daisy Miller remained both more popular and more controversial than any other of James’s novels and stories.

Daisy Miller is the narrative that Tamar Yacobi selects to exemplify the quantity and the variety of the data that affect readers’ decisions about who is the focus of interest (the protagonist) in a narrative. In a detailed analysis of the process by which readers determine the identity of the protagonist, Yacobi first summarizes
the six textual indicators of the protagonist that Meir Sternberg
describes, then adds to his list six contextual indicators: in her
words, the “centralizing force [of the contextual indicators]
derives less from the intratextual signals encountered and the pat-
terns made of them in the reading than from the models and
expectations of interest that we bring to the reading” (“Hero or
Heroine?” 10; her emphasis). Then turning to the published
record of readers’ responses to Daisy Miller—the reviews and
commentaries from the early decades, and twentieth-century crit-
cial accounts—Yacobi reports “a sharp division on [the identity of
the protagonist, Daisy or Winterbourne] among readers, and what
is more, a systematic division along historical lines: between con-
temporaries and moderns.” Yacobi’s analysis of the documents
shows that in the early decades “the girl—her character, morality,
fate—caught the imagination and dominated the response of the
reading public,” while Winterbourne’s “elevation to the role of
protagonist came as late as the 1960’s” (13, 14).16

Yacobi’s historicizing account of interpretations of the identity
of the protagonist in Daisy Miller, in conjunction with James’s
emphasis on the popularity of the novella during the early period
in which, as Yacobi discerns, Daisy is seen as the protagonist,
leads me to return to the recorded readers’ responses to look for a
correlation between the novella’s reception at a given historical
period and the importance of function C in the interpretations of
that period. Also supporting this undertaking is my own interpre-
tation that (as fascinating as James’s novella is) neither Daisy nor
Winterbourne is a very satisfactory protagonist, largely because
neither, in my reading, makes the function-C decision that would
establish her or him as a C-actant. But I will move chronologi-
ally, looking first at the immediate response, next at William Dean
Howells’s commentary written at the turn of the century, then at
Wayne Booth’s analysis sixty years later, and lastly at my own.

As Yacobi points out, in the decades following the publication
of the novella readers’ identification of Daisy as the central char-
acter “cut across all oppositions in attitude and judgment . . .
[T]he focus on the heroine united her attackers and her defenders,
those who viewed her as a type and those who saw a caricature,
the Philadelphia editor who [James’s friend suggests] rejected the
story as ‘an outrage on American girlhood’ and the champions of
decorum who celebrated it as a lesson to that girlhood” (13–14).
Some aspects of the controversy that surrounded the novella at the
time of its publication are not relevant to my project of formulat-
ing a function analysis that represents James’s contemporaries’ interpretations of the novella: chauvinist defenses of American girls, or arguments about whether James intended Daisy as a faithful portrait of a typical American girl or an exaggerated representation designed to teach his compatriots proper behavior. I look instead for indications of contemporary interpretations of why Daisy behaves as she does.

For its first generation of readers, *Daisy Miller* drew attention to the difference in the behavior that was expected of young unmarried women in Europe and in the United States. The primary difference, as I understand the materials I have read, is in the customs regarding chaperonage. In England and on the Continent, at the time, marriageable young women were chaperoned at home when they received visits from young men and always when they went out. According to an editorial in *The New York Times* that was written the year after *Daisy Miller* was published, chaperones were required in the highest circles in New York, but not in many cities even nearby:

> Again, as to social customs, ask a young lady in highest grade of life in New York whether it is considered the correct thing to go to a theatre alone with a young man, and she will exclaim at such an idea; yet there are cities not many hours distant where her cousins, who occupy an equally good social position, do this with perfect propriety. (June 4, 1879, in William T. Stafford, *James’s Daisy Miller*, 123–24)

In other words, in Schenectady where Daisy has grown up, “going about” unchaperoned is acceptable behavior. For that matter, various published voices suggest that the freer social customs practiced in places like Schenectady are appropriate for American women abroad. A writer identified as “J. P. T.” asks in a commentary published in 1878: “As to young ladies who have already taken a place in society at home, why should they not travel abroad as freely as young men, whether for study, pleasure, or ‘general culture’?” (Nation 36, 356; quoted by Elizabeth F. Hoxie, “Mrs. Grundy Adopts Daisy Miller,” 126). Even the social arbiter Mrs. John Sherwood wrote in 1884 that “Independent American girls may still choose to travel without a chaperon, but they must be prepared to fight a well-founded prejudice if they do” (Manners and Social Usages [New York, 1884], 26, quoted by Hoxie, 129).

Leslie Fiedler, revisiting from a much later period James’s con-
temporaries’ response, refers to Daisy’s “resolve” when he asks, somewhat rhetorically, what made American girls in 1878 “indignant at and resentful of poor Daisy, with her unspeakable little brother, her shocked American admirer and her naïve resolve to consort with Italians just as she had with her ‘gentlemen friends’ in Schenectady” (Love and Death in the American Novel, 311). Guided by Fiedler, I suggest that James’s contemporaries are reading Daisy’s behavior as that of a C-actant who has resolved to behave in Europe exactly as she has behaved at home. If one looks for textual evidence to support this interpretation, one can find some. Daisy tells Winterbourne that she introduces her gentlemen friends to her mother, her mother’s timidity notwithstanding, because if she didn’t, “‘I shouldn’t think I was natural’” (31). She comments that “‘[p]eople have different ideas’” of propriety, comparing Mrs. Walker’s “‘wanting me to get into her carriage and drop poor Mr. Giovanelli, and under the pretext that it was proper,’” to her own view that “‘[i]t would have been most unkind; he had been talking about that walk for ten days’” (70). She tells Winterbourne, “‘The young ladies of this country [Italy] have a dreadfully pokey time of it, by what I can discover; I don’t see why I should change my habits for such stupids’” (70; James’s emphasis). The same logic can be interpreted as motivating her arrival after her mother’s at Mrs. Walker’s party (she sent her mother ahead, she explains to Mrs. Walker, because she “‘wanted to make Mr. Giovanelli practice some things before he came . . . and I want you to ask him to sing’” [69]) and her trip to the Roman Colosseum (“‘I was bound to see the Colosseum by moonlight—I wouldn’t have wanted to go home without that’” [88; James’s emphasis], she tells Winterbourne).

A function analysis might look like this:17

EQ Daisy lives happily in Schenectady
A1 Daisy is brought to an unfamiliar environment, where she does not know how young women are expected to behave

C1 Daisy resolves to behave as she would at home: she decides to go to Chillon alone with Winterbourne
H1 Daisy goes to Chillon alone with Winterbourne
I_{neg1} Mrs. Costello refuses to meet Daisy
I\textsubscript{neg1} = A\textsubscript{2} Daisy loses the guidance Mrs. Costello could have given her

C\textsubscript{2} Daisy resolves to behave as she would at home: she decides to walk in public alone with Giovanelli; she decides to go to Mrs. Walker’s party alone with Giovanelli

H\textsubscript{2} Daisy walks in public alone with Giovanelli; she goes to Mrs. Walker’s party alone with Giovanelli

I\textsubscript{neg2} Mrs. Walker excludes Daisy from her guest list

I\textsubscript{neg2} = A\textsubscript{3} Daisy loses the guidance Mrs. Walker could have given her

C\textsubscript{3} Daisy resolves to behave as she would at home: she decides to visit the Colosseum alone with Giovanelli at night

H\textsubscript{3} Daisy goes to the Colosseum with Giovanelli alone at night

I\textsubscript{neg3} Winterbourne decides he need no longer respect her; she is exposed to Roman fever

I\textsubscript{neg3} = A\textsubscript{4} Daisy loses Winterbourne’s respect and dies of the Roman fever

I draw attention to the similarity between this function analysis and the one earlier in this chapter that represents Racine’s *Phaedra*. Both include repeated function-C decisions. In both, the protagonist’s decisions motivate intentional acts that make her situation worse. Although neither is responsible for the initial function-A situation she finds herself in, both bring about as the result of their function-C decisions a qualitative change that increases the difficulty of the initial disruptive situation. For readers today, Daisy’s stubborn insistence on going about unchaperoned does not carry the semiotic value it apparently did at the time the novella was published; as a result, we easily miss the signs that I am proposing that readers of the period interpreted as function-C decisions. For readers who understood the semiotics of chaperonage, Daisy’s function-C decisions would pre-
sumably have brought the comforts that function-C brings both as a hermeneutic device (providing the lodestar that locates where one is in an ongoing sequence) and as a thematics (the comfort of believing in the efficacy of human intentional action, even in situations in which the effects happen to be unwelcome).

The function analysis above with its repeated function-C decisions, I am proposing, represents interpretations at the time of the novella’s greatest popularity. Moreover, this analysis represents equally well the interpretations at the time of Daisy’s defenders and of Daisy’s accusers: those who see her as choosing to behave abroad as she does at home and thereby retaining her naturalness and her identity, and those who see her as choosing to behave abroad as she does at home and thereby foolishly damaging her reputation and unnecessarily restricting the society she moves in. A function analysis represents interpretations of causal relations; judgments about the appropriateness of a character’s intentional acts are a separate issue. As judgments, approval and disapproval of a given behavior both require the assumption that the behavior has been chosen. I am suggesting that among the first generation of readers, at the period of the novella’s greatest popularity, readers who defended Daisy and readers who disapproved of her behavior all typically interpreted Daisy’s behavior as that of a C-actant who repeatedly made and acted upon decisions about how to behave.

For William Dean Howells, who just over twenty years after Daisy Miller was published wrote a study to which I turn, James’s novella offered so accurate a portrait of the American girl at a specific historical moment that the portrait had the effect of altering the species portrayed: “[James] recognized and portrayed the innocently adventuring, unconsciously periculant American maiden, who hastened to efface herself almost as soon as she saw herself in that still flattering if a little mocking mirror, so that between two sojourns in Europe, a decade apart, she had time to fade from the vision of the friendly spectator” (Heroines of Fiction, 2: 166). Howells is a defender, both of Daisy and of Daisy Miller (“[i]t is pathetic to remember how ‘Daisy Miller’ was received, or rather rejected, as an attack on American girlhood” [2: 169]). But the defense he offers consists of an after-the-fact (“in the retrospect”) description—a static portrait—of a girl who has died, rather than a sequential representation of discrete events leading to a death. The effect is to remove from the character her resolve—her function-C decision-making, whether judged for good or for ill—that the first generation of readers seems to have found in the novella.
and to have found fascinating. I draw attention particularly to Howells’s expressed interest in the psychology over the incidents, and to his use of the verb tenses to indicate an ongoing state (Daisy “goes about Europe” and “knows” and “is”) until she “is dead” (of “the blows” and the Roman fever):

Such drama as arises in the simple circumstances precipitates itself in a few spare incidents which, in the retrospect, dwindle to nothing before the superior interest of the psychology. A girl of the later eighteen-seventies, sent with such a mother as hers to Europe by a father who remains making money in Schenectady, after no more experience of the world than she had got in her native town, and at a number of New York dinners among people of like tradition; uncultivated but not rude, reckless but not bold, inexpugnably ignorant of the conventionally right, and spiritedly resentful of control by criterions that offend her own sense of things, she goes about Europe doing exactly what she would do at home, from an innocence as guileless as that which shaped her conduct in her native town. She knows no harm and she means none; she loves life, and talking, and singing, and dancing, and “attentions,” but she is no flirt, and she is essentially and infinitely far from worse. Her whole career, as the reader is acquainted with it, is seen through the privity of the young Europeanized American who meets her at Vevey and follows her to Rome in a fascination which they have for each other, but which is never explicitly a passion. This side of the affair is of course managed with the fine adroitness of Mr. James’s mastery; from the first moment the sense of their potential love is a delicate pleasure for the reader, till at the last it is a delicate pang, when the girl has run her wild gantlet and is dead not only of the Roman fever but of the blows dealt her in her course. (2: 170–71)

To emphasize the iterative aspect of Howells’s description (in contrast to the discrete events reported in narrative accounts), I compare Howells’s account to a similar account by James—not Daisy Miller, but rather James’s report of the germ from which he developed the novella, an incident mentioned by a friend:

some simple and uninformed American lady of the previous winter, whose young daughter, a child of nature and of freedom, accompanying her from hotel to hotel, had “picked
up” by the wayside, with the best conscience in the world, a
good-looking Roman, of vague identity, astonished at his
luck, yet . . . all innocently, all serenely exhibited and intro-
duced: this at least till the occurrence of some small social
check, some interrupting incident. (Preface, 18: v)

James uses different tenses (the young woman’s activities “had”
gone on until an event interrupted them), but both accounts report
by summarizing a state of affairs that continues over a period of
time, followed by a disruptive event. According to the germ James
reports,

EQ an American girl goes about Rome with a good-looking
Roman
A some interrupting incident occurs

Or, according to Howells’s account of the completed novella,

EQ Daisy goes about Europe
A Daisy dies of the Roman fever and “the blows dealt her in
her course”

In both cases—James’s report of the germ, Howells’s report of the
completed novella—the events of the American girl’s life are pre-
sented as part of the exposition: as prior chronologically to “that
point in time which marks the beginning of the fictive present” in
the representation (Meir Sternberg, Expositional Modes, 21).
James, of course, begins with such an account and makes from it
Daisy Miller. But Howells reduces Daisy Miller to this account in
order to defend Daisy.

By describing Daisy’s activities as “going about Europe,” Howells
offers an interpretation of the character that includes no indication
that she is engaging in any form of function-C decision-making. In
fact, elsewhere in the same essay, Howells refers to the “witless pur-
poselessness” that Daisy illustrates (“where else [other than James’s
novella, can one] find the witless purposelessness . . . in much of a
girl’s behavior more sufficiently yet more sparingly suggestive” [2:
173]). According to Howells’s interpretation of Daisy as I under-
stand it, Daisy should not be considered an affront to American girl-
hood because what she does when she “goes about” is purposeless—
that is, that her actions are not guided by function-C decision-mak-
ing. Perhaps too she seems to him too “witless” to recognize a func-
tion—A disruptive situation or to formulate a decision in response to it. As I read Howells’s commentary, his defense of Daisy consists of absolving her of her “sins” by presenting her as incapable of distinguishing and deciding between appropriate and inappropriate behavior. As outrageous as a defense in these terms seems today, Howells’s interpretation of Daisy also leaves her less interesting—even in 1901, when his study was published—than in earlier interpretations that credited Daisy with decision-making ability. In addition, by 1901, the “topical interest” (Yacobi’s term; “Hero or Heroine?” 17) in Daisy as a type had long since waned with the disappearance of the type, which Howells reports. In conjunction with changing social conditions, Howells’s often-cited commentary not only presages but perhaps influenced declining interest in the character and the novella for a number of decades to come.

In *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961), Wayne Booth famously reinterprets *Daisy Miller*, renewing interest in the novella by guiding readers to turn their attention to the focalizer Winterbourne, rather than to the object on whom Winterbourne focuses, Daisy. Describing Daisy as “really, as James said, a ‘scant’ object” (283), Booth concludes:

> the drama of Winterbourne’s chilly misunderstanding of her true nature is really more important in the finished tale than Daisy’s own actions. Seen through his eyes she can hardly become emotionally important to us, though of course we must recognize that she is worth much more than he suspects. His slow caution and ready suspicions are admirably suited to make us aware of the pathos of Daisy, without giving our awareness too much emotional force. (283)

Continuing, Booth points to a scene in the novella that explains how the “drama” that he envisions (“the drama of Winterbourne’s chilly misunderstanding”) concludes:

> When Winterbourne discovers [Daisy] alone with her Italian at night in the Colosseum, his “final horror is mitigated by a final relief.” “It was as if a sudden clearance had taken place in the ambiguity of the poor girl’s appearances and the whole riddle of her contradictions had grown easy to read. She was a young lady about the shades of whose perversity a foolish puzzled gentleman need no longer trouble his head or his heart.” (Booth, 283–84, quoting *Daisy Miller*, 86)
The answer to the riddle that Winterbourne is relieved in this scene to have discovered is “wrong,” Booth says, and implicates Winterbourne because of his “faulty vision [as] a necessary cause in the overt action” (284).

As I understand Booth’s interpretation, Winterbourne is the C-actant.

EQ Winterbourne is making one of his frequent visits to his aunt
A Winterbourne meets Daisy and is puzzled and fascinated
C Winterbourne decides to try to understand Daisy
C' Winterbourne takes Daisy to Chillon
E Winterbourne looks for guidance in interpreting Daisy from Mrs. Costello, Mrs. Walker, Daisy’s mother and brother, and Daisy herself
F neg Winterbourne fails to acquire the information he needs
G Winterbourne arrives at the Colosseum at midnight
H Winterbourne sees Daisy there, decides that that “once questionable quantity had no shades—it was a mere black little blot” (*Daisy Miller*, 86); he tells her it doesn’t matter to him whether she’s engaged
I neg Winterbourne’s interpretation is wrong
I neg = A 2 Winterbourne’s misunderstanding of her behavior contributes to Daisy’s death
EQ with Daisy dead, there is no more information to study; Winterbourne returns to Geneva

Booth’s interpretation reestablishes in the novella (in my terms) a C-actant—although a different one than the readers in James’s lifetime found. Interestingly, his interpretation coincides with a new popularity for the novella, which many of us have read and taught, under Booth’s influence, as an example of James’s use of a reflector-character.

Writing near the end of the twentieth century, Kenneth Graham discerns a linguistic parallelism between Winterbourne’s comment to Daisy during their final meeting and her response to him. The resultant emphasis on Daisy’s words guides Graham’s interpretation:

Winterbourne’s laughing words are harshly contemptuous:
“I believe that it makes very little difference whether you are
engaged or not!” Daisy’s reply is a rhythmic and syntactic echo of Winterbourne’s, the two forming an ironic, because fatally antithetic, couplet: “‘I don’t care,’ said Daisy, in a little strange tone, ‘whether I have Roman fever or not!’” The enforced grammatical echo makes the emotional point: without Winterbourne’s jealous concern and affection she has no interest left in life. . . . Daisy’s last line of direct dialogue is the narrative’s one confession of love. In a tale about incommunication, and about the distance-beyond-words of one young woman’s growing inner world of feeling, it comes to us appropriately through the indirections of silence and of richly associative imagery, quite counter to the surface brusqueness and briskness of language. (Graham, “Daisy Miller: Dynamics of an Enigma,” 51, quoting Daisy Miller, 89)

Like Graham, I read the novella as exemplifying a thematics of incommunication or miscommunication in which Winterbourne does not receive a message or messages that Daisy may be attempting to communicate. About how (or when or whether) Daisy’s feelings develop, I remain less sure than he. And I will suggest that Winterbourne is listening for—and not receiving—a message from Daisy long before her final words to him, which are emphasized by the lovely parallelism Graham so happily discerns.

From their first meeting, Winterbourne’s interest in Daisy is intense. Initially he finds her “strikingly, admirably pretty” (8), and thinks “it was impossible to be prettier than that” (36). During their penultimate meeting “[i]t struck him . . . that Daisy had never showed to the eye for so utterly charming; but this had been his conviction on every occasion of their meeting” (81). He likes her too. During their trip to Chillon he tells her, “‘I never was better pleased in my life’” (41). He admits to Mrs. Walker, “‘I like her awfully, you know’” (65). He recognizes that he has shown “the zeal of an admirer [by stopping] on his way down to Rome . . . neither at Bologna nor at Florence, simply because of a certain sweet appeal to his fond fancy” (51). Even in the final section, when he assumes he is intruding on private moments between Daisy and Giovanelli, he “liked her the better for [the] innocent-looking indifference and [the] inexhaustible gaiety” (74) she displays whenever he joins the two of them. Moreover, the representation emphasizes Winterbourne’s interest in Daisy by offering almost no indication of his perceptions or thoughts about anyone or anything else.
In addition to Winterbourne’s interest in Daisy, the focalization permits readers to see, in the sequence in which Winterbourne acquires it, the information he learns about the young woman. The first three scenes, all of which occur on the day he meets Daisy, are instructive. First, Winterbourne learns from her brother that her father is in Schenectady (13). Second, Mrs. Costello’s “declin[ing] the honour” (26) of permitting her nephew to introduce Daisy to her surely indicates to Winterbourne, who has been taught to understand his aunt’s world, that not just she but all the matrons who are her social peers will refuse to serve for Daisy in loco parentis. Third, Daisy’s mother, when Winterbourne first sees her, turns away in an attempt to avoid meeting him, and, Daisy explains, regularly does so when her daughter attempts to introduce to her mother her “gentlemen friends” (31)—behavior that Winterbourne recognizes is “a very different type of maternity from that of the vigilant matrons who massed themselves in the forefront of social intercourse in the dark old city at the other end of the lake” (35).

Moreover, already on that first day of his acquaintance with Daisy, Winterbourne recognizes in himself a desire to take care of her. When he is forced to tell her that Mrs. Costello refuses to meet her, he senses from her response that he has hurt her, and “wondered if she were seriously wounded and for a moment almost wished her sense of injury might be such as to make it becoming in him to attempt to reassure and comfort her” (29). According to the logic of the society in which he has been reared, Winterbourne must assume that an attractive young woman of marriageable age, which Daisy is, is in need of protection. In the first few hours of their acquaintance, Winterbourne has learned that neither mother nor father nor society itself is providing the protection she needs. Under these conditions, I suggest, he must assume that only a husband can protect her, and thus that she must need one. In my terms, Winterbourne interprets Daisy’s circumstances as a function-a situation: the lack of a spouse.

Daisy is an attractive young woman of marriageable age, placed in an unfamiliar environment without the protection of father, mother, or society; she needs a husband.

From this point on, as I interpret the function of the events, Winterbourne listens to Daisy with the expectation that she will make a function-B request—that she will indicate that she likes
and trusts him—to which he seems to be willing to respond by performing function C: deciding to act to alleviate her situation by asking her to marry him.18

But Winterbourne never makes a function-C decision to marry Daisy, because he does not receive a function-B request until it is too late; she is already mortally ill. Conversations between the two characters occur, but very little communication takes place.19 For me, Daisy’s emotions and intentions are unknowable; I am less sure what messages she is sending than Winterbourne, at the end of the novella, is. But even her parting words to Winterbourne when she leaves the Colosseum, which are as strong a statement as she makes and which Graham interprets as “the narrative’s one confession of love,” Winterbourne does not hear as such. Winterbourne receives a function-B message from Daisy only when her mother conveys it, just a week before Daisy dies: “she wants you to realise she ain’t engaged. I don’t know why she makes so much of it, but she said to me three times ‘Mind you tell Mr. Winterbourne!’” (91). Winterbourne’s conversation with Mrs. Costello at the very end of the novella informs readers that he receives this message as the function-B message for which he has been listening. But by then, the message has come too late to motivate action. A negative function represents a specified event that does not occur; Winterbourne does not decide to ask Daisy to marry him.

a Daisy is an attractive young woman of marriageable age, placed in an unfamiliar environment without the protection of father, mother, or society; she needs a husband

B Daisy conveys through her mother a message that Winterbourne hears as indicating that she “would have appreciated [his] esteem” (93)

C_{neg} because Daisy dies, Winterbourne cannot propose marriage to her

The move from function B to function C requires a completed communication—a message that is sent and received—which does not and (the novella may be read as suggesting) cannot occur across the social barriers that perhaps both characters attempt to cross. As I interpret the novella, Winterbourne listens throughout for a function-B request from Daisy, but cannot hear the message from her, even if she attempts to speak it. If she expresses her interest in him,
he considers her a flirt and assumes she says the same things to other men. If she does not express her interest, he assumes she prefers someone else. The only message that Winterbourne hears is the one that is echoed by Daisy’s mother. The very condition that has aroused Winterbourne’s desire to take care of Daisy—her vulnerable social situation, with no one to protect her—leaves Winterbourne at such a loss to grasp the semiotics of the situation that he receives a message only when it arrives under the aegis of an appropriate sponsor.

As I interpret *Daisy Miller*, the logical sequence of action stops at function B. In narratives that move from function B to function C, a message is successfully transmitted. The addressee, having heard the full urgency of the message, agrees to help. Communication has occurred. Because function B marks the sending of a message, a narrative that stops at function B necessarily includes a thematics of failed communication. In my reading, as interesting as the novella continues to be for theorists to analyze, it offers readers neither the comfort that function C brings as a thematics (no one’s intentional acts ameliorate Daisy’s situation) nor the comfort that function C brings as a hermeneutic device (without a clearly indicated function-C decision, it is difficult to be sure what any of the characters interpret as problems to be solved).

Given these four interpretations—all of which I offer as examples of credible readings in their time—the issue I find most compelling is why James’s relatively traditional narrative can be the subject of so many, and such varied, interpretations. In her analysis of the shift in interpretations of the protagonist, Yacobi points to the topical interest in the 1870s and 1880s in the behavior of young women from the United States traveling in Europe, and the interest that had developed by the 1960s in the psychological process of perceiving and analyzing illustrated by Winterbourne—in addition to the shift in interest among readers and critics from what happens in a narrative to how it is represented, which in the United States is most clearly marked by Wayne Booth’s *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. One might add to the changes in the readership that Yacobi discerns, an increased tolerance for ambiguity in the present day.

In addition, James’s novella leaves open the identity of the C-actant to a degree that I think is unusual in Anglo-American and Continental narrative fiction of the period. As we saw in the first section of this chapter, a C-actant’s function-C decision that estab-
lishes intent may be directly revealed by depictions of the decision-making process that precedes motivated action, or indirectly revealed by action that a C-actant undertakes which in the context suggests that it is motivated by a function-C decision. In the case of Daisy, the novella gives no access to her unspoken thoughts so no decision-making is directly revealed; if she makes decisions we cannot see her making them. As for actions that indirectly reveal decision-making, Daisy’s actions are so minimal—she goes to parties, takes walks, visits monuments—that twentieth- and (early-) twenty-first-century readers will probably not interpret them as motivated by a function-C decision. As we saw earlier, however, James’s contemporaries, who were trained to expect and look for a chaperon whenever a young woman appeared, apparently did interpret Daisy’s actions as motivated: as the effect of a choice she had made.

As for Winterbourne, we see his mind in action, but we do not see a directly revealed C-actant decision. In fact, Winterbourne’s reported thoughts are almost entirely devoted to analyzing Daisy and include very little self-analysis. The closest he comes to analyzing his motives, I suggest, is when he thinks of himself as having traveled to Rome with “the zeal of an admirer” (I am reading the passage as free indirect discourse: the signifiers for the most part—including “zeal” and “admirer”—reflecting the character’s vocabulary, although reported in syntax formulated by the narrator). But even this thought, in the context in which it is offered, is subjugated to an analysis of Daisy; Winterbourne is “a trifle disconcerted . . . by her inadequate measure of [his] zeal” (50–51). Similarly, as far as Winterbourne’s actions are concerned, we cannot read his trip to Rome as indirectly revealing a C-actant decision to pursue Daisy since he has planned a trip to Rome during the winter to visit his aunt. Nor do any of his other actions necessarily indicate a C-actant’s pursuit. While we know that Winterbourne finds Daisy interesting, because he says so and because he talks and thinks about her often, we are given insufficient information to determine whether he finds her merely an appealing distraction or whether he has made a C-actant decision to attempt to win her affection.

In other words, what I have described as the comfort function C brings as a hermeneutic device is largely unavailable to readers of *Daisy Miller*, except perhaps to the first generation of readers. As function analysis demonstrates (for instance, in the analyses above that represent interpretations of *Daisy Miller*), without the
hermeneutic guidance provided by a directly revealed function-C decision, or an indirectly revealed but readily inferred function-C decision, readers’ interpretations of where they are in a logical sequence—of where the characters are in a logical sequence at the time in their lives that is represented—can vary to an astonishing degree. The variation in interpretations of the function of events in *Daisy Miller* attests to the degree to which relatively clear indications of a C-actant, whether direct or indirect, can center and support interpretations of the logical relations among events in a sequence. Moreover, as the interpretations of *Daisy Miller* that I have analyzed exemplify, when readers’ interpretations of where they are in a logical sequence shift, so do the thematics of the narrative being interpreted: naïveté abroad, the innocence of “American girlhood,” a search for truth, miscommunication.

In the analysis above of how *Daisy Miller* was read in relation to its reception, the periods of the novella’s popularity seem to coincide with interpretations in which first Daisy, for the first generation of readers, and later Winterbourne, beginning in the 1960s, are interpreted as C-actants. Both interpretations would seem to offer (to have offered) both the hermeneutic comfort of knowing where one is in an ongoing situation and the thematic comfort of being permitted to believe that intentional acts can sometimes effectively change situations. These two interpretations of *Daisy Miller*, in conjunction with *Hamlet*, *Phaedra*, and the St. Louis newscasts during the flooding in the Midwest in 1993, suggest—but offer far too small a sample to prove—a correlation between an emphasized function-C decision, whether repeated or extended, and a strongly positive reception. The other two interpretations of *Daisy Miller* suggest, by default as it were, the value for readers of a directly revealed or readily inferable function-C decision, whether or not it is emphasized by being repeated or extended. As we have seen, a function-C decision as a hermeneutic device guides interpretations of where one is in an ongoing logical sequence—and thereby shapes interpretations of a narrative’s thematic focus. Representations of function C, when emphasized, guide recognition that the decision-making process is the central thematics of a narrative. In complementary fashion, representations of function C that are not emphasized but that serve to establish where one is in an ongoing logical sequence also play an important role—perhaps an even more important role than the selection of the events portrayed, I suggest—in guiding interpretations of the thematic focus of the narrative.
As we have seen in this chapter, by explicitly or implicitly indicating when a function-C decision is occurring, narratives satisfy our desire to know where we are in a represented sequence and to understand what message we are receiving. In chapter 5, I look at narratives that deny us these forms of hermeneutic and thematic comfort, and I draw attention to our similar lack of these forms of comfort when we interpret events in our world that we perceive directly, without the guidance of a narrative. In narratives about our world, the comforts that function C brings are often deceptive comforts. The real-world danger, to which I turn in the concluding chapters, is that we may not recognize the extent to which narratives are shaping our interpretations and bringing us comfort where comfort is not to be had.