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“Heaven save the market!”: Henry James in the *Fin de Siècle* Literary Field

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Abstract. This article situates James’s late nineteenth-century career within the context of the British literary field. Taking *The Princess Casamassima* (1886) as an example, I recast the novel’s socialist drama as an exploration of tensions between aesthetic autonomy and external commitment, especially the pressures of a commercial literary marketplace. While James vies for simultaneous critical and commercial success in mid-career novels like *Princess*, after its commercial failure he turns to a new “experiment”: seeking these polarized incentives in separately designated experimental and marketable works.

“What I mean by Socialism,” artistic polymath and famed radical William Morris explained in 1894, “is a condition of society in which there should be neither rich nor poor, neither master nor master’s man, neither idle nor overworked, neither brain-sick brain workers, nor heart-sick hand workers . . .” (277). *The Princess Casamassima*’s Hyacinth Robinson is an exception to Morris’s typology of benighted labor; beginning as a brain-sick *hand* worker, the “little bastard bookbinder” dreams of the higher pursuits of a “brain worker,” only for such refinement to infect him with the very “heart-sick[ness]” that, in Morris’s schema, he should’ve had from the first. Though the initial brain-sickness of a humble bookbinder may have been a surprise, the heart-sickness of a disillusioned English socialist would have been a much more familiar prospect at the time of *Princess*’s publication. A habitual reader of British novels in 1886 might have gotten quite tired of reading about these heart-sick socialists—in fact, at least one expressed just this frustration. The *Scottish Observer*’s literary reviewer

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ended their *Princess* write-up with a bewildered complaint about that year's literary landscape: "But why should three different writers produce three different socialists, and call them respectively, Mutimer, Monument, and Muniment? It makes it hard for a critic to avoid getting a little mixed" (Hayes 186). The reviewer refers to Richard Mutimer of George Gissing's *Demos: A Story of English Socialism* (1886), Claude Monument of Walter Besant's *Children of Gibeon* (1886), and Paul Muniment of Henry James's *Princess*. *Punch's* reviewer concurred that "[socialists] seem, indeed, lately to have taken all fiction for their province" (Hayes 177). I'll admit that I share the *Scottish Observer's* puzzlement: why are so many novels about socialism floating around the British literary marketplace in 1886? What about the field that produces them could explain this phenomenon? And what did it mean for a writer in Henry James's position to partake in this socialist vogue?

One explanation is that "socialism" had a much more influential place in the English "marketplace of ideas" than ever before at this point and that novelists with realist inclinations would naturally reflect those ideas that are current in their period. After all, the 1880s saw the beginning of a "socialist renaissance of the late Victorian period" in which radical print circulated widely within classes that benefited from unprecedented literacy rates (Haywood 176-79). This might be a satisfactory account of socialism's *presence* in any of these novels but not enough to account for the particular "treatment" of the subject in any one of them, to use a characteristically Jamesian term. To theorize the literary work that mass politics performs in these cases, I will focus on James's *The Princess Casamassima*, using the novel and its context in the British *fin de siècle* literary field to identify a larger phenomenon that I'm referring to as the "socialism disillusioned" ideologeme. In this field of cultural production, I will argue, the deployment of "socialism disillusioned" opens a space in which novelists claim aesthetic autonomy in the marketplace: their ability to set the terms by which they are judged or profess to ignore judgment altogether. I will then reread *Princess's* relation to that autonomy to clarify the novel's positioning in James's trajectory through the field in the 1880s and '90s, ultimately suggesting that its poor reception changed the strategies by which James sought public and elite acclaim in the decades to come.

I should address some issues of terminology before I begin, however. My persistent use of "socialism" and "socialist movements" in this essay may strike the reader as inconsistent with James's later framing of *The Princess Casamassima*. In the preface to the New York Edition of the novel, James casts its "sinister anarchic underworld" as "a presentation not of sharp particulars, but of loose appearances" and "general looming possibilities," a diffuse social mood rather than a specific context (PC1 xxi). To be sure, I am largely unmoved by efforts to identify whichever "real" European revolutionary inspired James's Hoffendahl, or which historical bookbinder-bomber lingers behind his creation of Hyacinth Robinson. However, in sympathy with critics who insist that James's novel was influenced by more specific movements and figures, but is not strictly reducible to them, I use the more historically and ideologically specific term "socialism" to refer to the radical energies in question here.¹ Even elsewhere in that preface, James wavers between the generality of social unrest and the specifics of European socialism, declaring a few pages earlier that it was "essential" for Hyacinth to have a "social—not less than a socialist—connexion" before he finds "a door somehow open to him into the appeased and civilised state" (PC1 xviii). I will argue

below that this conflict, between the revolutionary demands of socialist commitment and a “civilised state” of depoliticized aestheticism, is a narrative scenario through which James navigates the pressures bearing down on his position in the literary field. Importantly, this is a tension that is only newly articulable in a late nineteenth-century context featuring both an insurgent socialist politics and autonomous literary ideal to set against one another.² Finally, it makes sense to retain some skepticism about James’s framing of *Princess* in the New York Edition. Those prefaces famously recast the earlier works in a stylistic vocabulary James only solidified in his career’s latest phase; part of James’s reframing of *Princess* may very well involve this abstraction from historical circumstance (Millgate 90). Indeed, James figured this collected edition as his “passport to immortality,” in Michael Millgate’s words; in 1908, as James sought to cement his legacy, the timeless generality of “general looming possibilities” befits immortality much more than a historically specific engagement with socialist politics (91).

Whether or not critics agree with James on the question of the novel’s political specificity, scholarship on *The Princess Casamassima* has tended to take the political drama at the core of the novel for its primary object of analysis. Lionel Trilling’s influential postwar critical reclamation of *Princess* is the most sophisticated and forceful representative of a trend of revisionary midcentury criticism that praises the novel for its foray into radical politics. James bolsters, rather than vitiates, his reputation as a social critic in this depiction of a late-nineteenth-century anarchism that “even in decline . . . dominated the imagination of Europe” (Trilling 69). James’s use of such radicalism is not just important for its demonstration of his attunement to historical detail, however. For Trilling, the specter of revolution lays bare the meaning of art and what one gives up loving it. Hyacinth’s tortured end “instructs us in the nature of civilized life”—that is, reminds “us” (an imagined middle-and-upward class of readers) of the grinding class exploitation that subtends every achievement of “civilization” and of a correlative incompatibility of revolutionary politics with “the vision of the world ‘raised to the richest and noblest expression’” (Trilling 84–86). While Wendy Graham doesn’t share Trilling’s assessment that a heroic “moral realism” is the fruit of James’s accuracy, she makes a convincing case for the novel’s “documentary power” regarding London’s queer underground near the turn of the century (69). Marshaling evidence from Hyacinth and Paul’s kinetic homoeroticism in Kensington Gardens to subtle nods at Piccadilly cruising spots, Graham traces a knowledge of gay London life in James’s novel, including a “familiarity with the medico-psychiatric literature on homosexuality” of the day (57). This furtive sexual underground “provides a vital connection between allegedly discrete forms of dissidence,” linking up with the mysterious world of solemn vows and socialist clubs James obliquely depicts (Graham 54). In Graham’s reading, socialism, as a “screen for the underlying theme of sexual subversion,” stands in for the kind of political “deviance” with which sexual “inversion” is conflated in the discourse of Victorian heterosexual panic (53).³

Where Trilling and Graham test James’s historical accuracy for *Princess*’s commentary on cultural and sexual politics, other critics consider James’s treatment of socialism and anarchism more directly as nonfigurative commentary on the movements themselves. Eileen Sypher, analyzing *Princess* alongside Joseph Conrad’s *The Secret Agent* (1907), reads these two novels as narratives that “attempt to contain

the threat of anarchism" (2). For Sypher, James and Conrad literally *domesticate* the political frictions of class conflict, imagining that their characters' radicalism is primarily rooted in the psychosexual pathology of domestic life. Fredric Jameson and Pierre Macherey scaffold Sypher's distinction between the text's "project" of ideological containment from the imperfect "product" that belies its sanded-down surface. Ultimately, Sypher suggests, this unstable product reveals that late Victorian gender relations, summoned in these texts as the circuit through which anarchy can be redirected, are more "troubled and changing . . . than at first meets the eye" (13). Owen Holland similarly invokes Jameson to dive into *Princess's* politics, exploring the text's "political unconscious" in a chapter of his book devoted to British fictional reactions to the Paris Commune of 1871. Plumbing those murky depths, Holland reads Hyacinth's realization that his radical comrades are driven by a "politics of envy" as an example of the "by-now-familiar ideologeme of *ressentiment*" discussed by Jameson in *The Political Unconscious* (108).⁴ James makes the diminutive craftsman a "diagnostician of *ressentiment*" to advance a conservative vision of the artist's place in political life: that is, entirely outside and above it (Holland 111).

As Holland and Jameson show, James and Gissing make *ressentiment* the beating heart of English socialism in their novels of renounced revolution. However, the specific narrative situation in which these novels stage their "unmasking" of radical politics—accomplished through characters' diegetic disavowal of a radical past or a narrator's ironizing of socialist movements—is both quite specific and surprisingly common, meaning that the general term *ressentiment* doesn't quite capture this particularity. There is an essential difference in diegetic level here, too: characters show *ressentiment*, while authors position themselves by staging narratives of disillusioned socialism. In more general terms, though, Holland's linkage of Jameson and James through the "ideologeme" category will be fruitful for recognizing what *Princess* is up to. What is most analytically useful about this "amphibious formation" is its nature as the "smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes" (Jameson 87, 76). Ideologemes thus manifest "either as a pseudoidea—a conceptual or belief system, an abstract value, an opinion or prejudice [like *ressentiment*—or as a protonarrative," both of which play some role in mediating between the ideological infrastructure and actual narratives of class antagonisms (87). In arguments like those Sypher and Holland advance, ideologemes and other features of the political unconscious only reveal an underlying conservatism that the reading exists to denounce. It's hard to disagree that, for example, the vision of art and politics we find in *The Princess Casamassima* is a fundamentally conservative one. However, I would rather treat this as a starting point, rather than culmination, of my analysis of the novel, its place in James's trajectory as an artist, and the cultural moment in which he produces it. To make that reading possible, it's necessary to put Jameson's terms in conversation with a method more attuned to the unique logics of cultural contestation and valuation: Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of literature.

A sociological reading, informed by Bourdieu's theory of the literary field, will allow us to examine a more specific ideologeme, that of "socialism disillusioned," as one of Jameson's "protonarratives" that implies an aesthetic-political positioning in this field. Bourdieu's site of theorization and analysis, the modern field of literary production in France established near the end of the nineteenth century, is structured by oppositions along two poles: the pole of "pure production" versus "large-scale pro-

duction” and the pole of low versus high “degree[s] of consecration” in the economy of symbolic and artistic value (*Rules* 121-22). Individual artists enter the “space of positions” in this field—defined by the “distribution of the capital of specific properties which governs success in the field,” like sales on the production axis or prestige on the consecration axis—through “literary or artistic position-takings” manifested in their works and reception (Bourdieu, *Field* 30). The production axis defines a writer’s relationship to the market—their degree of *autonomy* from its demands in the world of small-scale production and low profits, or conversely the *heteronomy* that comes with substantial profits and a wide audience. Gustave Flaubert’s “conquest of autonomy,” then, has a heroic role in the constitution of the modern literary field, in Bourdieu’s account. The *mâitre du seul mot juste*, Flaubert, effects a “transformed definition of the novel involving a denial of the rank it has been assigned in the hierarchy of genres,” inventing a “pure aesthetic” that positions the novel as a form capable of achieving the same aesthetic heights as the most autonomous literary pursuits like Symbolist and Parnassian poetry (Bourdieu, *Field* 89, 104).

The corners of this field in which writers like Flaubert vie for “high” artistic consecration and autonomy from the literary marketplace (the “economic world turned upside-down”) act as an “independent social universe with its own laws of functioning” (Bourdieu, *Field* 163). With this crucial feature of the field in mind, I will return to James and Jameson. As a semantic unit of class struggle, the “socialism disillusioned” ideologeme originates in what Bourdieu would call the “field of power” that envelops the semi-autonomous literary field. The literary field, however, “refracts every external determination” within “the specific logics of the field” (164). It is my contention that in the literary field of *fin de siècle* Britain, a refracted “socialism disillusioned” ideologeme enables a striking number of novelists to articulate their desires for aesthetic autonomy against the demands of a chaotically expanding literary market. Such claims could guide interpretations of Gissing’s novels *Workers in the Dawn* and *Demos*, as well as Conrad’s *The Secret Agent* (and even his *Narcissus* [1897], if one were reading “socialism” more generously), but I will remain focused on *The Princess Casamassima* to provide one example of this larger reappraisal of the British literary field. Robert Hampson has already produced a Bourdieu-influenced reading of *Princess*, but his relatively brief analysis concentrates mainly on intertextual “reflexivity” as a signifier of literary autonomy (569-70). For Hampson, *Princess* asserts James’s autonomy by positioning Hyacinth Robinson within a narratological and stylistic matrix of existing novel genres, rejecting or modifying them all. While Hampson introduces Bourdieu’s field theory to *Princess* scholarship admirably, his argument ultimately neglects the “reconstruction” of a field, in Bourdieu’s terms, that one needs to undertake to make claims about it. That is, Hampson toggles between intratextual evidence from *Princess* and similar evidence from *The Golden Bowl* (1904), as if the Jameses of 1886 and 1904 had the same tactics, reputation, and surroundings in the field. By contrast, I hope to demonstrate that *only* by attending to the longer trajectory of James’s career can we understand the effects James intends *Princess* to have in the field, and how the novel fits into his storied career after it.

Contrary to some twentieth-century characterizations of the novelist’s supposed access to a “family fortune,” Henry James supported himself financially by the work of his pen well into the 1890s (Anesko 7). As much as James desired acceptance in the highest echelons of literary taste, this financial situation meant that he could not

afford to scorn the reading public and disregard sales of his work. He didn't seem to regard this as a great disappointment, however; according to Linda Simon, the novelist chafed at implications that he was "only a 'writer's writer,'" intent on cultivating a wider readership than an elite coterie—for reasons financial, obviously, but also for the more psychological assurances of a place in public letters ("Publishing" 404). At times, he even appeared to view a certain level of heteronomy as a counterweight to artistic solipsism, praising in a letter to sculptor Hendrik Andersen "that benefit of *friction with the market* which is so true a one for solitary artists too much steeped in their mere personal dreams" (qtd. in Anesko 6). After establishing himself in London in 1876, James sought avenues of publication through which he could channel that friction into critical praise *and* mainstream success. These were established publishers with wide appeal. For book-length works, Macmillan and Company was a respectable generalist publishing house with a broad list that included well-known literary authors but fared far beyond literature; the magazines that published James's work were similar publishers of good middle-class taste and wide subject-interest, both in Britain (*Cornhill*, *Macmillan's*) and the United States (*Scribner's*, *Harper's*, and especially the *Atlantic Monthly*).⁵ Though his works are too numerous for a detailed reception history here, these efforts did earn James a solid readership in the period bookended by *Roderick Hudson* (published in the U.S. in 1876 and Britain in 1879) and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). This readership, though, tended toward the "upper middle cultured," in the words of one reviewer (qtd. in Simon, *Critical* 5). This bourgeois stratum still amounted to a huge slice of the British reading public, however, and for a moment it seemed to promise James the acclaim and popularity he sought. "Daisy Miller" (1879), after a popular serialization in *Cornhill*, sold twenty thousand volumes almost immediately and brought James serious reputational gains in the mainstream press, solidifying the diffusion of his name in cultured corners on either side of the Atlantic—at least among those with enough capital to undertake the kind of travel in which one tests the accuracy of Daisy's American-abroad "type" (Anesko 43-44).

However, "[n]ever again [after *Daisy*]," writes Kevin J. Hayes, "would James' artistic quest and his desire for public acceptance so happily coincide" (xiii). The more experimental *The Portrait of a Lady* brought James a divided critical reception. Some reviewers considered it a "dull book," a tome far too long to have such an unsatisfying (since ambiguous) ending (qtd. in Hayes 121; Simon, *Critical* 16). In 1882, however, his friend William Dean Howells praised James as the "chief exemplar" of a new "school" of novel-writing convinced that it is the novel's "pursuit and not the end which should give us pleasure" (Gard 129). This essay—an American critic claiming in the pages of an American magazine, the *Century*, that an American-born novelist had a hand in elevating the "art of fiction" over the days of Dickens and Thackeray—elicited a venomous response in the world of British letters (Gard 132). Writing to Howells afterward, James laughed at the "little breeze" caused by his confidant's essay, reassuring him that "[t]he indictment is rubbish" (CL 245). Despite dismissing this controversy as "infinitesimally small," James would later take advantage of the conversation that took shape around "the art of fiction," publishing an essay by that name in 1884. This article, nothing less than James's declaration of artistic independence, still tempers that autonomous ideal with a commitment to some measure of popularity. James, responding (quite kindly, overall) to the bestselling novelist Walter Besant's April 1884 lecture on the topic, appreciates this discus-

sion of the novel form as one of the “fine arts” but refutes what he views as Besant’s restrictive characterization of that art. The English novelist must have a “conscious moral purpose,” Besant argued, and should remember that “the story is everything” (qtd. in *AF* 507-08). For Besant, a proper novel is also drawn only from the writer’s social experience; he criticizes the kind of cross-class imaginations that would later animate *The Princess Casamassima*. By contrast, in James’s view, the novel must be “perfectly free” from all such predestined parameters—save that it be “interesting” (507). James, like Flaubert (who died just four years before this essay was published), welcomes the novel’s ascendance in the hierarchy of artistic genres and asserts that this ascent requires autonomy from external determinations of appropriate subjects and styles. Crucially, though, James’s position here is one that asserts the novelist’s autonomy without divorcing him from his wide reading public. James even repudiates germinating attitudes about the degrading market for fiction that would come to define the realist avant-garde of the 1890s. Anticipating the “trackless desert of print” in which Gissing’s New Grub Streeters die of thankless thirst, James admits that the novel has been “vulgarised, like all other kinds of literature, like everything else, to-day,” but still the “good subsists and emits its light” (Gissing 138; *AF* 506-07). The literary artist need not insulate himself entirely from the market, as the cream will rise to the top.⁶

We can assume, then, that James’s next two full-length ventures, the near-simultaneously published *The Bostonians* (1886) and *The Princess Casamassima*, represent his attempts to write this newly autonomous novel into being. In *Princess*, especially, James resembles a succession of his own protagonists who are named in this novel’s New York Edition preface as “intense *perceivers*, all, of their respective predicaments” (*PC1* xvi). *The Princess Casamassima* bears the traces of the “predicament” James finds himself in, transmitting his desire to stake out a precarious position on successful aesthetic and financial footing. I realize that suggesting an affinity between the project articulated in “The Art of Fiction” and its execution in *Princess* is not in itself new ground. Michael Anesko, for example, observes that Hyacinth’s sensitivity to the endless “impressions” that “kept him thrilling and throbbing,” in the words of the narrator, echoes James’s description of the novelist’s channeling of “experience” in “The Art of Fiction” (110-11). An explicitly sociological reading of the relationship between James’s theory and practice does offer new insights though. For example, much has been written about James’s identification with Hyacinth, but there is a particular resonance to the relations among author, protagonist, and the field of culture here that recalls the similar complex interchange between Flaubert and Frédéric Moreau.⁷ In the course of *Sentimental Education* (1869), Flaubert’s protagonist must learn the “incompatibility between two universes,” according to Bourdieu: the opposed poles of “art and money, pure love and mercenary love,” as well as art and politics (*Rules* 20). This links up nicely with Sypher’s claims that in his preface James talks of Hyacinth like he’s a “lesser James,” a hypothetical Henry “had he been shut out of upper class culture”—much like Frédéric, the version of Flaubert who wasn’t decisive enough to write the novel he stars in (Sypher 3; Bourdieu, *Rules* 25). In Hyacinth’s sentimental and political education, Bourdieu’s two “universes” are encoded as the “two currents that flowed in his nature, the blood of his passionate, plebeian mother and that of his long-descended, supercivilised sire” (*PC2* 479). Like Flaubert, James projects onto his aimless but observant protagonist a refracted

version of the dilemma that faces his own writing: in this case, the task of maintaining an uncompromising devotion to aesthetics while managing pressures from without. Most pressingly for James, these were the need to keep himself financially afloat by his pen and Besantian sermons against style-first fiction.⁸

On a formal level, the novel's elliptical narrative structure stubbornly resists the mandates in Besant's "Art of Fiction" lecture for plot-focused fiction, which James viewed as a threat to "free" artistry. With this demand for "story" in mind, it's striking that some of the novel's defining moments happen almost entirely "offstage," as it were.⁹ The end of Book Two builds up an "impatience and curiosity" doubled in protagonist and reader as Paul Muniment teases Hyacinth with talk of seeing the "genuine article" of revolutionary plotting, those murky parlors that are truly "in it" (PC2 296). Though we end on a cliffhanger that promises an introduction to "one of the purest martyrs of their cause" (and it's important to remember here that this chapter ended the February 1886 installment of the serial in the *Atlantic Monthly*), James interrupts the circuit of narrative satisfaction (288). The next we see of Hyacinth is his morning at Medley, already having sworn his oath. It is only later in Medley's bucolic interlude that Hyacinth cryptically remembers the "other day, when he gave Hoffendahl a mortgage on [his 'liberty']" (311). This sparks a recursive memory of "that dim back-bedroom of a house as to whose whereabouts he was even now not clear, while Muniment and Poupin and Schinkel, all visibly pale, listened and accepted the vow" (312). James eases his narrative restraint further into this episode, relinquishing a few sensory details of Hyacinth's meeting with the mysterious German exile ("he leaned against the wall, straight in front of me, with his hands behind him. He told me certain things, and his manner was extraordinarily quiet") (331). However, he nonetheless shrouds the details of this "plot"—and, consequently, of *Princess's* plot—in mystery and euphemism: Hoffendahl speaks only of "certain things"; Hyacinth's vow is later inexactly described as a requirement to "kill some one—some humbug in a high place" (332-33).

This narrative structure—in which the crest of a crucial plot point is built up only for its deferral, usually displaced to retrospection—runs through the revolutionary thread of the book. We see it again, for example, at the narrative climax. Hyacinth's dreaded orders from Hoffendahl appear first in chapter 43 at the Poupin home; even when Hyacinth eventually extracts the letter from the reluctant Schinkel, the unread omen burns in his pocket all through a painful conversation with Mr. Vetch. After Hyacinth has dispatched Vetch and cleared the ground to read the inscription of his fate, he finally draws "from his breast-pocket the letter that Schinkel had given him" (PC2 565). James repeats his narratological gambit here, to our chagrin: this ends chapter 44 (and the serial's penultimate September 1886 installment). Chapter 45 begins *in medias res* during Hyacinth's last visit to Madeira Crescent, deflating the apocalyptic revelation of Hyacinth's written fate. After a cryptic reference to "a winding-up of his affairs," it's almost twenty pages into the next chapter that we learn, through Paul Muniment, of the would-be assassin's assignment at "a grand party" coming up (568, 581).

While *Princess* specializes in ellipsis and retrospection to dislodge the centrality of the "story" that a popular writer like Besant emphasizes, the novel is by no means "plotless"—and James is conscientious in selecting a widely appealing array of genre conventions to fashion that plot. This draws a key distinction between the position-

taking that James develops through *Princess* and what we see in other novels expressing a desire for autonomy in the same period. Take *New Grub Street*, for example. James makes his case for autonomy using narrative and descriptive topoi of commercial genres that spring from the same market for popular print that is the source of Gissing's despair. This makes one of the central ironies of *Princess*, and the riskiness of its undertaking, apparent: the space for aesthetic cultivation that James separates from exterior concerns (such pressures represented in the novel as mass politics through the "socialism disillusioned" ideologeme, but associated with popular influence and heteronomy in the literary market) is theorized within James's conscious attempt at a more "readable" book.¹⁰ So, in lieu of "Bostonian nymphs . . . reject[ing] English dukes for psychological reasons" (critic Andrew Lang's tart dismissal of a Jamesian plot), we find sensational illegitimacies, secret vows at "queer hours," melodramatic suicides, and even gothic elements (qtd. in *AF* 517).¹¹ The artist's right to autonomy might be the foremost necessity, James implies, but an autonomous novelist can have a little sensationalism as a treat.¹² Returning to the Flaubert comparison underscores the particularities of James's position. After the separability of *Sentimental Education's* "two universes" has been established, Frédéric's indecision regarding his erotic/artistic/political options in the field nets him a disappointed dotage in which he and Deslauriers "exhume[] their youth" (Flaubert 458). One could imagine a Frédéric-esque end for Hyacinth in a different James novel, given James's reputation for "disappointing" and ambiguous endings—an echo of *Sentimental Education's* own rocky reception. However, James's bloody conclusion grafts the sensational conventions of the popular genres with which he seeks association onto Frédéric's inability to commit himself to art, business, or politics.

Specific details of Hyacinth's craft as a bookbinder also attest to the cultural position James angles for in this novel. After Hyacinth's first intoxicating brush with the "whole provinces of art" and "refinements of choice" on lavish display at the Princess's house in Mayfair, he "float[s] and soar[s]" down South Street, resolving to present her with a "humble tribute" in return (*PC2* 254). Naturally, he binds her a book:

He had at home a copy of Tennyson's poems—a single, comprehensive volume, with a double column on the page, in a tolerably neat condition, though he had handled it much. He took it to pieces that same evening, and during the following week, in his hours of leisure, at home in his little room, with the tools he kept there for private use, and a morsel of delicate, blue-tinted Russia leather, of which he obtained possession at the place in Soho, he devoted himself to the task of binding the book as perfectly as he knew how. He worked with passion, with religion, and produced a masterpiece of firmness and finish. . . .

The resplendently rebound volume not only creates "a sort of material link between the Princess and himself," as Hyacinth muses, it is for James a bibliographical encoding of the kind of cultural experiment *The Princess Casamassima* strives to be. The Tennyson edition in question is almost certainly the poet's *Complete Works*, brought out by James's own publishing house, Macmillan, two years earlier in 1884. Hyacinth's copy would have originally been bound in a publisher's binding of simple

green cloth with no tooling or decoration. This “enormously successful” volume sold “between 15,000 and 19,000 copies a year” between its publication and Tennyson’s death in 1892 (McDonald 3). Hyacinth’s rebinding of the poet’s *Complete Works*—a book that was no cheap edition at 7s 6d but still affordable enough for a craftsman to own—is an attempt to elevate an artifact of commercial success (from an author nonetheless invested with the status of a literary “sage and saint”) by the execution of a singular artistic vision (Mazzeno 22). For Hyacinth, the “fruit of his toil” is a union of popular will, literary aspiration, and aesthetic achievement, bound together by the artisan’s eye—not to mention his thread (PC2 254).

Even while James articulates his cultural project through bookbinding’s textile semiotics, he cannot help but encode his doubts, his visions of failure, lurking under this synthesis. Hyacinth’s binding cannily anticipates the unraveling of this marriage of populist and artistic sensibilities, both in the narrative itself and the course of the literary field after the novel’s publication. First, as a demonstration of individual taste, Hyacinth’s Tennyson rebind has a lot more in common with his taste in fiction than the masterpieces that gain him Crookenden’s recognition near the end of the novel. Brendan Whitmarsh points out that though critics have linked Hyacinth’s desire for cultivation with his reading of French fiction, the novels he reads are about a generation out of date (131). By contrast, the cutting edge of contemporary literary culture eludes him: perusing Lady Aurora’s bookshelf, he laments that she doesn’t have any examples of “an intensely modern school, advanced and scientific realists, of whom Hyacinth had heard and on whom he had long desired to put his hand” (PC2 264). While his choice of Russia leather for the Princess’s copy of Tennyson reinforces Hyacinth and the Princess’s desire to be exceptions to their social types (“blue-tinted Russia leather” would be quite a unique, even improbable, binding), this material was well out fashion for British fine bindings by the late nineteenth century.¹³ Even amid James’s bid for the kind of synthesis this binding ostensibly represents, there’s an undercurrent of doubt in the object’s ability to embody that goal from the beginning—lending a new semantic context to the “perpetual laceration of the rebound” (PC2 479). It’s even likely that James was aware of the implications of this binding—after all, the novelist had an eye for bibliographic detail and an “abiding concern about the technical standards of the book trade” (Anesko 112).

Even when Hyacinth’s bindings are at their height of sophistication, however, the novel undercuts any articulation of financial and artistic achievement that might coalesce around them. Mr. Vetch, preternaturally aware of *something* hanging over Hyacinth’s head near the end of the novel, feverishly assures the bookbinder that “[w]ith such a talent, such a taste, your future leaves nothing to be desired. You will make a fortune and become a great celebrity” (PC2 561). There’s an almost unspeakable sadness to this declaration, in the abrupt emergence of this naïveté (who ever heard of a rich and famous bookbinder?) in the face of desperation (Vetch is still absolutely convinced that Hyacinth is going to breach his promise not to do “[a]nything that those people expect of you”) (PC2 564).¹⁴ Vetch knows as well as the reader that Hyacinth will realize no such utopian artistic-financial goals, whether he carries out the assassination or not.

There is also a real irony in the novel’s treatment of bindings that would have been impossible for James to recognize in 1886. In the early 1890s, the very edition of Tennyson’s works through which Hyacinth tries to unite high sales and high art

becomes a totem of literary vulgarization in a contentious episode of avant-garde critique. Peter D. McDonald recounts that the popular “mob” grieving Tennyson outside the poet’s Westminster Abbey funeral crystallized Edmund Gosse’s distaste for the influence of the masses on literary standards. Gosse, an eminent late-Victorian man of letters, contrasted the “atmosphere” of “reverence, antiquity, beauty, rest” within the Abbey with the clamorous crowd outside, replete with such unspeakable horrors as “seamstresses holding the ‘little green volumes’ to their faces to hide their agitation” (qtd. in McDonald 2).¹⁵ Tennyson’s *Complete Works* returns, this time as a manifestation of the commercial corruption of high literature. This denunciation of literary populism is all the more remarkable for its contrast with some of Gosse’s earlier criticism on the subject. As McDonald shows, Gosse had previously claimed—like James, his close friend and literary confidant—that a mass reading public did not threaten the “survival and continuance of literature” but instead could spread the ennobling influence of high art among unprecedented numbers of people (McDonald 1). In the crowd that cried for Tennyson, though, Gosse saw the draining away of “authority, the grace and dignity of life” (qtd. in McDonald 2).

The reception of *The Bostonians* and *The Princess Casamassima* conditioned a similar shift in James’s thinking about the possibility of simultaneous popular and artistic success, bringing him closer to Gosse’s perspective and setting the angle of his literary trajectory in the tumultuous 1890s. In 1886, James does not yet feel like the “luckless fine artist of [his story] ‘The Next Time,’ trying to despoil himself, for a ‘hit’ and bread and butter, of his fatal fineness,” attempting instead to demonstrate that one can maintain artistic integrity and still make a living (*PC1* xvi). Despite these intentions to achieve literary recognition and high sales at one stroke, *The Bostonians* and *Princess* were each “conspicuous failures in the marketplace” (Anesko 101).¹⁶ Consequently, James wrote to William Dean Howells in 1888:

I have entered upon evil days—but this is for your most private ear. It sounds portentous, but it only means that I am still staggering a good deal under the mysterious and (to me) inexplicable injury wrought—apparently—upon my situation by my two last novels, the *Bostonians* and the *Princess*, from which I expected so much and derived so little. They have reduced the desire, and the demand, for my productions to zero. . . . (Gard 182)

Such “evil days” ended Macmillan’s near fifteen-year reign as James’s primary publisher in England. When the publisher offered him an advance for *The Tragic Muse* (1890) that was a third of its usual size, James wrote to Frederick Macmillan, “Unless I can put the matter on a more remunerative footing all round I shall give up my English ‘market’—heaven save the market!—and confine myself to my American. But I must experiment a bit first—and to experiment is of course to say farewell to you” (qtd. in Edel 202-03). Though James did end up placing *Muse* with Macmillan—and that house would go on to publish several American editions of his fiction—this would be the last novel for which Macmillan would publish the first English edition. His “experiment,” I argue, would prove more significant than just a shift in English publishers: it involved an intentional *separation* of his financial from literary goals. For evidence of this, I look to two near-simultaneous, seemingly contradictory shifts in James’s career in the 1890s: self-consciously commercial output and an association with

the emerging avant-garde. On the commercial side, what exactly James was looking for in the theater—and what he found, stylistically—is too complicated an affair to establish in these pages; it still seems true to me, though, that foremost among James's motivations was a desire for popular acclaim signified equally by monetary success and the approbation of applause.¹⁷ The now-infamous opening of *Guy Domville* (1895) clarified matters of popular and literary taste for James, who remembers “an abominable $\frac{1}{4}$ of an hour during wh. all the forces of civilization in the house waged a battle of the most gallant, prolonged & sustained applause with the hoots & jeers & catcalls of the roughs” (qtd. in Simon, *Critical* 20). James's (over)reaction here and in a few other letters have long overdetermined critics' understanding of *Domville*'s reception, which Dee MacCormack demonstrates was neither as catastrophic as James makes it sound nor the end of his career as a dramatist (154). Still, even though James does not swear off the popular market associated with the specter of these jeering groundlings, an association with the theater becomes his epithet for mercenary work. *The Other House* (1896) is a “little thrifty pot-boiling turning-to-acct. of the scheme of a chucked-away 3 act play.” This is of a piece with tales like “Covering End” (1898, in *The Two Magics*) which “has of course, like *The Other House*, its base origin smeared all over it . . . a one-act comedy completely worked-out & finished, but never acted; reclaimed a little for literature—& for my pocket” (*SL* 149, 165).¹⁸ The novelty here, in the 1890s onward, is that James attempts to disentangle rather than merge the commercial and aestheticized pursuits in his fictional output.

It is no coincidence that Edmund Gosse is the recipient of these letters in which James denigrates his “theatrical” works. In this correspondence, James is talking to a staunch defender of a notion of British literature insulated from commercial aims. The growing friendship between the two men in the second half of the 1880s indicates James's inclination to move in literary circles that defined themselves against the market for which he would otherwise intentionally tailor certain works. In the 1890s, Gosse and James each became professionally and personally associated with the avant-gardes that transformed the British literary field: an Aestheticist-Decadent group gathered around John Lane's Bodley Head Press and the *Yellow Book* and a more ambiguously defined strain of avant-garde realism associated with publications edited by critic and poet W. E. Henley.¹⁹ In the structure of the literary field, these two groups were positioned near the most autonomous end of the productive scale, as they published mostly for the other writers in their circles. “The man of letters writes not for the many-headed monster,” wrote Henley; “it is enough for him if he please himself and his friends” (qtd. in McDonald 33). Equally important, though, is that the groups represent different artistic visions within that autonomous position. They are, in Bourdieu's parlance, different “*artistic generations*, defined by the interval (often very short, sometimes barely a few years) between styles and lifestyles that are opposed to each other,” jockeying for “dominance” in this corner of the field (*Rules* 122). James's involvement in this sphere shows another simultaneous aspect of the “experiment” of looking beyond his establishment publisher, Macmillan. From 1895 to 1899, James published with William Heinemann's “pioneering new firm,” which was more friendly toward the avant-garde and supported Henley's *New Review* (McDonald 15). That magazine serialized *What Maisie Knew* (1897), but James published on the other side of this “generational” divide in the avant-garde as well—“The Death of the Lion” opened the *Yellow Book*'s very first issue in April 1894 (Sullivan 458). James's

efforts in the proto-little magazine sphere were transatlantic: he also serialized *What Maisie Knew* in the *Chap-Book*, an American venture in a similar avant-garde vein.

This avant-garde literary subculture gave James an outlet for experimental work at a time when he began to express more frustration about the market's demands. However, he did not settle easily in either of these camps. He claimed to William James that he really "hate[d] too much the horrid aspect and company of [the *Yellow Book*]" ; Henley himself held James's 1890s fiction in disdain, serializing *Maisie* only reluctantly at Heinemann's urging (McDonald 74; Sullivan 260).²⁰ An independent agent in the literary field, James only sometimes aligned himself with these avant-gardes, as he still maintained a parallel interest in other modes of writing (and forms of capital that jangle louder in one's pocket than praise).

On its own, James's avant-garde drift in the 1890s—his pursuit of recognition in these experimental spheres defined by restricted production, low profits, and high symbolic value—seems to reinscribe a triumphalist narrative of modernist development predicated on the assumption that James invented literary modernity after retreating from the marketplace. Things need not be so neat, though: James continued working toward a messy coexistence with the market rather than a radical rupture with its strictures. In the 1890s, he pursued lofty aesthetic goals *simultaneously* with a parallel effort to produce other fiction for a tidy profit. This stands in contrast to his strategy of the 1880s in which he consciously vied for both these kinds of success in the *same* works. My rereading of a (relatively short) window in James's career demonstrates, most of all, that one has to flatten the entire structure of the literary field to support that aforementioned one-dimensional triumphalism.

By identifying the "socialism disillusioned" ideologeme refracted through *The Princess Casamassima* and recognizing the claims for aesthetic autonomy that it activates, I have hoped to show here that sociological readings of political fictions can illuminate surprising turns in a novelist's trajectory, especially as the literary field inevitably churns these political questions through literary claims. Viewed from this angle, the Henry James who actually surveyed, maneuvered through, and wrote beautiful novels in the British literary field of the 1890s had a lot more in common with a quasi-mercenary like Arnold Bennett than the critical edifice of "the Master" allows for. Although Bennett wouldn't credit the comparison—he used James's name as shorthand for a novelist "who has sacrificed popularity to the artistic conscience," unlike himself—his moonlighting as a *Yellow Book* contributor and aspiring literary novelist while making his bread in the popular press gives us a more exaggerated version of James's split 1890s output; a difference of degree, perhaps, but not of kind (McDonald 91). Such exigencies in James's career are necessarily elided if "the Master" is the strongest version of James's literary position that survives in memory. Further study along these sociological lines, reconstructing James's trajectory through the "final phase" of major novels, could elucidate how long-lived a strategy his consciously bifurcated popular and literary production in the 1890s—the "experiment" James described to Frederick Macmillan—would prove to be. Given that "late James" is a byword for modernist difficulty and low sales, I suspect this "experiment" soon faltered in favor of a full turn toward limited circulation. It's clear from the complexity of the market-positioning I've examined here, though, that even such reliable generalizations about James's reputation might fall short of the full story.

NOTES

¹I am thinking especially of readings by Trilling, Sypher, and Holland, all of which I will discuss in more detail below. Poole's introduction to the Cambridge University Press edition of *Princess* demurs about "sort[ing] out" the "general muddle" (James's own words) of the political formations bearing on the novel but still collates a number of useful and specific socialist and anarchist presences in it—not the least of which is William Morris and English artisan socialism (xli-xlii, li-liii).

²Compared to its more recent literary history, James's use of the specter of socialism is more historically specific to nineteenth century socialist and anarchist movements than, say, the more generalized social unrest in the pages of mid-Victorian social problem novels.

³While Graham is careful to claim that this reading doesn't regard the novel's socialist politics as just a "screen" for the gay underground, she nonetheless loses some of its political texture in moments that claim, for example, that James's preface displaces the "phony anarchist drama to the genuinely subversive plotted activities behind the scenes" (60).

⁴On *ressentiment*, Jameson quotes Nietzsche, its "primary theorist, if not, indeed, [its] metaphysician: 'The slave uprising in ethics begins when *ressentiment* becomes creative and brings forth its own values: the resentment of those to whom the only authentic way of reaction—that of deeds—is unavailable, and who preserve themselves from harm through the exercise of imaginary vengeance.'" For Jameson, *ressentiment* is an ideologeme that has particular literary purchase as an anchor of Gissing's pessimism. See Jameson (201).

⁵I draw all bibliographical information about the original American and British publications of James's prolific output from Phillips.

⁶The fact that the essay was published in *Longman's Magazine* also indicates James's unwillingness to forego the expanding reading public. Longmans, Green, and Company launched the magazine to offer "intellectual entertainment" to the readers "reinforced in England since the passing of the Elementary Education Act in 1870," a readership often specifically pointed to as the core of the mass reading public. See *Longman's* original statement of purpose, quoted in Sullivan (209).

⁷Edel is a good representative of the more straightforward biographical readings of *Princess* here: "[Like Hyacinth, James] felt himself an aristocrat by birth, who had also to labour for his bread; he could move among princesses and lords, yet at a given hour each day he was pledged to his task [i.e. writing] . . . never more so than during the two years in which, month after month, he delivered instalments of *The Bostonians* and then of *The Princess Casamassima*. Feeling himself alone in the world after the death of his parents, he seemed truly disinherited, clinging to art and civilization amid the unrest in British society." See Edel (127).

⁸The fact that James uses the specter of totalizing political commitment (in Hyacinth's oath) to navigate these anxieties about threats to artistic autonomy reiterates why *Princess* is so important to Trilling, whose critical coterie looked to art as a "haven of formal beauty and internal complexity free of the vulgarity of politics," in Posnock's words (68).

⁹This is a tactic James takes up with increasing frequency as the "late phase" approaches. From the withholding of narrative detail on tantalizing questions of characters' behavior (details of the previous affair between Prince Amerigo and Charlotte in *The Golden Bowl*; whatever Miles got expelled for "saying" at school in "The Turn of the Screw") to opportunities for dramatic deaths that James passes over (Effie in *The Other House*; Milly in *The Wings of the Dove*), the second half of James's career sees a frequent deferral of narrative release to the background. *The Golden Bowl* might be the apotheosis of this style, with its "characteristic narrative rhythm" of narrative deferment followed only by retrospective, even offhanded mention of events as important as marriages and births (Ohi 37).

¹⁰According to Jacobson, James tried to make *Princess* a "tighter and therefore more readable" novel than his previous work, writing to his brother that "[t]he *Princess* will, I trust, appear more 'popular'" than *The Bostonians* (44).

¹¹Le Reste reads an intermittent Gothic strain in James's novel, especially in the "ominous Gothic castle" of Milbank prison, the "gothicization of the revolution," and spectral language around the Princess's "radically unintelligible quality." See Le Reste.

¹²The name of the "very poor little corner" where the Muniments live, Audley Court, is an ironic link to the web of sensation and sales embedded in the novel's generic makeup. Audley Court is the name of the country estate of the titular aristocrat in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), a mid-Victorian bestseller of sensation fiction.

¹³Russia leather, made from skins treated with a combination of willow and birch extracts (resulting, apparently, in its signature pleasant odor) was traditionally colored brown or red-brown and is almost always associated with those shades. I have been unable to find any examples of bindings made from blue (or even blueish) Russia leather, but my search has been by no means exhaustive (limited thus far to the digital collections of bindings at the British Library, the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the Real Biblioteca de Madrid, and the Folger Library). For more info on Russia leather, see "Russia." On its obsolescence by the novel's time, Carter, an authority on the English antiquarian book trade, claims that Russia leather was "particularly popular with English binders between 1780 and 1830." See Carter and Barker (196).

¹⁴Vetch's "sobbing" even after Hyacinth affirms this on his "dear old Pinnie's memory" tells me that the only thing the old man's been convinced of is Hyacinth's insincerity here.

¹⁵I relish the irony of the occupation Gosse imagines for the women here: Gosse, like our little London bookbinder, is surrounded by the figure of the seamstress, the ghost of Miss Pynsent.

¹⁶James was aware that the serializations of *The Bostonians* and *Princess* had made “no audible echo or reverberation of any kind, either in America or here,” during their runs in the *Century* or the *Atlantic Monthly*. More than a few reviewers lauded these more accessible stories, but this never translated into the sales that James needed.

¹⁷James lists these two interrelated motivations in his letters of the period: he tells Howells that “[i]t isn’t the love of art and the pursuit of truth that have goaded me into such miry ways . . . it is the definite necessity of making, for my palsied old age, more money than literature ever consented or *will* ever consent to yield me” (qtd. in Anesko 21). To his sister, Alice, he writes with rapture of “[t]he attention, the interest, the outbursts of applause and appreciation . . . the final outbreak at the end for ‘author, author, AUTHOR!’” See Anesko (21).

¹⁸It is also important to note regarding *The Other House*’s genre positioning in the market that it revolves around a typically un-Jamesian plot: the collective response to a murder.

¹⁹Though many figures published (and associated socially) with both sides of this supposed divide, I don’t want to understate the genuine differences of opinion here. For an overview of this context that focuses especially on Henley’s circle, see McDonald (32-53). Writers associated with the *Yellow Book* set include Wilde (by a sometimes dubious association, as he never published in the magazine), Henry Harland, Richard Le Gallienne, Arthur Symons, and the ambient influence of Walter Pater; among the “Henley regatta,” as they were cheekily known, we can count Kipling, Conrad, Gissing, George Moore, and a young W. B. Yeats, to name only a few.

²⁰Henley had previously championed James in the 1870s but now privately lamented that his board of directors had “‘landed’ him with ‘100 pages of Henrietta James.’” This brings up another reason James likely shied away from settling himself firmly with the Henley circle: the editor’s vituperative reactionary politics in all matters foreign and domestic. Henley’s vision of a realism independent from moral concern had a glaring exception in the case of writers who undermined male “virility”—a list that just happened to include Pater, Wilde, and James. See McDonald (35).

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