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## Time and Transformation in Henry James' Social Novels

### ABSTRACT

*The Princess Casamassima* and *The Bostonians*, both published in 1886, are exceptional in James' literary career. They exemplify his attempt to adjust to the expectations of his readers by venturing into contemporaneous socio-political debates. Writing these two novels was in itself an act of courage. No reviewer expected James to have any expertise in matters relating to the lives of early feminists or lower classes. He was, however, interested in these current issues and invested time and effort in researching them. The two novels form a transatlantic diptych, with *The Bostonians* addressing the topic of American feminism and *The Princess Casamassima* focusing on workers' movements in Britain. Quite predictably, most American reviewers were critical of *The Bostonians*, which only shows that the novel touched a nerve, and praised *The Princess Casamassima*, which seemed to concern British society. Reviewers in Britain did the reverse, which exposes the quasi-patriotic impulse in literary reviewing of that time, or perhaps any time. The author argues that James' work on his social novels transformed his self-perception as a writer. She also shows that the transformations James captured in Anglo-Saxon societies and their representatives on both sides of the Atlantic are at once caught up in history and symptomatically timeless, almost historiosophic.

**KEYWORDS:** Henry James, social novel, feminism, revolution, authorship

### STRESZCZENIE

Czas i transformacja w społeczno-obyczajowych powieściach Henry'ego Jamesa

Powieści *Księżna Casamassima* oraz *Bostończycy* (obie opublikowane w 1886 r.) stanowią wyjątek w literackim dorobku Henry'ego Jamesa. Świadczą bowiem o podjętej przez pisarza próbie dostosowania się do czytelnich oczekiwań poprzez włączenie się w ówczesne debaty społeczno-polityczne. Proponując czytelnikom te dwie powieści, James wykazał się odwagą. Żaden współczesny mu recenzent nie spodziewał się po nim wiedzy w sprawach związanych z życiem protofeministek oraz niższych warstw społecznych. James interesował się jednak tymi aktualnymi kwestiami, inwestując czas i wysiłek w ich zbadanie. Obie powieści tworzą transatlantycki dyptyk, przy czym w powieści

*Bostończycy* James porusza temat amerykańskiego feminizmu, a w *Księżnej Casamassimie* skupia się na ruchach robotniczych w Wielkiej Brytanii. Jak można było przewidzieć, większość amerykańskich recenzentów krytykowała powieść *Bostończycy*, co wskazuje na celność zawartej w niej krytyki społecznej, chwając zarazem *Księżną Casamassimę*, która wydawała się dotyczyć brytyjskiego społeczeństwa. Recenzenci w Wielkiej Brytanii postąpili odwrotnie, co ujawnia quasi-patriotyczny impuls, jakim podsyte były recenzje literackie tamtych czasów, a być może recenzje jako takie. Autorka artykułu dowodzi, że praca Jamesa nad tymi powieściami społecznymi zmieniła sposób, w jaki postrzegał on siebie jako pisarza. Pokazuje również, że przemiany, które James uchwycił w anglosaskich społeczeństwach i ich przedstawicielach po obu stronach Atlantyku, są jednocześnie uwikłane w historię i symptomatycznie ponadczasowe, niemal historiozoficzne.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: Henry James, powieść społeczno-obyczajowa, feminizm, rewolucja, autorstwo

## Introduction

Always an experimenter and often a provocateur, in his early forties, Henry James (1843–1916) tried his hand at writing a social novel. By the end of 1886, he, published two such novels that form a transatlantic diptych: *The Bostonians*, which is set in the United States, and *The Princess Casamassima*, which is mostly set in Britain. The urge to write – in quick succession – two novels addressing current issues reflects not only his rising social anxiety but also his divided loyalties. James was ten years into his expatriation in Britain, but his ties with the United States remained strong through his family, friends, and publishers. As usual, the two novels were first serialized in literary magazines before appearing in book form on both sides of the Atlantic.

James is not readily associated with the genre of social novel, even though in addition to these two straightforward attempts, much of his fiction may be viewed as exemplifications of social interest in fiction or studies of society's impact on an individual. The questions he poses in his novels include the following: What are the chances of a penniless provincial genius from America on the European art market, as in *Roderick Hudson* (1875)? What mistakes is an independent young woman bound to make when she suddenly becomes rich, as in *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881)? What happens when an American heiress buys herself an impoverished Italian prince, as in *A Golden Bowl* (1904)? These examples show that the key issue in James' major novels is the economic status of a person in society. In his fiction, money makes the world go round, effecting transformations

and revolutions that end in some welcome or unwelcome state of equilibrium. James' fiction thus resolves what philosophers have exposed as an *apparent* controversy of Parmenidean static and Heraclitean flux (for example, Small, 2010, p. 19).

The social novel (also known as the problem novel or the social problem novel) is a work of fiction that addresses social problems, including the issues of class, race, and gender, which are exemplified by characters and their interactions. The label itself dates back only to the 1950s, and the genre has since been viewed as flawed and second-rate (Guy, 1996, p. vii, 3). The social novel is, however, a much older transatlantic phenomenon that emerged in the United States and Great Britain in the mid-19th century, even though its predecessors reach back to the 18th century. The forerunners of the social novel arose around the time of violent changes known as the Industrial Revolution (Guy, 1996, p. 41). Those changes came suddenly enough to merit the name of a revolution but lingered for well over two centuries. The 19th-century examples of the social novel include first and foremost the fiction of Charles Dickens (which James imbibed from his earliest childhood – see James, 2011a), Elizabeth Gaskell's industrial novel *Mary Barton* (1848) and her study of a "fallen woman" in *Ruth* (1853), Harriet Beecher Stowe's antislavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), and – far less straightforward – *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) by Mark Twain. William Dean Howells, James' friend and promoter, also addressed social problems in novels such as *A Modern Instance* (1881) or *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885). Many of these texts first appeared serially, appealing to a large magazine readership, as did James' social novels (Okker, 2003, pp. 3, 10).

Henry James does not come to mind as a social novelist probably because of his quarrel with H.G. Wells, who in his satirical novel *Boon* (1915) attacked his one-time friend and supporter for treating literature as an end in itself, and not as a means to a social end. In contrast to Wells, who puts life first, James extolls art in a letter to his former protégé (who became one of his harshest critics). James thus defines the relationship between life and art in his frequently quoted letter of protest:

It is art that *makes* life, makes interest, makes importance, for our consideration and application of these things, and I know of no substitute whatever for the force and beauty of its process (James, 1984, p. 770).

In his response to Wells, James focuses on the process of "making" life, but both would probably agree that the raw material of art's making is life itself, and art returns this processed material to the lives of its readers. What Wells and James were then most likely arguing about was the immediate

resonance of art as either a direct message driven home by Wells or an ambiguously veiled complication suggested by James.

### *The Bostonians*

Contrary to popular belief and Wells' assumption, James was interested in current social changes, not in the partisan, engaged manner of Wells, but in the manner of an observer who discovers larger patterns in a myriad of events. To see things from such a perspective, he needed to step back and withdraw, which may have irritated Wells. For example, James became aware of women's movements in New York and Boston as early as 1863. With a cousin of his, he occasionally went to feminist lectures and penned sarcastic reports about them in his letters (quoted in Gale, 1989). However, two decades later, in his fiction, the off-hand censure of epistolary witticism is transformed into a balanced panorama of a society facing an intricate web of challenges. *The Bostonians* is remembered as "James's most ambitious American novel" (Gale, 1989, p. 84). His intention was from the beginning to write "a very *American* tale, a tale very characteristic of our social conditions" (James, 1987, p. 20) "in a big Balzacian way" (Gale, 1989, p. 84). He is believed to have levelled criticism at American reformers, most notably Boston feminists, whose agenda was an heir to earlier abolition and temperance movements. However, James' criticism is at once time-bound and timeless. He does not oppose changes or the need for reforms; he is not reactionary in that sense. He notices, however, the abuse of high-flown ideas that results from the self-interest of individual proponents. Thus James does not satirize the women's movement but exposes instead how their representatives defeat the purpose and turn in circles. As Daniel Karlin points out,

James does portray a rift within the women's movement, but it is personal, not ideological, caused by a clash of 'imperial' egos between Olive and Mrs Farrinder (2019, p. p. xlviiii).

The time of the novel's action is just after the Civil War, which adds the socio-political to the sexual opposition of the main characters. At the very centre of the novel is a very attractive and inexperienced young woman, Verena Tarrant, who is the mouthpiece of the feminist message. One way of looking at James' novel is to view it as a version of a medieval morality play, in which angels and demons vie for Verena's soul (Gale, 1989, p. 84). On the one hand, there is a progressive female from the North, well-off and cool-headed Olive Chancellor, who is probably lesbian, while, on

the other, there is a reactionary impecunious Civil War veteran from the South, Basil Ransom, who is likewise interested in Verena as an object of sexual desire. These two – in a way predators – parallel Verena's parents, especially her father, who styles himself as a mesmerist and seeks to monetize his daughter's skill as an inspired speaker. What James exposes then is the objectification and instrumentalization of a beautiful woman by all involved parties. This may perhaps be the twist that James adds to Edgar Allan Poe's famous dictum that "the death (...) of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world" (2023, p. 718).

The first instalment of *The Bostonians* in the *Century* magazine of February 1885 caused a scandal, which proved its topicality. To some extent at least, the novel was a *roman à clef*. James was accused of satirizing impractical Miss Birdseye, who was modelled on a well-known Boston figure of Nathaniel Hawthorne's sister-in-law, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody (Karlin, 2019, pp. xcvi–xcix; Ronda, 2017, p. 63). James' disclaimers were not particularly convincing, and the odium lingered. The magazine's editor Richard Watson Gilder did not spare James' feelings and wrote openly about the complete lack of interest in his novel on the part of his American readers. James in his turn wondered why William Dean Howells' harsh criticism of American society was appreciated, and his own, much more moderate commentary caused such a storm (Gale, 1989). It was a naïve question. There were obvious differences between James and Howells: first and foremost, Howells remained in the United States whereas James had the status of an expatriate. For this reason, James' commentary was inevitably viewed as an attack from the outside. Secondly, the message of Howells' novels was quite straightforward, especially in comparison with James' ambiguities. Thirdly, Howells conveyed a deep-seated belief in a human being's moral regeneration, which was the kind of uplifting, much-needed optimism that James did not display.

### *The Princess Casamassima*

The idea of *The Princess Casamassima* had appeared before the high hopes for *The Bostonians* ended in disaster. Henry James was still in a flurry of activity when Thomas Bailey Aldrich approached him in 1883 with the offer of serializing a new novel in the *Atlantic Monthly* under his editorship. The famous author had already committed himself to writing *The Bostonians* and three tales, in addition to his involvement with other magazines (Poole, 2020). The new editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, who had taken over from William Dean Howells in 1881, renewed the proposal in 1884, and this time James, "as usual, (...) anxious about his earnings"

(Poole, 2020, p. xxviii), offered the prospect of providing a novel for 1885 in twelve installments (Poole, 2020). The book must have been on his mind for some time as the title he named at that early stage in his letters, *The Princess Casamassima*, remained. James negotiated with the *Atlantic Monthly* editor the amount of payment but he did not take rejections too hard and was willing to settle for less. Money did matter, but there was value in experimentation and the new project promised that as well.

The writing itself was work, in both creative and physical sense, but, in addition, it also required research. The topic of social unrest in London and in Europe was new to James and called for personal observations of the scene. He wrote in a letter to Thomas Sergeant Perry of Dec. 12, 1884, that he had spent “all the morning at Millbank Prison (horrible place) collecting notes for a fiction scene” (Gale, 1989, pp. 526–527; Poole, 2020, p. xxx). Extensive reading and conversations with fellow writers were also an important part of the preparation for the novel writing. Apart from Charles Dickens, Ivan Turgenev, and especially his novel *Virgin Soil*, was an “essential resource in the composition of *The Princess*” (Poole, 2020, p. xxv), but there were many other coinciding tropes and activities as well. James’ thoughts on the French Revolution and more recent radicalism in France (Poole, 2020, p. xxvii) were sanitized as a travel book in his *Little Tour in France* of 1884. There were letters from Aldrich, who travelled with his wife to Russia in the 1880s. James was reading Victorian pro-labour novels by George Gissing and Sir Walter Besant, in addition to studying reports in the *London Times* of assassinations and acts of sabotage by revolutionists, anarchists, and nihilists.

In 1884, James spent a month in Paris to renew his acquaintance with such authors as Emile Zola, Guy de Maupassant, Edmond de Goncourt, and Alphonse Daudet. He was becoming, as he put it himself: “quite the Naturalist” (quoted in Poole, 2020, p. xxx). *The Princess Casamassima* is viewed as James’ closest approach to a naturalist work (Joyce, 2015, p. 144). It is worth noting that James was becoming a naturalist not only in terms of subject but also in terms of methodology, which included observation and experiment. All along, however, he retained a scientific distance that manifests itself in unexpected meaningful juxtapositions and onomastic choices. For example, the eponymous Princess knows the socialist or anarchist movement far better than representatives of the English working class. Her skin-deep fascination is juxtaposed with Hyacinth’s torment of divided loyalties. The association of literary naturalism with natural history and the study of living organisms in their natural environments is playfully reflected in the choice of a floral name, Hyacinth, for the would-be anarchist, and Rosy for the reactionary invalid sister of the main revolutionary among the book’s protagonists.

## Troubles with the Two Novels

*The Princess Casamassima* (1886) was James' fifth novel. Like its immediate predecessor, *The Bostonians*, it gave Henry James "hard, continuous work for many months" (James, 1987, p. 31) and, as he confessed in a letter to his brother William, "quite exhausted" him (quoted in Gale, 1989, p. 527). He thus commented on the change in his capacity at work in a letter to his editor: "I work better, I think, as I grow older, but I also work more slowly" (quoted in Poole, 2020, p. xxx). Adrian Poole gives in his introduction to the recent Cambridge Edition of the novel an account of nerve-racking time pressure, delays, anxiety, and disappointment. That experience taught the novelist also to what extent he had to rely on the work of the editor and the unnamed proofreader (Poole, 2020, pp. xxxiii-iv). Practicalities were at war with the high principles of art. What was conceived as twelve installments ended up as fourteen, with James entreating his editor to accommodate the additional chapters with or without payment (Poole, 2020, pp. xxxv-xxxvi). What aggravated the situation was the bankruptcy of the novelist's American publisher James Ripley Osgood, who had contracted to pay for book rights to *The Bostonians*, which he never did. In May 1885, James experienced deep anxiety when Osgood's bankruptcy, left *The Bostonians* stranded (Poole, 2020, p. xxxi). He realized that "interminable" work (quoted in Poole, 2020, p. xxxii) under time pressure and with reduced capacity could go unpaid. However, when *The Bostonians* appeared in book form in England, the novelist could boast in a letter to his brother William about its "goodish success" (quoted in Gale, 1989, p. 85).

Like *The Bostonians*, *The Princess Casamassima* was difficult not only to write but also to sell. In October 1886, Macmillan published the novel in three volumes and also in one volume. The sales were disappointing, though a bit better than in the case of *The Bostonians* (Poole, 2020, p. lxxx), which led the publisher to suggest to James in the spring of 1888, the experiment of issuing the novel in a new series of Two Shilling Editions (Poole, 2020, p. xxxviii). This cheaper edition was not quite as vulgar as yellow-backs, but the idea itself meant that not only the subject and the writing process brought James closer to the condition of working classes, but so did the publication strategy. Despite the high hopes and heavy investment, *The Bostonians* and *The Princess Casamassima* "reduced," as James bitterly remarked in a letter to Howells, "the desire & the demand for [his] productions to zero" (quoted in Poole, 2020, p. lxxx). Consolation came from Howells, who praised *The Princess* as James' "greatest novel" and comparing it with W.H. Mallock's anti-socialist novel *The Old Order Changes* (1886), stressed the difference between the novelist James and the partisan

Mallock (quoted in Poole, 2020, p. lxxx). James, however, pessimistically appraised his deteriorating ability to accommodate the changing requirements of the dynamic literary market. Transformations were multidimensional and inescapable; they concerned the author's age, his relationships with editors and audiences, and his sense of national and class identity.

In contrast to the "deliciously provincial" (James 2019, p. 32) protagonists of *The Bostonians*, late 19th-century London in James' *Princess Casamassima* is the Tower of Babel, with characters representing not only various nations and classes but also mixed identities and confused social aspirations. In his preface to the New York Edition, James defends his vague presentation of the working-class movement in the novel. Apart from limited knowledge of secret societies, which he honestly admits, he conflated anarchism, nihilism, and socialism for a purpose. It was not his aim to write a chronicle of a specific movement, but to address the impact that social change has on individuals, and vice versa. His

scheme called for the suggested nearness (...) of some sinister anarchic underworld, heaving in its pain, its power and its hate; a presentation not of sharp particulars, but of loose appearances, vague motions and sounds and symptoms, just perceptible presences and general looming possibilities (James, 2011b, p. 76).

### He finds

a defence of [his] 'artistic position' – in what he calls – the happy contention that the value I wished most to render and the effect I wished most to produce were precisely those of our not knowing, of society's not knowing, but only guessing and suspecting and trying to ignore, what 'goes on' irreconcilably, subversively, beneath the vast smug surface (James, 2011b, pp. 77–78).

Commenting on James' competence in handling the topic of social unrest, Leon Edel argues that the novelist "had known radicals from childhood; his father was himself a religious radical" (1962, p. 186). Henry Junior was aware of such experiments as Brook Farm and Fruitlands. He visited Paris during the aftermath of the Commune and later came to know Turgenev's "entourage, Nihilists and émigré revolutionaries" (Edel, 1962, p. 186). The prejudice against *The Princess Casamassima* among readers and critics, derived, as Edel explains, from the simplistic classification of James as "a chronicler of the Upper middle class and of Americans abroad" (1962, p. 185). James was deemed incompetent in the field



of working-class life and politics, but as Edel argues, his novel accurately “records the primitive beginnings of British Marxism” (1962, p. 186), the helplessness and confusion of the workers, and the range of self-appointed leaders of the would-be revolution. James was, as Edel argues, prescient: “he understood better than the early Marxists the dynamics of power, the relationship between idealism and the manipulation of people” (1962, p. 187).

### Hyacinth James

Over twenty years after its first appearance, Henry James revised *The Princess Casamassima* for the New York Edition of his major works. On this occasion, he wrote a preface in which he outlines the creative process and, to some extent in a roundabout manner, responds to the unfavourable reception. Interestingly, he did not include *The Bostonians* in the New York Edition, not because he disapproved of it, but because of massive revisions that he found would have been necessary. In the very first sentence of his preface to *The Princess Casamassima*, James highlights the literally pedestrian provenience of the novel; he recalls that it “proceeded quite directly, during the first year of a long residence in London, from the habit and the interest of walking the streets.” He walked, as he explains

a great deal – for exercise, for amusement, for acquisition, and above all [he] always walked home at the evening’s end, when the evening had been spent elsewhere, as happened more often than not (James, 2011b, p. 59).

James describes London metaphorically as “the great grey Babylon” that “easily becomes, on its face, a garden bristling with an immense illustrative flora” (2011b, p. 59). The former metaphor was common among Victorian writers, who saw the capital of the British Empire as a large and luxurious city, tainted by decadence and corruption. In the following sentence of James’ preface, “the garden” becomes “the thick jungle” (2011b, p. 59). Against this background of natural entanglements, connoting vice hidden behind the façade of a superior civilization, James imagined “some individual sensitive nature or fine mind” confronted with “all the civilisation, all the accumulations” (2011b, p. 60). This is how James “arrived (...) at the history of little Hyacinth Robinson,” who sprang for him “out of the London pavement” (2011b, p. 60).

Hyacinth’s intense observation of London parallels that of Henry James with one crucial difference that James stresses in the preface; his protagonist does not have the advantages that financial independence can

give. In his study of James as a literary labourer, Michael Anesko subverts, however, this claim and argues that “like Hyacinth, he [Henry James] had also to labor for his bread” (1986, pp. 108–109), working steadily on average six hours a day (Poole, 2020, p. lv). The protagonist of James’ novel, whom the author belittles as “a dingy little London bookbinder” (2011b, p. 74), undergoes a transformation that consists in reaching “the complete” degree of feeling, or “in a word the power to be finely aware and richly responsible,” like Hamlet and Lear (2011b, p. 62). The complication that James, according to his report, invented for his little Hyacinth is that he falls in love with “the beauty of the world, actual order and all, at the moment of his most feeling and most hating the famous ‘iniquity of its social arrangements’” (2011b, p. 72). The latter was the foundational concept in 19th-century Socialism that looks back to John Stuart Mill’s *The Principles of Political Economy* (1848). Hyacinth throws himself “into the more than ‘shady’ underworld of militant socialism,” but his commitment is “out of all tune with his passion, at any cost, for life itself, the life, whatever it be, that surrounds him. (...) [H]is tergiversation is the climax of his adventure” (2011b, pp. 72–73). The word “tergiversation” has the dual meaning of “evasion of straightforward action or clear-cut statement, equivocation,” on the one hand, and “desertion of a cause, position, party, or faith,” on the other (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). This is eventually what he does; he evades his mission and deserts his cause in the only way that appears honourable to him, that is by taking his own life.

Another narrative dilemma that James faced and explains in the preface was how Hyacinth, circumscribed as he was by his low social standing, could gain access to the world of beauty and leisure. To solve this puzzle, James recreated a character from his earlier novel, *Roderick Hudson* of 1875, “that extremely *disponible* figure of Christina Light” (2011b, p. 73), the eponymous Princess Casamassima. In *Roderick Hudson*, Christina Light turns into Princess Casamassima, namely, she is browbeaten by her overambitious mother to marry a wealthy Italian prince, which causes the ruin and downfall of the eponymous American artist, who has become her plaything. In *The Princess Casamassima*, she toys with the idea of revolution and – inescapably – with young attractive revolutionists as well. Some are more impervious to her charms than others, but both Hyacinth and his English friend and revolutionary Paul Muniment are impressed by the social opportunities that she represents. It would be too simplistic to blame Christina for the death of Roderick Hudson in the Swiss Alps, but she is again around – this time in London – when another young man in her retinue dies. *The Princess Casamassima* ends with Hyacinth Robinson’s suicide. The visual inspiration may have come to James from the famous painting *The Death of Chatterton* by Henry Wallis, a Pre-Raphaelite artist.

The young George Meredith served as the model for the painting, which was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1856, with a quotation from the *Tragedy of Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe inscribed on the frame: “Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight, And burned is Apollo’s laurel bough.” That extremely popular and widely reproduced image must have haunted James. One may argue perhaps that just as Poe invented “the death of a *beautiful woman*” as “unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world,” James may be credited with developing the motif of the death of a beautiful man.

### Revolution: From Idea to Action (and back)

In his preface to the New York Edition, James singles out Hyacinth and Christina, even though there is a large diversity of English, French, and German characters in this densely populated novel. The novelist’s effort to depict lower-class inhabitants of London was not appreciated by contemporary English critics (see Poole 2020, pp. xvii – lxxvii). It was not his social *métier*, they argued, and he was – an unforgivable sin – a foreigner (see “A Mistake to Misunderstand,” 1887). It is worth noting in the context of his explorations into feminism in *The Bostonians*, that in *The Princess Casamassima*, it is the upper classes, especially upper-class women, who take interest in the activities of the lower classes, which – in their turn – have no power or no intention to change anything in society. James shows in his novel – in his usual roundabout manner – why it is so. *The Princess Casamassima* is a novel about change, transformation, and revolution, but all these are conceived as ideas rather than actual historical processes. In *The Princess Casamassima*, James uses the word “transformation” and its cognates nine times, always with reference to a change that takes place in a person. The word “revolution” and its cognates appear forty-four times, and “change” – eighty-five times. By contrast in *The Bostonians* the word “transformation” does not appear at all, the word “revolution” – seven times, and “change” – twenty-one times. There is thus a more urgent sense in *The Princess Casamassima* that social relations are changing or should change, but – for all the talking and squabbling – no real turning point on a large social scale occurs. The distrust, confusion, and misunderstanding, manifested by the mispronunciation of names within the group of multinational revolutionaries, undercut the noble cause. For example, the English revolutionist Paul Muniment mispronounces the name of the aged French revolutionist M. Poupin as (the belittling) “Puppin” (James, 2020, pp. 76–77, 79). The social climber, Miss Henning, mockingly mispronounces Paul Muniment’s name as “Mr Monument” (James, 2020, p.115).

Change and revolution may be on everyone's lips but nothing of consequence happens. The revolutionaries meeting in the Sun and Moon tavern have no plan at all, and orders come eventually from German conspirators. It is a plan to kill a duke at a social gathering. In other words, no revolution is planned but a symbolic act of one man killing another. Hyacinth is entrusted with this mission simply because he looks like a gentleman and would be allowed to enter a gentlemen's meeting in the first place. He is supposed to use a pistol, which he eventually uses to kill himself instead. There is a foreshadowing in the novel that suggests that this mission is theatrical and has little to do with the reality of social relations. "[P]istol shots and shrieks" first appear on stage in a play that Hyacinth and his female companion are rather inattentively witnessing in one of the London theatres (James, 2020, p. 135). Hyacinth and Christina's meeting in that theatre leads each of them to a different kind of transformation. He discovers the beauty that money can buy and class allows one to appreciate, whereas she reduces herself and descends socially.

The two have more in common than one may expect. Both are socially and ethnically hybrid. Hyacinth's mother is French and his father was probably an English aristocrat. Christina's mother is an adventurous American woman and a social climber, and her father is a poor Italian. Both Hyacinth and Christina were born out of wedlock, and remained uncertain and ambivalent about their heredity. Encouraging his readers to seek Christina's origin in an earlier book, James also seems to suggest an analogy between Hyacinth and the eponymous character of the novel *Roderick Hudson*. Both the Franco-English Hyacinth and the American Roderick fall under Christina's spell and end badly. Roderick falls down a precipice in the Alps and Hyacinth shoots himself. This may well turn Christina into a *femme fatale*, whose irresistible power is deadly to the people around her. In the characters of Christina and Hyacinth, James seems to study the options that socially hybrid and artistically inclined people have in the context of socio-political turmoil: either being drawn into the whirlwind (like Christina) or absencing oneself through voluntary death (the case of Hyacinth). It would be a stretch to read *The Princess Casamassima* entirely through the lens of Martin Heidegger's idea of being and time (cf. Davis, 2014), and to claim, for example, that James traces Hyacinth's Dasein and his constant becoming in time-space. The diverging horizons of the revolutionary and the aesthetic may well inform the trajectory of Hyacinth's social career. He does not, however, exemplify Heidegger's idea of reaching authenticity or of authentic engagement with time, which includes facing one's mortality. Hyacinth's death is a theatrical closure that brings confusion rather than enlightenment, and gestures toward the illusion of change and fulfillment.

## Conclusion/Confusion

James' critics were convinced that *The Princess Casamassima* was not an American book, even though James highlighted in his preface to the New York Edition the characters of the Princess, who is partly American, and Hyacinth, who resembles both Roderick Hudson and James himself. These subtle links suggest that in considering the chances of socialist movements in London, he also thought about the country of his birth. He was still an American citizen and the United States of the late 19th century witnessed a succession of social upheavals: strikes and riots, most notably the famous Haymarket Riot in Chicago on May 3, 1886. The New York Edition of *The Princess Casamassima* appeared in 1907, just one year after the publication of the controversial German economist and sociologist, Werner Sombart's book *Why is there no Socialism in the United States?* It seems that in his novel, James poses, and maybe even answers, the same question. James explicitly states his intention in a letter of 29th October 1888 to his brother William: "I can't look at the English & American worlds, or feel about them, any more, save as a big Anglo-Saxon total." The life of the two countries appears to him as "continuous & more or less convertible" (quoted in Wadsworth, 2022, p. lix). His reviewers were thus wrong when taking strict national distinctions for granted. James saw clearly that by the end of the 19th century, new movements, including feminism and workers' protests had become, if not yet global, certainly transatlantic phenomena.

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