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Article

An “Entirely Personal” Success: Intertextuality and Self-Reflexive Ironies in Henry James’s “Pandora”

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Abstract: Henry James’s self-allusions in “Pandora” have been read as a rewriting of his former treatment of the “American Girl abroad” in the comic mode. The hints at “a Tauchnitz novel by an American author” (90) establish an ironical reversal of the failures of understanding which had led to tragedy in “Daisy Miller.” Yet the ironies in “Pandora” are multi-layered, often self-reflexive, and can be further interpreted in the light of James’s controversial adaptation of his famous novella for the stage. In this framework, well-known Jamesian *topoi* appear both as a (self-)parody and a metaliterary dialogue James engages with his readers and critics. The author’s personal implication in this “American” story is further testified by his *Notebooks*, in which James states his intention to write about his friends Henry and “Clover” Adams. Indeed, “Pandora”’s multi-layered intertextuality includes undeclared references to Adams’s anonymously published novel, *Democracy*, a semi-satirical account of U.S. political life. My article focuses on the web of intertextual relations woven in this short story with a view to reflecting on James’s ideas concerning the politics of authorship, readership, literary success, and the fate of the American Girl.

Keywords: Henry James; “Pandora”; intertextuality; American girl; “Daisy Miller”; Henry Adams; *Democracy*; international theme; irony



Citation: Vellucci, Sabrina. 2021.

An “Entirely Personal” Success: Intertextuality and Self-Reflexive Ironies in Henry James’s “Pandora”. *Humanities* 10: 61. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h10020061>

Received: 7 January 2021

Accepted: 23 March 2021

Published: 29 March 2021

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1. The Unfinished Business of the American Girl

In the early 1880s Henry James had been struck by the unpredictable success in the United States of “Daisy Miller: A Study.” Although by that time he had made for himself a remarkable literary reputation, his name remained mainly attached to the controversial reception of his famous *nouvelle*. As a result of “Daisy Miller”’s publication, there had been an accruing general criticism over what had been read as an unflattering portrayal of the national icon of the American Girl abroad and an increased perception in the public opinion of the author’s lack of patriotism. However, after the initial indignation, the *New York Tribune* was “calling loudly for more fiction like “Daisy Miller”—‘more work in the same style’” (Monteiro 2016, p. 60). In devising his plans for future writing, among James’s first thoughts was that the heroine could serve as a model in a story about Washington. “Pandora” was indeed prompted by the author’s visit to the United States over the winter of 1881–82, after an absence of six years, and in particular by his first ever stay in the nation’s capital, which stamped itself vividly on his imagination. His experience of the trip is recorded in the *Notebooks*, where he expresses his wish to write something of his “very lovely memories of last winter,” in which Henry Adams and Marian Hooper “Clover” Adams had played a major role. In the entry dated 29 January 1884, he records a sketch of its main theme:

I don’t see why I shouldn’t do the ‘self-made girl,’ whom I noted here last winter, in a way to make her a rival to D[aisy] M[iller]. I must put her into action, which I am afraid it will be difficult in the small compass (16 magazine pages which I now contemplate). But I don’t see why I shouldn’t make the thing as concise as *Four Meetings*. The concision of *Four Meetings* with the success of *Daisy M.*;

that is what I must aim at! But I must first invent the action! It must take place in New York. Perhaps indeed Washington would do, so far as I know it, and work in my few notes, and my very lovely memories, of last winter. I might even do Henry Adams and his wife. The hero might be a foreign secretary of Legation—German—inquiring and conscientious. New York and Washington, say. The point of the story would naturally be to show the contrast between the humble social background of the heroine, and the position which she has made—or is making for herself and, indirectly, for her family [. . .]. Her people—her impossible father and mother—the way she carries them, etc. The picture admiring and appreciative. [. . .] The thing must have the name of the girl (like D.M.) for its title—carefully selected. [. . .]—I may make the thing a ‘little gem’—if I try hard enough. (James 1947, p. 56)

James clearly nurtured high expectations for his new story and deliberately conceived of it as a companion-piece to “Daisy Miller.” He was determined to make his portrait of the most interesting human type he found on his return to the United States, the “new” American girl who advances in society solely by her own wits and bold charm. In “Pandora” he would have his male protagonist, the secretary of the German legation, learn that “[s]he was possible doubtless only in America [. . .]. She was not fast, nor emancipated, nor crude, nor loud, and there wasn’t in her, of necessity at least, a grain of the stuff of which the adventuress is made. She was simply very successful, and her success was entirely personal” (James [1884] 2009, p. 130).

In his Preface to the New York Edition, James (1909, p. xlii) would admit that “[a] good deal” of Daisy’s element of “pure poetry” had “doubtless sneaked into ‘Pandora.’” Yet, when “Pandora” first came out in the *New York Sun*, in two instalments on 1 and 8 June 1884, it did not cause anything like the sensation and controversy that “Daisy Miller” had stirred and never won the fame the latter had enjoyed, even though it was one of the first short stories that James decided to publish in popular newspapers, embittered by the mediocre profits from Macmillan’s and eager to “have leisure to work carefully, artistically, and according to one’s taste” (James 2018, pp. 237–38). In this regard, Monteiro notes that, in spite of “James’s strong feelings about the papers, he was willing in this instance to accept, according to Charles A. Dana, the *Sun*’s editor, the then very generous payment for ‘Pandora’ of between eleven and twelve hundred dollars” (Monteiro 2016, pp. 58–59). At this time, like other contemporaries such as Oscar Wilde, James was starting to engage in the struggle to appeal “to a high-brow audience while seeking to come to terms with the popular demands and commercial constraints of literary success” (Orlich 1996, p. 537). Yet, unlike Wilde, James would come to feel that he failed at fully addressing either readership, and his response to the demands of an increasingly remunerative mass audience and an ever more competitive publishing arena would be marked by “silent rage” (Orlich 1996, p. 537). His preoccupation with the rapidly changing marketplace and his attempt to reconcile commercial success with his aesthetic standards may thus account for his decision, as he wrote in a letter to his brother, to supply “a very large general public with artistic work”—a desire he restated in a letter to his sister Alice dated 5 February 1884: “I see no shame in offering my productions to the widest public, & in their being ‘brought home’, as it were, to the great American people.” (James 2019, p. 10).

However, James’s quest for fame and fortune by means of what he termed “the Dana-business” was bound to be frustrated. “Pandora” was even less than “an unqualified success in its own day,” since negative reviews ranged from the observation that it was “a complete failure” (*New York Tribune*) and that its only contribution was to introduce readers “to a highly disagreeable Daisy Miller, a trifle more honest, but not less provincial” (*The Independent*) to the half-hearted acknowledgement that it was “by far the cleverest thing” in what was otherwise “a decidedly miscellaneous collection” (*The Literary World*) (Monteiro 2016, pp. 63–64, 159). Notwithstanding the generally dismissive assessments,

the tale was twice reprinted in book form in 1885¹ and James thought it worth revising for inclusion in the New York Edition: he worked on it over the summer of 1908 and “Pandora” was republished in volume XVIII of that edition in 1909.²

Among the reasons for James’s willingness to appear in the *Sun*, Sara Wadsworth has advanced the explanation that “Pandora” “contains, redeems, and disseminates the narrative of the ‘self-made girl’ in the very forum in which her prototype was subjected to public scrutiny, insinuation, and outright condemnation.”³ From this perspective, “Pandora” offers further insight into the author’s reactions to “Daisy Miller”’s reviews. In this tale, the themes of the treacherous distinction between observation and imagination and the instability of social boundaries are reworked to appear both as a (self-)parody and a metaliterary dialogue James engages with his readers and critics. To be sure, the author is personally implicated on several levels in this “American” story, which not only openly and consistently references “Daisy Miller” but also incorporates James’s opinions of American politics, while signifying his “neatly contrived joke” on the Adamses (Goode 2009, p. xxi), possibly intended only for them and for their small circle of friends.⁴ As a result, the short story has been read as a rewriting of James’s former treatment of the “international young lady” in the comic mode, resulting in an ironical reversal of the failures of understanding which had led to tragedy in “Daisy Miller.”

As James stated in the *Notebooks*, his planned new story would extend beyond the study of “the self-made girl” and include a treatment of his Washington hosts, Henry and Marian Adams. In “Pandora,” they would emerge, very thinly disguised by an allegorical name-change, as Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Bonnycastle, the couple whose spacious house becomes the social center of James’s fictional Washington.⁵ Like Henry Adams, Alfred Bonnycastle “was not in politics, though politics were much in him”⁶ (James [1884] 2009, p. 114); and like “Clover” Adams, Mrs. Bonnycastle is supremely discriminating about the company she invites to her receptions, sometimes prompting the complaint that her hospitality “was too limited, that it left out, on the whole, more people than it took in” (James [1884] 2009, p. 112). Making their appearance in the second part of the tale, the Adamses are portrayed with a lightly satiric touch. Their occasionally supercilious attitude toward society is stressed, for instance, in Alfred Bonnycastle’s quip: “Hang it, there’s only a month left; let us be vulgar and have some fun—let us invite the President” (James [1884] 2009, p. 115).⁷ The Bonnycastles are knowledgeable, witty, and endowed with an insider’s view of the political life of the capital that appears extremely alluring to the inexperienced protagonist, a young German by the resounding name of Count Otto Vogelstein. Mrs. Bonnycastle, in particular, takes a special delight in defining and, at the same time, deconstructing the boundaries of Washington (high) society for the anxious and clumsy “theoretic Teuton” (James [1884] 2009, p. 113), who is the object of her constant teasing and laughter. Faithful to the stiffness suggested by his last name’s suffix,⁸ Count Vogelstein is incapable of perceiving the subtle discriminations to which the fun-loving interpreter of Washington society strives to introduce him.

¹ In January of that year, it was published in *The Author of Beltraffio* by James R. Osgood of Boston; in February it was issued by Macmillan in London as part of a three-volume collection entitled *Stories Revived*.

² References in this article are to the New York Edition. On James’s revisions in “Pandora,” see (Vandersee 1968). For a list of variant readings, see (Goode 2009, pp. 293–95).

³ Unpublished conference paper at “The Real Thing: Henry James and the Material World,” University of Aberdeen, 16–19 July 2014.

⁴ The few positive reviews of the tale stressed James’s ability to portray Washington society.

⁵ The Adamses would make several appearances in James’s fiction in the 1880s, “either as lightly disguised characters or through quotations of their words and sentiments” (Monteiro 2016, p. 53). Besides “Pandora,” the most relevant stories in this regard are “The Point of View” and “The Modern Warning.” For a consideration of the “echoes” of Adams’s *Democracy* in Henry James’s works, see chapter 5 in Ormond Seavey, *Henry Adams in Washington: Linking the Personal and Public Lives of America’s Man of Letters*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2020.

⁶ As Harbert (2008) observes: “For four generations, the Adamses retained their important place in national politics. But for Henry, his appropriate role had become that of observer and critic, rather than actor, in the political drama.”

⁷ Reportedly a remark that Adams really made (see Buitenhuis 1970, p. 123).

⁸ In German *stein* means ‘stone, rock.’ On the other hand, *Vogel* means ‘bird,’ which is also slang for “an idiot, a clown (dimwitted, or ridiculous person).” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Vogel> (accessed on 9 March 2021).

As Orlich (1996, pp. 546–47) remarks, “Pandora”’s social drama is built on the fundamental assumption of the “textuality of experience, namely the basic philosophical assumption of a world in which the only objects for understanding are the texts of social convention.” The protagonist’s ignorance of the American social semiotic requires him to rely first on a book and then on the ability of a native informant, Mrs. Bonnycastle, to interpret for him the queerness and contradictions of a life “he was often at a loss to understand” (James [1884] 2009, p. 113).⁹ It is tempting to detect an autobiographical element in Vogelstein’s inexperience and alien perspective. James’s return to the United States in 1881–82 was an occasion for “updating his impressions of his native land with ample opportunity for re-encountering the ‘good American’ [. . .] in his many habitats” (Monteiro 2016, p. 59). His unfamiliarity with Washington’s manners and his eagerness for new experiences led him to put aside his usual inhibitions, thus eliciting Mrs. Adams’s criticism for his lack of discrimination in accepting invitations. Unlike James (but much like the Adamses), the Bonnycastles in the story are depicted as having “taken upon themselves the responsibilities of an active patriotism; they thought it right to live in America, differing therein from many of their acquaintances who only, with some grimness, thought it inevitable. [. . .] one knew they had lived in Europe only by their present exultation, never in the least by their regrets. Their regrets, that is, were only for their ever having lived there” (James [1884] 2009, p. 114).

In fact, the Adamses’ influence runs deeper in “Pandora” and can be detected in a web of subterranean intertextual references to *Democracy. An American Novel*, which Adams had published in 1880, a semi-satirical account of U.S. political life set in Washington. The book possessed the quality of a joke on different levels. The author—even though “Clover” Adams significantly contributed to the writing¹⁰—had insisted on total anonymity and had instructed the publisher to bring the book out on April Fool’s Day.¹¹ The Adamses also took care to be in Europe at the time of publication, which created a sensation. The book was a best seller in the United States and England, but the author’s identity would be disclosed only thirty-five years later, in 1925. For “Pandora” James drew inspiration from Adams’s ironic depiction of the capital and his insights into the corruption of American politics. Although he would never be an expert (despite enjoying Adams’s tutorship in the subject), he articulated his strongly critical view by showing how determinedly democratic politics was excluded by the city’s enlightened society—it is not without irony that the Adams’ house, with its hosts’ discriminating policies, would come to represent the epitome of this peculiar divorce.

Hence “Pandora” echoes several aspects of *Democracy*: the setting in post-Civil War Washington; the heroine’s ambition for power (even though with important differences concerning social status, goals, and eventual outcome)¹² as well as her intellectual ability and cultivation; and the allusions to the decline of ideals and moral principles in the contemporary political system, combined with elements of (failed) romance. Furthermore, it includes a visit to Mount Vernon and an overarching concern with judging people correctly (which, in Adams’s novel, engages the female protagonist, Madeleine Lightfoot Lee, who is the subject and not the object, like Pandora, of reflection). Similarly, it suggests a complex and ambivalent, ultimately pessimistic view of American democracy. In

⁹ As Vandersee (1968, p. 97) has shown, Mrs. Bonnycastle’s role as “candid informant” and foil to Vogelstein is exceedingly important in the story. The significant alterations James made in his revisions of “Pandora” for the New York Edition made her “even more sharp-tongued and more acidulous than she had been originally.”

¹⁰ Harbert (2008) reports that Adams composed the novel “as a diversion for himself and his wife, who would contribute details of dress, manners, etc., as well as timely gossip about Washington society. Both Adamses found their collaboration congenial, but neither wanted to be known as ‘author’ of the novel.” Indeed, Wineapple (2021) notes that “*Democracy* was later rumored to be the handiwork of Henry James, and in 1911 Adams playfully remarked, ‘Really, of course, Henry James wrote it, in connection with his brother Willy, to illustrate Pragmatism.’”

¹¹ Although the novel’s authorship “became for Adams and his friends something of a private joke,” Harbert (2008) remarks that another part of Adams “sought tangible results from the book: he hoped for a wide readership that could effect political reform.”

¹² At the beginning of the story, Adams’s heroine “wished to see, she thought, [. . .] the clash of interests, the interests of forty millions of people and a whole continent, centering at Washington; [. . .] the tremendous forces of government, and the machinery of society, at work. What she wanted was POWER.” (Adams [1880] 2008).

Adams's novel, for instance, the omniscient narrator states: "A certain secret jealousy of the British Minister is always lurking in the breast of every American Senator, if he is truly democratic; for democracy, rightly understood, is the government of the people, by the people, for the benefit of senators, and there is always a danger that the British Minister may not understand this political principle as he should" (Adams [1880] 2008). In keeping with the heroine's eventual flight from Washington's political life (much like Adams himself), *Democracy* insisted on an inconclusive escape as the proper moral of political involvement.¹³ Conversely, "Pandora"'s ending more openly and ambiguously shows the eponymous protagonist's triumph over the strictures of a rigidly codified society whose obsolescence she contributes to expose. Thus, through the covert references to *Democracy* and to the Adamses' counterparts, James "humorously deconstructs conventional attitudes by turning traditional and 'earnest' values connected with love, marriage, truth, sincerity, and so forth upside down, and 'trivializes' them by means of parody, nonsense, and wit" (Orlich 1996, p. 546).

Although it is mostly in his stories of the 1890s about writers that James reflects on his craft—works whose serious subject, according to Richards (2012, p. 427), does not exclude an element of "wry comedy"—"Pandora" can be said nonetheless to shed light on the author's ideas concerning the politics of authorship, readership, and literary success. In this short story James seems to challenge the familiar interpretations of his work—again, like Henry Adams, who claimed that each of his books (including *Democracy*), "had been written as an experimental test of his readers" (Harbert 2008). The short story's multi-layered, self-reflexive ironies seem to allude to that version of Bakhtin's "reduced laughter" uncovered in other Jamesian works, in which the author's "comic seriousness" manifests itself as "a deliberately self-critical attitude, highly expressive and uncompleted" (Burns 2005, p. 3).¹⁴ The fittest venue for conveying such an attitude was of course the stage: in James's own comments in *The Scenic Art: Notes on Acting and the Drama*, this attenuated type of comedy "seems a matter of invention, of reflection and irony."¹⁵ It is the middle term that appears especially revealing for an apprehension of James's comic sense, which is based on the activity of moral and critical reflection—"one which understands that the world is essentially open and incomplete, and that we, as social beings, must remain open to others" (Burns 2005, p. 4), one in which dialogue plays a pivotal role.

Both the activity of moral and critical reflection and dialogue are the main sources of "Pandora"'s comic effect. The characterization of Vogelstein, the author's systematic reflector, verges on the caricatural: "serious civil ceremonious curious stiff, stuffed with knowledge," he is aware that the United States "offered a vast field for study" (James [1884] 2009, p. 86). Thus, having been taught "to appreciate the nature of evidence," he immediately engages in a process of inquiry, in which all his senses and organs are involved—his tongue, eyes, ears, nose, palate—his only fault being that "his sense of comedy, or of the humour of things had never been specifically disengaged from his several other senses" (James [1884] 2009, p. 86). This is, however, no minor disadvantage, since he feels he is "on his way to explore a society abounding in comic aspects." Therefore, being aware of "a missing measure" (James [1884] 2009, p. 86), he adopts circumspection as a safe strategy. The Count's stiffness, his tendency to amass information in his mind, and his lack of imagination make him a character doomed to fail. Like other Jamesian works, "Pandora" is concerned with representing the central character's mental acts of perception, speculation, and inference, and its plot is conveyed through the consciousness of this single character, whose understanding of the actions and motives of others is necessarily limited and often unreliable. Vogelstein's constant hesitation, his untimely epiphanies, and his failure to reach a higher level of consciousness exemplify "James's persistent preoccupation with unfinalizability, responsibility, and creativity" (Burns 2005, p. 5).

¹³ Harbert (2008) observes that the novel's final effect thus "proved less experimental or innovative than repetitive in the larger message it conveyed to readers."

¹⁴ In his analysis of James's comic perception Burns (2005) focuses on "The Beast in the Jungle."

¹⁵ Ronald Wallace. *Henry James and the Comic Form*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975, p. 4 (quoted in Burns 2005, p. 3).

The importance of dialogue, both as a fundamental device to make the action progress and as underlying (meta)narrative theme, highlights the openness of the tale's structure against any monological conception of fiction. In this dialogical structure it is mostly the Bonnycastles' voices that, offering a contrapuntal perspective to the protagonist's, transform Washington political scene in a Bakhtinian "carnavalesque" sphere of moral perception and philosophical reflection, in which reduced laughter becomes a "form-shaping ideology" (Burns 2005, p. 15). Reduced laughter—to be distinguished from satirical laughter, since the satirist's view of the world depends upon stable positions in both ethical norms and in knowledge—often becomes self-reflexive laughter in "Pandora." As in the passage in which the narrator remarks that "[e]ven his [Vogelstein's] American novelist was more amusing" than the landscape in which "the elements of air and water managed to make between them so comparatively poor an opposition" (James [1884] 2009, p. 91). The core of James's humor is not so much to be found in the object of Mrs. Bonnycastle's perpetual laugh or in the "comic aspects" of American society (James [1884] 2009, p. 86). Nor is it to be found in American boisterous humor, which is occasionally alluded to in the story, in ways that make James's narrator seem almost "like a puzzled anthropologist describing the exotic trait of an aboriginal people"¹⁶ (Vandersee 1968, p. 100). It is rather inherent in the author's style and in "his persistent reflexiveness on the nature of language," in his awareness that language is "a treacherous and inadequate instrument to realise all of its noble and functional aims [. . .] and capable of as much deformation and frustrated functionalism as the human grotesques in Dickens" (Richards 2012, p. 420). Since "Pandora" illustrates the fallacies deriving from a society whose pretentiousness leads to attribute "misplaced significance to what cannot bear thematic weight" (Goode 2009, p. xxii), James's humor has its source in "a heightened awareness that all was not well with the world," and coexists "with a sense of horror" (Richards 2012, p. 435) that makes his vision closer to Henry Adams's pessimistic view of American politics—as the narrator shrewdly observes, "Count Vogelstein was still young enough in diplomacy to think it necessary to have opinions" (James [1884] 2009, p. 87).

The 'germ' of James's serio-comic experiment in "Pandora" might be also traced back to his controversial adaptation for the stage of *Daisy Miller: A Comedy in Three Acts*, drafted when James returned to the United States in the fall of 1881 (James [1882] 1949). The play rewrites considerably the original story: Eugenio, the courier of the novella, is transformed into a villain, while the mysterious lady in Geneva becomes Madame de Katkoff, a Russian countess and one of the play's main characters. According to formula, the comedy ends with the promise of an early marriage between Daisy and Winterbourne.¹⁷ Whether the idea of adapting the text for the stage originated with James or not, the Madison Square Theatre's manager, Daniel Froham, whom the author entrusted with his play, rejected it. In his opinion, the play was "beautifully written," but it was "too literary. It had too much talk and not enough action" (Edel 1949, p. 117). James's negotiations went on but eventually fell through, and the author returned to England "with [. . . his] comedy in his pocket" and a sense of "deep and unspeakable disgust" for what he had learned about "the manners and ideas of managers and actors and [. . .] the conditions of productions on our unhappy stage" (Edel 1949, p. 118). Undiscouraged, in the fall of 1882, James had the play printed privately in order to circulate it more easily among the London theater managers. His hopes, however, even in this case, went unfulfilled, and the play never reached the stage.¹⁸ Edel has defined the script "rather artificial" (Edel 1949, p. 119), still revealing "the author's skill in dialogue and characterization," but amateurish in its dramaturgy. The

¹⁶ When, for example, Pandora's brother utters witticisms in the smoking room, we are told that "Vogelstein, well as he knew English, could rarely catch the joke; but he could see at least that these must be choice specimens of that American humour admired and practised by a whole continent and yet to be rendered accessible to a trained diplomatist, clearly, but by some special and incalculable revelation" (James [1884] 2009, p. 99).

¹⁷ Mendelsohn (1964, p. 61) defines the play imitative and devoid of originality, showing "no evidence of the subtlety that James displays so well in his later work. *Daisy Miller* is a string of melodramatic clichés based entirely on a simple dichotomy of good and evil—with virtue predictably triumphant."

¹⁸ In the spring of 1883, he published the script in the *Atlantic Monthly* in three installments and later that year he published it in book form with James R. Osgood, after it had been rejected by Houghton and Mifflin.

contemporary critical reaction was more severe. The *Dial* wrote: “It is neither readable nor actable”; *The New York Tribune* dismissed the book as a “highly impossible comedy,” a “failure” which the otherwise accomplished writer and critic had, all the more regrettably, “put permanently on record” (ibid.).

2. “Pandora”’s “Writerly” Text

James’s own reflections on artistic failure, together with a sense for comedy he had not been able to channel into his adaptation, become important motifs in “Pandora.” The story takes up where “Daisy Miller” had left. Unlike Daisy, who dies in Rome, we first see Pandora on her way back to the United States, after having completed her travels in Europe, in line with her plans of self-education. The story opens at the port of Southampton, England, aboard a steamer that, coming from the port of Bremen, is headed to New York. Count Otto Vogelstein, newly appointed to the secretaryship of the German legation at Washington, is reading “a Tauchnitz novel by an American author whose pages, he had been assured, would help to prepare him for some of the oddities” (James [1884] 2009, p. 90) he would encounter in the country he is headed to.¹⁹ Like Frederick Winterbourne in “Daisy Miller,” although on a reverse trajectory²⁰ (the first in a series of reversals), Count Otto occupies the privileged position of the observer. From his comfortable nest on the upper deck of the vessel, he watches with complacency the struggle of the less fortunate travelers, who appear to his objectifying gaze as “the many additions” to the *Donau*’s “human cargo” who are going to be “absorbed in the huge capacity of the ship” (James [1884] 2009, p. 85). Most of these passengers are Americans; among them Vogelstein notices a “slim, brightly dressed, rather pretty” young woman who will turn out to be Pandora Day. Later on, during his first meeting with her, the Count will consider as “the oddest coincidence in the world” the fact that the story he “had taken up treated of a flighty forward little American girl who plants herself in front of a young man in the garden of a hotel. Wasn’t the conduct of this young lady a testimony to the truthfulness of the tale, and wasn’t Vogelstein himself in the position of the young man in the garden?” (James [1884] 2009, p. 92).

The references to James’s novella being thus plainly revealed in the first pages, one might wonder why James has decided to spoil the reader’s pleasure in discovering “Pandora”’s intertext by herself. A plausible explanation is that they may very well serve as a warning that, in spite of the apparent echoes and similarities, the author is telling a different story, and one with very distinct implications. Indeed, as Despotopoulou (2017, p. 437) remarks, by this act the author inscribes his earlier story into his readers’ cultural memory, seemingly establishing a type of American girl against which Pandora is measured only to reveal the impossibility for her “to be fitted into the earlier Jamesian model.” In “Pandora,” James seems thus to suggest that “Daisy Miller” is a contestable source for collective memory.²¹ The title character’s allure appears in fact to derive from her divergence from her supposed precursor. Even Vogelstein soon realizes it. Having finished “his little American story,” he “definitely judged that Pandora Day was not at all like the heroine. She was quite another type; much more serious and strenuous, and not at all keen, as he had supposed, about making the acquaintance of gentlemen” (James [1884] 2009, p. 98). Hence, showing, on the one hand, that “James’s textual strategy [. . .] includes the reader as an integral part of its operation” (Izzo 2008, p. 355), “Pandora”’s *mise en abyme* of “Daisy Miller” also prompts the reader to get James himself involved in the story. His paraded self-implication

¹⁹ James’s notion that a Tauchnitz copy of “Daisy Miller” could serve as a link for his later work seems to have had its source in an anonymous review appeared in the *Nation*. The story’s connection with the transatlantic voyage is also stressed by another critic, who “was moved to ask what this tale alone might not have done ‘to swell the receipts, in the ‘80’s and ‘90’s, of the American tourist agencies.’” (Gooder 2009, p. viii). The novella was actually published by Tauchnitz, the Leipzig-based publisher, in 1879, in “the Collection of British Authors’ Series.”

²⁰ Unlike Winterbourne, an American who has lost touch with his native culture because of his long stay in Europe, where “Daisy Miller” is set, Otto Vogelstein is a German whose anxieties come from facing the New World for the first time.

²¹ Despotopoulou (2017, p. 449) reads “Pandora”’s intertextuality in the framework of a “commemorative action” aimed at establishing literature as “culture memory.”

in this work can thus be understood as part of his life-long critical reflection, an effort that “seems to aim at writing the story of his literary story” (Demir-Atay 5).

From this perspective, “Pandora” can be read as a ‘revision,’ in the meaning proposed by Horne (1989, p. 358) as involving “the existence of two ‘visions’ of the same object or situation—one in the present and one in the past.” These two visions may be embodied in different texts and, “either implicitly or explicitly they invite a comparison between them” (Horne 1989, p. 358). “Pandora” shows both the character (Vogelstein) and the author engaged in the activity of comparison and revision producing a critical variation on the former text. As he stated in the *Notebooks*, James reworked “Daisy Miller”’s narrative structure into a conscious variation on the theme of the American Girl, engaging her in the political arena. He later claimed that “Pandora” had grown out of an anecdote he had recorded during his stay in New York, a year or two earlier, when at a party he had observed a young lady present in a “rather perceptibly unsupported and unguaranteed fashion” (James 1909, p. xliii). He had been told that “she was an interesting representative of a new social and local variety, the ‘self-made,’ or at least self-making, girl, whose sign was that [. . .] she was anywhere made welcome enough if she only came, like one of the dismembered charges of Little Bo-Peep, leaving her ‘tail’ behind her” (James 1909, p. xliii). It is through this new “specimen” of the characteristic national type, “free from regulation by parents and state,” that James articulates his own discourse on American democracy. Thus, for all its apparent fancifulness, “Pandora” provided James with “a significant *exemplum* of American experience” and with an opportunity to analyze some aspects of social life and politics in a way that cut “quite deeply into the facts of post-Civil War Washington reality” (Buitenhuis 1970, p. 125).

The capital represented by James is characterized by barrenness and lack of sophistication, both in its social and cultural scene. The pretentious architecture and deserted spaces allude to an “unfinished, provincial society” (Buitenhuis 1970, p. 126). Yet, for all its ancient history and civilization—in a novel variation on the Jamesian international theme²²—the European culture embodied by the young German secretary of legation is also not made to appear under a good light. In a tale in which the first-person narrator is rather intrusive (and a self-appointed “philosophic historian” (James [1884] 2009, p. 119)), his impossibility or unwillingness to fully access Vogelstein’s mind²³—while, for instance, he is observing the “densely grouped” German emigrants—is inherently critical of his prejudices against U.S. republican culture.²⁴ With pointed irony the narrator informs us that these people’s “mission in the United States differed considerably from Count Otto’s” (*ibid.*, p. 87). They were “destined to swell still further the huge current of the Western democracy; and Count Vogelstein doubtless said to himself that they wouldn’t improve its quality. Their numbers, however, were striking, and *I know not* what he thought of the nature of this particular evidence” (*ibid.*, p. 88, emphasis added). As “a stiff conservative, a Junker of Junkers; he thought modern democracy a temporary phase and expected to find many arguments against it in the great Republic” (*ibid.*, p. 87). In judging happiness “an unscientific term, such as a man of his education should be ashamed to use even in the silence of his thoughts” (*ibid.*), Vogelstein could not be farther from understanding the American republican project. The same failure of interpretation will eventually doom his relationship with Pandora Day.

²² James had already tried out this subject in *The Europeans*.

²³ Other instances of the narrator’s peculiarly deliberate reticence are evident in his refusal to account for Count Otto’s nervousness at the thought of meeting Pandora. He comments: “The fact is certainly singular, but I shall not take on myself to explain it” (James [1884] 2009, p. 119). Readers are also denied access to “the only approach to intimate conversation” between the Count and Pandora since, as he states, “It’s not necessary, and it’s not possible, that I should reproduce this colloquy” (James [1884] 2009, p. 139). As Gooder (2009, p. xi) observes, James often enacted the process of inquiry characteristic of his fiction through a narrator, “whose task it becomes to disengage the truth of events by a patient chemistry of understanding.” His narrators are usually conscious of the difficulty to mediate between the facts and the reader and “become increasingly uneasy about the degree of their own implication in what happens [. . .] surrendering their apparent neutrality.”

²⁴ Vandersee (1968, pp. 99–100), conversely, interprets the intrusive narrator’s “ugly picture of German emigrants” as a sign that “two decades of immigration apparently disturbed James as he looked at America.”

It is precisely while reading the American novella, which was supposed to serve Vogelstein as a how-to manual for his prospective life in the U.S., that he notices the tale's eponymous heroine for the first time. Before Vogelstein can return to his author, his glance is "arrested by the figure of a young lady who had just ascended to the deck" (ibid., p. 91). She has almost trespassed an area that, according to the compartmentalization reflecting European social class divisions, was not supposed to be accessible to people of her rank. Her ascension through "a trap" (ibid., p. 94)²⁵ is a foreshadowing of what is to come. True to her type, Pandora's attitude is straightforward as she responds to Vogelstein's gaze by fixing her eyes on him and advancing "straight upon [. . . her] victim" (ibid., p. 91). As he wonders whether she might be a "specimen" of the American girls he had met in Dresden, he discovers that her gaze is not bent on him but on the chair he is comfortably occupying, in the first of a series of discomfitures he will experience with Pandora.

She is "a nice-looking girl," with "a really charming appearance," "brilliant and expressive eyes" (ibid., p. 92). Yet, unlike Daisy, she is depicted as possessing a predatory attitude, also suggested by her "delicate aquiline nose, which, though pretty, was perhaps just a trifle too hawk-like" (ibid.). Moreover, "[t]he girl in the present case was older and not so pretty" (ibid., p. 94). Struck by her image, Vogelstein

went back to his book with the feeling that it would give him some information about her. This was rather illogical, but it indicated a certain amount of curiosity on the part of Count Vogelstein. The girl in the book had a mother, it appeared, and so had this young lady; the former had also a brother, and he now remembered that he had noticed a young man on the wharf—a young man in a high hat and a white overcoat—who seemed united to Miss Day by this natural tie. [. . .] These reflexions would indicate that Count Vogelstein read his volume of Tauchnitz rather interruptedly. (ibid.)

Yet, in spite of Vogelstein's discontinuous reading, his identification with Winterbourne is rather complete. Not only does he follow his example "by addressing himself to his aggressor" (ibid., p. 92), but he also "felt more than ever like the young man in his American tale" (ibid., p. 94)—like Winterbourne, Vogelstein is rendered anxious by "the potential illegibility of cultural or national or class affiliation" (Wardley 1991, p. 238), therefore, he "push[es] through his American tale [. . . to] discover what the hero did" (James [1884] 2009, p. 94). Indeed, for all his rational logic, the "square Teuton" appears as an overly impressionable and inexperienced reader. Since he has heard that America is "the country of the Mädchen," the Girl becomes for him "an aspect of study, like everything else." Also, despite his "complete training" (ibid., pp. 87–88), Vogelstein has no propension for original or independent thinking and forms his opinions according to ready-made judgments and received notions. Therefore, his interpretation of reality and people around him proceeds from stereotypes and clichés, as when he unconvincingly echoes the commonplace that "[d]ifferences were [. . .] notoriously half the charm of travel, and perhaps even most when they couldn't be expressed in figures, numbers, diagrams or the other merely useful symbols" (ibid., p. 89). Yet this is exactly how he probes the facts concerning Pandora. Vogelstein's fatal mistake is that of reading Pandora as a synecdoche for her country. In Lacanian terms, such a figure of speech represents an insistent lack in the human subject by which desire is defined as always yearning for something displaced. In this case, the structure of desire and the subject's fetishistic perversity are staged through the image of Pandora's "smiling eyes and speaking lips" still hovering before Vogelstein after she has disappeared "through the trap by which she had ascended" (James [1884] 2009, p. 94). The Count's "'perverse' fixation" suspends the signifying process as his "screen-memory is immobilized and the fascinating image of the fetish becomes frozen."²⁶ It is precisely at

²⁵ James is playing on the double sense of the word, which here refers to the mouth of the companionway through which Pandora ascends to the deck (ibid., p. 91), but also to the presumed deceitfulness of her upward mobility.

²⁶ Jacques Lacan. "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud." *Écrits*. Trans. Bruce Fink. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006, p. 428, quoted in Demir-Atay (2016, p. 9).

this point that he feels more than ever like Winterbourne and goes back to “his book with the feeling that it would give him some information about her” (ibid.).

Hence, the interpretive process, and its possible fallacies for the inadvertent reader, are at the core of this tale and, following its *trompe l'oeil* pattern, might be understood as James’s own criticism of the dominant readings of “Daisy Miller.” The Count’s pragmatic approach to his Tauchnitz novel makes him a stand-in for the grateful advice givers who had interpreted James’s novella as a cautionary tale, in the tradition of nineteenth-century etiquette manuals and didactic literature, and praised it for having “inoculated” American girls against the perils of flirting²⁷ (Wardley 1991, p. 242). Vogelstein’s reading is purportedly guided by a utilitarian intent—he does not go into ecstasy, nor seems to be experiencing *jouissance*, as his “interrupted” reading indicates—yet his unconscious desire is transferred from the pages of the novel to the present time of narration, as the character “desperately plagiarizes” or “contaminates”²⁸ what he reads. Such transference “lends itself to reader’s intervention, which manifests itself in readerly desire for the text” (Demir-Atay 2016, p. 8). With its dramatization of the reading process, “Pandora” illustrates the contagious nature of storytelling which results in readers partaking in the stories told and their being implicated in the successful hermeneutics of the text. By foregrounding a character intent on reading the author’s previous work, the short story performs a *mise en abyme* of the novella while reframing it within a different prospect. In so doing, “Pandora”’s double-layered intertextuality, both declared and covert, problematizes the borders between genres (novella, play, novel, short story) and modes (comic, dramatic) as well as between the text and its readers.

In this light “Pandora” can be considered a “writerly text,”²⁹ namely a text that entails an uneasy experience of reading and, most important, “the writer’s loss of mastery in ‘desperate plagiarism’”³⁰ (ibid., p. 1), exemplified by the repeated allusions to “Daisy Miller” and other European literary works, as well as the covert intertextuality established with Henry Adams’s anonymously published novel. Indeed, Pandora reads “a great deal, and almost always French books, in fresh yellow paper; not the lighter forms of that literature, but a volume of Sainte-Beuve,³¹ of Renan or at the most, in the way of dissipation, of Alfred de Musset” (James [1884] 2009, p. 98). She has also read Goethe, while another German writer, Friedrich Schlegel, is discussed by Vogelstein and “a very intelligent girl” from Boston at the Bonnycastles’ reception (ibid., p. 119).

By the time of his writing “Pandora,” James had become “fully conscious of how the perception of reality is conditioned by literary schemata” (Buitenhuis 122). As we have seen, his protagonist assumes that a book can be the instrument for him to understand the unknown American culture. His almost obsessive attempts at solving the mysteries concerning both Pandora and American society will end up in failure, as he will eventually realize that his conjectures were unfounded. Pandora on her part defies classification as she does not fit in the forms and realities of Washington society—and, unlike Daisy and other Jamesian heroines, she gets away with it. In fact, “the very uncertainties of definition are the condition for her personal success” (Gooder 2009, p. xxvi).

In a story in which traditional distinctions of gender, class, and social status are difficult to make, the reader, imagining it to be her task to discern the social and ethical implications of the narrative, “finds instead that the text works to undermine the very

²⁷ Gooder (2009, p. xiv) likewise notes that the “perverse consequence” of “Daisy Miller”’s popularity “was that the tale proved a godsend to the etiquette writers of Victorian England, and America [. . .]. It was read, in other words, as social satire.”

²⁸ I am borrowing the terms Demir-Atay uses in her analysis of James’s “The Story in It.”

²⁹ Barthes ([1974] 2002, p. 5) defines “writerly” a text that can be written, re-written, and desired by the reader, a text that makes “the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text.”

³⁰ Demir-Atay refers to Barthes (1992, p. 22).

³¹ Gooder (2009, p. x) remarks on James’s preference for the “scrupulous inquiries” of this author: “Sainte-Beuve’s very horror of dogmas and formulas was to James his ‘living testimony to the importance of the facts’. [. . .] for Sainte-Beuve it [the truth] was rather ‘a diffused and imponderable essence, as vague as the carbon in the air which nourishes vegetation, and, like it, to be disengaged by patient chemistry’. Such vagueness is not a weakness of conception in a writer: it is a means of resisting a premature conclusion.” The same vagueness, or lack of fixed definitions or points of (social) demarcation, seems especially suited to a character like Pandora.

foundations of moral values that the reader has drawn from the existing social order” (Orlich 1996, p. 542). The systematic deconstruction of the rhetoric of cultural, social, and political life seems to point to a larger cultural crisis—a crisis of self-representation—of which Pandora becomes a sign. She is a free-floating signifier, “not self-defining but defined by others; [. . . her] semiotics is basically metamorphic, carried out in the interest of artificial social forms and power relations. [. . .] Thus, the character’s place in the story is a matter of convention and represents the writer’s sophisticated manipulation of our modes of reading” (Orlich 1996, p. 542). It is precisely the character’s vacuity that makes her successful in Washington’s society. A vacuity the author was possibly alluding to in the “carefully selected” name for his protagonist, which has less to do with the mythological woman who opened the fateful box containing all the evils of humanity³² than with the “Pandora” dolls used by the Parisian fashion houses.³³ Such a connection reveals a further irony behind the definition of the heroine’s success as “entirely personal,” since a tailor’s mannequin is merely a model upon which others hang their creations (the word “type,” repeatedly used with reference to Pandora, reinforces this idea³⁴). In a world so designed, the reader is far removed from the clear-cut absolutes of sin and virtue that had decreed Daisy Miller’s exile and death (happily so, one would fain add).

Unlike Daisy, Pandora will rise and succeed, both in society and in marriage, to the disappointment and regret of her baffled European suitor. Pandora Day—a name that may even allude to an entire era³⁵—does not die but conquers and thrives, although seemingly at the cost of her objectification. As Vogelstein had been warned, the marriage to this type of American girl, appears as “one of the complications of modern life, something one had to reckon with, like the railroad, the telegraph, the discovery of dynamite, the Chassepot rifle, the Socialistic spirit” (James [1884] 2009, p. 100). Moreover, she is repeatedly referred to by Mrs. Bonnycastle in terms of an experiment, an object of study, or a sort of heterodirect creature. Inquired by Vogelstein with regard to the possibility of Pandora’s letting “slide” the “young man who belongs to her earlier phase” (ibid., p. 141), the knowledgeable lady replies: “She does nothing of the sort; for what do you take her? She sticks to him; that at least is what we *expect* her to do, [. . .] As I tell you, the type’s new and the case under consideration. We haven’t yet had time for complete study” (ibid., p. 142). Earlier on Mrs. Bonnycastle had wittily defined Pandora as “the latest freshest fruit of our great American evolution [. . .], a new feature” (ibid., p. 129). A Darwinian definition not devoid of irony, to which the authoritative lady adds that “she isn’t self-made at all. We all help to make her—we take such an interest in her” (ibid., p. 130). Pandora will indeed comply with society’s prescriptions and expectations and, “a thousand other duties performed, [. . .] finally [get] round’ to the altar of her own nuptials” (ibid., p. 147). When Mrs. Bonnycastle apprehends the news, in the story’s concluding lines, she meets it “with the remark that there was now ground for a new induction as to the self-made girl” (ibid.).

Thus, even in the ending, the short story highlights—through the voice of a character for whom “[t]he whole thing was, like everything else, but for her to laugh at” (ibid., p. 142)—the form of inferential thinking that has guided the protagonist’s mental processes. This kind of logic, applied to Pandora, turns out to be fallacious. Earlier in the text the conclusion had been foreshadowed by the following exchange between the heroine and her uncertain suitor:

“You are unlike any Mädchen I’ve ever seen—I don’t understand you,” said poor Vogelstein with the colour still in his face.

³² Gooder (2009, p. xxiii) finds “a teasing analogy” between the legendary forbidden box given to the Greek Pandora and the trunk symbolically opened by a Customs Officer at the New Jersey docks as the Day family return from their two-year voyage to Europe.

³³ These doll-sized figures were used to model outfits for customers and were exported for display complete to every accessory.

³⁴ During the transatlantic crossing, an American lady by the comically allusive name of Mrs. Dangerfield, who had taken on herself the task to “explain her country” to Vogelstein, had so defined Pandora: “Well, I’m bound to admit that since I was at home last she’s a novelty. A girl like that [. . .]—it is a new type.” (James [1884] 2009, p. 105).

³⁵ The tale is set in the Gilded Age as it can be inferred in the first paragraph, in which the reader is informed that the story took place “a few years ago” (James [1884] 2009, p. 85).

“Well, you never *will* understand me—probably; but what difference does it make?” (ibid., p. 140)

At this point, “[h]e attempted to tell her what difference,” but the narrator has “no space to follow him here,” and seems rather impatient with Vogelstein’s excessive reasoning: “It’s known that when the German mind attempts to explain things it doesn’t always reduce them to simplicity” (ibid.). He records, on the other hand, Pandora’s reactions: she was “first mystified, then amused, by some of the Count’s revelations. At last, I think, she was a little frightened”³⁶ (ibid.). Regardless of the narrator’s uncertainty, we may assume that Vogelstein’s obsessive categorizing—which is ultimately cognate to the Washington society’s classificatory zeal embodied by Mrs. Bonnycastle—has not escaped Pandora who, again unlike Daisy, is experienced and alert, and rather prefers her business-minded longtime fiancé from Utica³⁷ to the pedantic German aristocrat.

Even in this respect, Pandora is different from her precursor: she is resourceful, capable, ambitious, and determined to achieve her goals. Her empowerment, underlined by the way she fixes her gaze on her subject of interest, had been misunderstood by the Count as coquettish at the beginning of the story. At the party in Washington, he will notice “her eyes attached to the presidential profile” (ibid., p. 121) as she is intent on extracting the President’s promise for a diplomatic office for her fiancé. The scene shows the extent to which she has everything under control, much the same way as, during the transatlantic crossing, she had shown perfect self-possession both in interacting with the Captain and in deftly performing little offices for her parents. While she is privately conferring with the President, her eyes catch sight of the Count; she will later tell him: “I was watching you. I wondered if you weren’t going to speak to me. [. . .] I was watching the President too. [. . .] I’ve got to watch *him*. He has promised me something” (ibid., p. 125). To the Count’s inquiring mind, it appears “quite in Pandora’s line to be mistress of the situation, for there was evidently nothing on the present occasion that could call itself her master”³⁸ (ibid., p. 122).

With *Julia Bride*, published in 1908 (at the time in which he was revising “Pandora”), James would complete a trilogy in which he followed the evolution of the representative American type of the American Girl over a span of three decades. As he wrote in his Preface, his long, patient waiting was

all to the advantage of my extension of view and my variation of theme. A whole passage of intellectual history [. . .]. It’s as if the international young ladies, felt by me as once more, as verily once too much, my appointed thematic doom, had inspired me with the fond thought of attacking them at an angle and from a quarter by which the peril and discredit of their rash inveteracy might be a bit conjured away. (James 1909, p. xlviii)

James (1947, p. 56) had initially thought he could “make the thing a ‘little gem’”; looking critically at the story in his 1909 preface, he was compelled to recognize that not much of “the latent ‘drama’ of the case” (p. xlv) had survived in his work. He also wondered why, among his American impressions, he should have picked up “that none so very precious particle as one of the pearls of the collection” (James 1947, p. xlv). The reason he gave was his “insuperably restricted experience” and his “various missing American clues” (James 1947, p. xlv)—much like Vogelstein’s. If his project was bound to fail, his analysis of the conditions of American life which produced his fictional American girls was once

³⁶ Pandora thus aligns herself with James’s later heroines who, unlike Daisy, are not immune from fears. As Fowler (1984, p. 38) notes, “The capacity for consciousness seems, paradoxically, intimately connected to the capacity for fear in James’s treatment of the American girl.” He turned away from the unafraid Daisy Millers “because the American girl’s ability to grasp the significance [. . .] of human life itself—depended on her capacity to see possible ‘abysses’ and thereby, of course, to become afraid of falling into them” (Fowler, p. 39).

³⁷ Like Schenectady for Daisy Miller, Pandora’s birth town is located in upstate New York, “the interior” of the country, as Mrs. Dangerfield snobbishly defines it (James [1884] 2009, p. 97). References to Mr. Bellamy’s business, possibly “in a store” in Utica (ibid., p. 142), reinforce James’s social satire since Utica was also the site of F. W. Woolworth’s first five-cent merchandise store in 1879.

³⁸ Conversely, as Izzo (2008, p. 350) observes, “‘Daisy Miller’ is entirely pervaded by an activity of visual control and judgement that involves all characters in the story.”

more to the point. We cannot but detect a further irony in Pandora's "entirely personal" success for, in spite of her remarkable abilities and knowledge, she ultimately endorses "models of womanhood derived from normative gender ideology" (Despotopoulou 2017, p. 438). "Pandora" thus offers a further illustration of "the inexplicable dissonance" between James's heroines' "gifts and their destinies" (Izzo 2008, p. 348), which can be read as the author's "way of inscribing the operation of gender ideology in his texts, foregrounding the power that it wields even under the best of circumstances and even on individuals that enjoy extraordinary privileges."³⁹ (Izzo 2008, p. 349). We may feel disappointed as readers, but so were to be the expectations concerning the American Girl as supplier of all the civilization even while she had been "too long abandoned and too *much* betrayed" (James 1907, p. 415).

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Acknowledgments: I wish to thank Simone Francescato for providing me with unpublished material from *The Cambridge Edition of the Complete Fiction of Henry James* Vol. XXVII, *The Aspern Papers and Other Tales*, edited by Rosella Mamoli Zorzi and Simone Francescato.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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³⁹ For an in-depth analysis of gender ideology in James's short fiction, see (Izzo 2001).

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