



Cecil Dreeme: A Novel

Theodore Winthrop

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Cecil Dreeme is one of the queerest American novels of the 19th century. This edition, which includes a new introduction contextualizing the sexual history of the period and queer longings of the book, brings a rare, almost forgotten, sensational gothic novel set in New York's West Village back to light.

Published posthumously in 1861, the novel centers on Robert Byng, a young man who moves back to New York after traveling abroad and finds himself unmarried and underemployed, adrift in the heathenish dens of lower Manhattan. When he takes up rooms in “Chrysalis College”—a thinly veiled version of the 19th-century New York University building in Washington Square—he quickly finds himself infatuated with a young painter lodging there, named Cecil Dreeme. As their friendship grows and the novel unfolds against the backdrop of the bohemian West Village, Robert confesses that he “loves Cecil with a love passing the love of women.” Yet, there are dark forces at work in the form of the sinister and magnetic Densdeth, a charismatic figure of bad intention, who seeks to ensnare Robert for his own. Full of romantic entanglements, mistaken identity, blackmail, and the dramas of temptation and submission, *Cecil Dreeme* is a gothic novel at its finest. Poetically written—with flashes of Walt Whitman, Charles Dickens, and Oscar Wilde— *Cecil Dreeme* is an early example of that rare bird, a queer novel from the 19th century.

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