Culture and Radicalism in "The Princess Casamassima"

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CULTURE AND RADICALISM
IN THE PRINCESS CASAMASSIMA

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ABSTRACT

The Princess Casamassima, a novel written by Henry James, concerns the English radical movement during the 1880's. Since the novel first appeared in 1886, critics have offered a considerable variety of opinions concerning its meaning and value. Most critics have concentrated on James's portrayal of the political underground and have ignored the moral and philosophical issues that the novel raises. The most important of these issues is the conflict between culture and radicalism. Like many political commentators of the late nineteenth century, James believed that culture and radicalism must be enemies because great cultural achievements are usually sponsored, created, and appreciated only by the privileged few. The purpose of this paper is to show that the conflict between culture and radicalism is an important moral, political, and philosophical issue that seriously affects the lives of the major characters in the novel.

A study of James's political statements reveals that he was deeply concerned about the possible consequences of this conflict. His anxiety and uncertainty concerning this problem are reflected in the troubled consciousness of Hyacinth Robinson, the protagonist of The Princess Casamassima. As in many of his works, James makes a conflict within the mind of his central character the most important concern of the novel. Hyacinth feels trapped between his opposing loyalties to the achievements of traditional culture and the demands of social change. Eventually his inability to choose between the two drives him to commit suicide. The conflict between culture and radicalism also affects the lives of the other important characters in the novel, but most of the other radicals are more single-minded in their opposition to art and cultural tradition. Their attitude casts serious doubts on the system of values on which their cause is based. In James's view, art affirms the value of life; in fact, art adds meaning and intensity to life by comprehending and portraying the essence of human experience. The radicals' opposition to art suggests that they place little value on life.

The effects of the conflict between culture and radicalism upon Hyacinth Robinson and his associates proves that this problem is of central importance in The Princess Casamassima.
CULTURE AND RADICALISM

IN THE PRINCESS CASAMASSIMA
The Princess Casamassima occupies an important position among the novels and tales of Henry James's "middle years." After his first commercial successes in England and America, James decided to write two "public" novels that would deal with the great political and social issues of his day. The Bostonians, the first of these, concerns the burgeoning women's rights movement in New England. Unfortunately, James's satiric portrayal of the feminine reformers and their emasculated hangers-on offended many of his fellow countrymen. The book was a commercial failure in America, and in England it achieved only marginal success. The Princess Casamassima, the second of James's "public" novels, concerns the English radical movement and the life of the British working class.¹

Since The Princess Casamassima first appeared in 1886, critics have offered a considerable variety of opinions concerning its meaning and value. Dame Rebecca West, one of the earliest "authorities" on James's work, found the portrayal of political intrigue in the novel comical and unrealistic.² She was joined in this opinion by Yvor Winters, who declared that the political issues of the novel had "little more force or dignity than a small boy under a sheet on Hallowe'en."³ One of the first
critics to contradict these early condemnations of the novel's authenticity was Stephen Spender. In The Destructive Element, Spender claims that for once James successfully "painted in the whole background of the International Scene." Lionel Trilling, who has written the most comprehensive general discussion of The Princess Casamassima, agrees with Spender that the novel's portrayal of the radical movement is both accurate and convincing. Trilling asserts that "there is not a political event of The Princess Casamassima, not a detail of oath or mystery or danger, which is not confirmed by multitudinous records." More recent critics of The Princess Casamassima have treated the novel less kindly. Maxwell Geismar, a vehement detractor of James's work in general, presents a long list of economic and social problems that James should have at least mentioned in a novel about the political underground. Irving Howe, who also doubts the novel's authenticity, claims that James presents a view of politics "that reminds one, a little uncomfortably, of the catchwords of melodramatic journalism." Finally, Wesley Tilley has convincingly demonstrated that James may have found models for several of his characters in the pages of The London Times, a publication notorious for its sensationalistic reporting of radical activities. James himself admitted that he had no immediate acquaintance with the world of political intrigue. Near the end of the preface to the novel, he
defends his ignorance on this subject by saying that, rather than diminishing the credibility of the novel, the lack of specific details about the radical movement reinforces the impression of "our not knowing, of society's not knowing, but only guessing and suspecting and trying to ignore, what 'goes on' irreconcileably, subversively, beneath the vast smug surface" (I, xxii). Apparently, few critics have considered this statement an adequate explanation of the novel's shadowy portrayal of the radical movement.

From the previous summary of critical commentary on The Princess Casamassima, it is apparent that most discussions of the novel have concerned the authenticity of James's portrayal of the radical movement. Very few critics have addressed themselves to the political and philosophical issues that affect the lives of nearly all the important characters in the novel. It is even difficult to find critics who admit that any such issues exist. Irving Howe, who bemoans James's failure to place some significant political insight at the center of his work, nevertheless admits that "one can see in James's novel a central idea of a sort, an idea once extremely popular in England and France." Howe explains that many political commentators of the nineteenth century saw the struggle for social and political reform as a conflict between the defenders of a corrupt but glorious tradition and the proponents of cultural destruction and violent social change. From this
viewpoint, art and taste belong to the reactionaries because great cultural achievements are usually sponsored, created, and appreciated only by the privileged few. Moreover, the artistic values of careful perception and reflection are irreconcilably opposed to the revolutionary taste for quick judgment and action.

Most critics of The Princess Casamassima have ignored James's treatment of the conflict between culture and radicalism. Instead they have praised or denounced the novel solely on the basis of its portrayal of the radical movement. The purpose of this paper is to show that the conflict between culture and radicalism is an important moral, political, and philosophical issue that seriously affects the personal lives of the major characters in the novel. The subtle psychological effects of this conflict occupy a far more important place in the novel than the bumbling exploits of the misguided revolutionists. As James states in the preface, he is not primarily concerned with recording the activities of the political underground, but rather with depicting the impressions of this movement upon the consciousness of his hero. The main stage for the drama of The Princess Casamassima is not the Sun and Moon Cafe but the mind of Hyacinth Robinson, the protagonist. Like his creator, Hyacinth is one of those rare people on whom nothing is lost:

For this unfortunate but remarkably-organised youth every displeasure or gratification of the visual sense coloured his whole mind, and though he lived in Pentonville and worked in Soho, though
he was poor and cramped and full of unattainable desires, nothing in life had such an interest or such a price for him as his impressions and reflections. They came from everything he touched, they made him vibrate, kept him thrilled and throbbing, for most of his waking consciousness, and they constituted as yet the principal events and stages of his career. (I, 159).

James uses the extraordinarily sensitive consciousness of his hero as a filter through which he presents the main events of his novel. As in many of James's works, the consciousness of the central character becomes more important than the external events of the novel.

In his emphasis on the inner life of his characters, James uses a technique that he previously praised in an essay on Ivan Turgenev's Virgin Soil. This novel bears some unmistakable resemblances to The Princess Casamassima in character, incident, and general theme. When James reviewed Virgin Soil for The Nation in 1877, he lauded Turgenev for portraying the Russian radical movement in terms of its psychological effects upon its members. Apparently James approved of this approach so enthusiastically that he decided to employ it in his own political novel.

The most likely explanation, then, for the lack of details concerning the radical movement in The Princess Casamassima is that James intended the primary action to occur not in the streets of London, but within the mind of a young man walking those streets. The activities of the Soho revolutionists appear only incidentally because the radical movement is only of peripheral importance in the
novel. The central subject of the novel is the conflict within the mind of Hyacinth Robinson. Hyacinth is caught between his conflicting loyalties to the achievements of traditional culture and the demands of social change. He feels a compelling need to appreciate man's cultural triumphs as well as a strong desire to improve man's lot in life. In the words of Irving Howe, "Hyacinth is trapped in the heart struggle between beauty and necessity: he wants only to live, to respond, but it is his very awareness of the unmediated clash between beauty and necessity that destroys him."11

To understand the influence of the conflict between culture and radicalism upon Hyacinth and his associates, it may be helpful to attempt to re-construct James's attitude toward political and social reform. James's early political statements indicate that he saw reform and change as healthy and inevitable processes. In 1870, he wrote to his father that his first year in Europe had convinced him of "the transitory organization of the actual social body." He added, "The only respectable state of mind is to constantly express one's perfect dissatisfaction with it."12 Ten years later, James told a friend that "much of English life is grossly materialistic and wants bloodletting."13 Despite his disapproval of British society, James regretted that any attempt at social reform on a large scale would probably destroy the great achievements of traditional culture along with its failures.
On a tour of France in 1882, James became extremely anxious about the possibility of a radical social upheaval. Examining the scars and destruction left by the French Revolution, he came to realize that any such uprising necessarily sweeps away the good with the bad. In *A Little Tour in France*, a series of articles originally written for *Harper's* magazine, he repeatedly mentions the damage done to the cultural monuments of France by her rebellious people. Surveying the ruins of a monastery at Montmajour, he writes, "Wherever one goes in France, one meets, looking backward a little, the spectre of the great Revolution, and one meets it always in the shape of the destruction of something beautiful and precious." At Brou his tone becomes more bitter:

> One asks one's self how all this decoration, this luxury of fair and chiselled marble, survived the French Revolution. An hour of liberty in the choir of Brou would have been a carnival for the image breakers.\(^5\)

When James hears news of violence in Lyons, he discards almost entirely any sympathy he had felt for the social revolutionists: "I wondered . . . whether I was losing all my radicalism; and then I wondered whether, after all, I had any to lose."\(^6\)

While James was working on *The Princess Casamassima*, he wrote a letter to his friend Grace Norton that eloquently expresses his feelings about revolution and reform. He writes,

> There is very little "going on" -- the country
is gloomy, anxious, and London reflects its
gloom. Westminster Hall and the Tower were
half blown up two days ago by Irish Dynamiters,
there is a catastrophe to the little British
force in the Soudan in the air . . . and a
general sense of rocks ahead in the foreign
relations of the country -- combined with an
exceeding want of confidence -- indeed a deep
disgust -- with the present ministry in regard
to such relations. I find such a situation as
this extremely interesting, and it makes me feel
how much I am attached to this country and, on
the whole, to its sometimes exasperating people.
The possible malheurs -- reverses, dangers,
embarrassments, the "decline," in a word, of old
England, go to my heart, and I can imagine no
spectacle more touching, more thrilling and even
dramatic, than to see this great precarious,
artificial empire, on behalf of which, neverthe­
less, so much of the strongest and finest stuff
of the greatest race (for such they are) has
been expended, struggling with forces which
perhaps, in the long run, will prove too many
for it.1

This letter suggests the ambiguity of James's feelings
toward English society in its time of trouble. Although
he recognized the "precarious, artificial" nature of the
British Empire, he regretted that its greatest achieve­
ments were in danger of being destroyed along with its
unfair distinctions and privileges. James's anxiety and
uncertainty about the political situation in England are
reflected in the conflict between culture and radicalism
in *The Princess Casamassima*. Like James, Hyacinth is
devoted to the triumphs of traditional culture, but at the
same time he realizes that this culture is radically
infected with injustice and corruption.

Even before his birth, Hyacinth seems destined to
become a victim of the destruction and strife created by
social injustice. Florentine Vivier, Hyacinth's mother, conceived her ill-fated child out of wedlock. She claimed that Lord Frederick, a wealthy British nobleman, was the baby's father. When the peer refused to acknowledge his paternity, Florentine murdered him in a fit of passion. She was imprisoned for the rest of her life, and Hyacinth was entrusted to the care of her friend Amanda Pynsent. Miss Pynsent reared Hyacinth with great love and self-sacrifice, but she was financially unable to provide him with the social and educational advantages that she felt he deserved. As Hyacinth grew older, he came to resent the social system that had deprived him of his proper place. He considered himself the victim of a cruel joke; he had inherited the emotional and intellectual sensitivity of the aristocracy, but his financial and social position prevented him from enjoying these precious gifts. Ironically, Hyacinth's rebellion against established society resulted from his frustrated attempts to dedicate his life to the great achievements of tradition and culture.

Hyacinth's dedication to art and the realm of the imagination begins early in life. One of the first things the reader learns about the young protagonist is that he loves to stand in front of a confectioner's shop reading the first pages of romances in The Family Herald and The London Journal. Unlike most children, he uses only a
small portion of his financial resources to buy candy; with the remainder he usually purchases "a ballad with a vivid woodcut at the top" (I, 5). Another indication of Hyacinth's early attachment to the artistic life is his love of the theater. His dedication to the grand illusions of the stage begins with his first boyhood visit to a second-rate music hall and continues throughout his adult life. As Hyacinth grows older, he finds an outlet for his love of beauty and elegance by becoming a bookbinder. Although he realizes that this trade allows him only limited opportunities to use his gifts of taste and creativity, he feels that his profession is closely allied to the grander vocation of the artist. Like his mentor Eustache Poupin, Hyacinth is proud of the skill and sensitivity required to produce a beautiful binding.

Hyacinth's contact with his beloved world of taste and refinement becomes much more intimate when he meets the Princess Casamassima. Through that remarkable lady the young man from the slums first gains admittance to the beautiful world he has only dreamed of. When Hyacinth first visits the Princess in London, he notes that her fine possessions reveal "not only whole provinces of art, but refinements of choice on the part of their owner, complications of mind and -- almost -- terrible depths of temperament" (I, 285). Hyacinth has an even better opportunity to survey the strange and beautiful treasures of the Princess when he visits her house at Medley. This
country estate gives the young artisan his first glimpse of a way of life untainted by the shabbiness and corruption of London.

Hyacinth's commitment to the radical cause is rooted just as deeply as his dedication to culture. He first becomes aware of social injustice when he learns of the circumstances surrounding his birth and his mother's imprisonment for killing Lord Frederick. By joining the cause of the common people, Hyacinth continues his mother's revenge against the aristocracy. He also finds an outlet for the resentment he feels toward society for excluding him from the cultivated life of the wealthy. James frequently reminds the reader of the poignancy of his hero's situation: he is unusually sensitive and perceptive, but his place in society prevents him from using his remarkable gifts. The frustration that Hyacinth feels in this predicament leads him to strike back at society for its callous indifference.

Although Hyacinth's resentment against society initially draws him into the radical movement, his desire for retribution is not strong enough to inspire his total commitment to the radical cause. The force that finally leads Hyacinth to offer his life to his fellow conspirators is his friendship with Paul Muniment. Since Muniment is the first strong male figure that the young orphan has encountered, Hyacinth offers him all the filial and fraternal affection for which he has found no outlet:
Our hero treated himself to a high unlimited faith in him; he had always dreamed of some grand friendship and this was the best opening he had yet encountered. No one could entertain a sentiment of that sort more nobly, more ingeniously than Hyacinth, or cultivate with more art the intimate personal relation (I, 228). Muniment's attraction for Hyacinth is enhanced by his powerful but inexplicable personal magnetism: "There was something in his face, taken in connexion with the idea that he was concerned in the taking of a stand... which made Hyacinth feel the desire to go with him till he dropped" (I, 119). In his desire to impress Muniment with his courage and seriousness, Hyacinth makes an impassioned address to the conspirators at the Sun and Moon Cafe in which he affirms his dedication to the cause and his willingness to give up everything for its sake. Muniment takes him at his word and leads him off to meet the shadowy figure Hoffendahl. Hyacinth agrees to meet Hoffendahl and eventually pledges his life to the radical leader primarily because of his friendship with Paul Muniment.

Hyacinth's vow to Hoffendahl is one of the turning points of the novel. Although James never reveals the exact nature of the vow, he implies that Hyacinth has promised to take some action that will probably lead to his death. Realizing that Hoffendahl may call on him at any time, Hyacinth decides to devote his few remaining days to intense experience and reflection. With his inheritance from Miss Pynsent and some help from her
friend Mr. Vetch, he finances a trip to the continent. In the course of his travels he becomes increasingly aware of his allegiance to the decadent culture which he has promised to destroy. Ironically, his vow to Hoffendahl has set his mind free to contemplate the reasons why he can not fulfill the vow.

Hyacinth's awareness of his conflicting loyalties becomes most poignant when he visits Italy. From Venice he writes to the Princess of his new devotion to

"the monuments and treasures of art, the great palaces and properties, the conquests of learning and taste, the general fabric of civilisation as we know it, based if you will upon all the despotisms, the cruelties, the exclusions, the monopolies and the rapacities of the past, but thanks to which, all the same, the world is less of a 'bloody sell' and life more of a lark (II, 145).

This letter marks another important turning point in Hyacinth's life. For the first time he confesses his awareness that art and culture rest on social injustice. He finally admits his realization that the great triumphs of civilization are the products of the happy few who have had the wealth and leisure to escape more mundane occupations. Despite this new awareness, however, Hyacinth decides that his loyalty to established culture transcends his commitment to the radical cause.

One reason why Hyacinth chooses to champion art instead of radicalism is his realization that the radical movement is primarily inspired by envy. In his letter from Venice, he tells the Princess of his doubts about the
radicals' belief in the redistribution of wealth: "I don't want everyone to have a little piece of everything and I've a great horror of that kind of invidious jealousy which is at the bottom of the idea of a redistribution" (II, 146). He becomes more firmly convinced that the intentions of his fellow revolutionists are mean and selfish when he speaks to them again in London: "Everywhere, everywhere he saw the ulcer of envy -- the greed of a party hanging together only that it might despoil another to its advantage" (II, 158). Hyacinth's new understanding of the motivation of his radical friends makes him even more reluctant to accept their attitudes toward art and existing culture.

Another reason for Hyacinth's increased commitment to the achievements of tradition and culture is his realization that he does not have long to live. One way or another, the message that he expects to receive from Hoffendahl will probably lead to his death. In his desire to make good use of the few days remaining to him, Hyacinth turns away from the prosaic concerns of the radical movement: "He had ceased himself to care for the slums and had reasons for not wishing to spend his remnant in the study of foul things" (II, 152). He insistently tells the Princess and Paul Muniment that "'there can't be too many pictures and statues and works of art . . . whether people are hungry or not'" (II, 170). This
repudiation of the cause of social justice illustrates Hyacinth's growing callousness to the sufferings of the poor. His walks through the slums of Soho now produce in him feelings of revulsion rather than pity, and he comes to consider social inequality as one of the unalterable facts of life:

In these hours the poverty and ignorance of the multitude seemed so vast and preponderant, and so much the law of life, that those who managed to escape from the black gulf were only the happy few, spirits of resource as well as children of luck; they inspired in some degree the interest and sympathy that one should feel for survivors and victors, those who have come safely out of a shipwreck or a battle (II, 262).

Hyacinth's admiration of the "survivors and victors" in the struggle of life reminds one of Herbert Spencer's theories of Social Darwinism. Obviously such theories are totally incompatible with the doctrines of radical socialism. Hyacinth embraces this conservative ideology because he fears that the rising "flood of democracy" will wash away all the old glories of civilization. This possibility is particularly disconcerting because there is no guarantee that the wave that carries away culture will leave justice in its wake:

When this high, healing, uplifting tide should cover the world and float in the new era, it would be its own fault (whose else?) if want and suffering and crime should continue to be ingredients of the human lot (II, 262-263).

Hyacinth feels that the only way to protect the accomplishments of the past is to maintain a stable society. He
abandons the radical movement because its aim is anything but social stability.

In view of Hyacinth's decision to defend the corrupt but glorious traditions of established culture, his suicide at the end of the novel appears puzzling. If he believed that he had finally found something in society that redeemed all its cruel inequities, why, then, did he not elect to stay alive and propagate his newly achieved faith? Perhaps the most likely explanation for his final decision is that Hoffendahl's vow represented such a strong commitment for Hyacinth that he could not break it just because he had changed his political ideology. The vow involves forces far more profound and unexplainable than mere political opinions. If Hyacinth were to abandon his commitment, he would feel that he had betrayed his friendship with Paul Muniment and the Princess and that he had forsaken the pursuit of vengeance against the aristocracy which he had inherited from his mother. Moreover, he would appear to almost all his acquaintances to be a fickle and irresolute coward. Involved in Hoffendahl's vow are loyalties and commitments too basic to Hyacinth's existence for him to deny. At the same time, to fulfill the vow would be to advance a cause which he had come to detest. Since Hyacinth feels that he can not live in good conscience with either of these alternatives, he decides instead to die. Although the immediate reasons for Hyacinth's suicide involve the unusual circumstances of
his life, the implications of his death transcend the personal level. Hyacinth's tragic end may mean that the conflict between culture and radicalism is ultimately impossible to resolve and that any person or society committed to these divergent values must face painful and destructive consequences.

In the struggle between culture and radicalism, Hyacinth eventually becomes a champion of the former. The latter is represented by the Bloomsbury conspirators and their associates, the most notable of whom is the Princess Casamassima. When Hyacinth first meets the Princess, he considers her a brilliant representative of the world of art and fine taste. Her beautiful house at Medley, her talent as a pianist, and her acquaintance with literature and philosophy all convince the innocent young man that she is one of culture's most ardent disciples. Only after he has succumbed to her charms does Hyacinth realize that the Princess does not share his single-minded devotion to the refinements of civilization. The first hint of the Princess's real attitude toward culture is her casual remark that art is nothing more than "a synthesis made in the interest of pleasure" (I, 287). Although this assertion appears harmless in itself, it implies that art is only valuable as a diversion or entertainment. In her pose as a radical democrat, the Princess recognizes the principle of "the greatest good for the greatest number" as the only valid basis for making judgements of value.
Since art at its best is merely a diversion, and since it benefits only the privileged few, its value is insignificant. The Princess expresses this attitude most emphatically when she tells Lady Aurora, "'When thousands and tens of thousands haven't bread to put in their mouths I can dispense with tapestry and old china'" (II, 168). In response to Hyacinth's assertion that works of art can be valuable "ameliorating influences," the Princess curtly declares that "'a piece of bread and butter's more to the point if your stomach's empty'" (II, 170).

Despite the Princess's assertion that she has ceased to care for art, she retains an amusing smugness about the flawlessness of her taste. When Paul Muniment praises the beauty of her newly acquired bourgeois home, the Princess replies, "'My dear sir, it's hideous. That's what I like it for'" (II, 230). The pretentiousness of this comment recalls her earlier condescending attitude toward Hyacinth:

I've kept you a long time but it's supposed not usually to be a bad place, my salon; there are various things to look at and perhaps you've noticed some of them (I, 285-286).

Despite her lovely salon, however, the Princess is not sincerely devoted to culture. Instead, she embraces the life of fine taste because her "restless vanity" and her "aversion to the banal" drive her away from Philistinism. Eventually, these two forces drive her to reject the cultivated life as well.

The Princess's vacillation between culture and
Philistinism indicates her uncertainty about her position in society. As readers of *Roderick Hudson* recall, she has been abruptly pushed from the American middle class to the heights of European aristocracy. From her own remarkable career she has learned the falseness and tenuity of social distinctions. One of her most important motives for becoming involved with Hyacinth is her desire to strike back at society for its failure to provide her with the position of power she could not find in the aristocracy. The Princess also joins the radical movement because she feels that it may provide her with just such a position. In her desire to attach herself to one of the new leaders of society, she abandons the dreamy Hyacinth Robinson for the supremely practical Paul Muniment. Like her conversion from culture to Philistinism, this vacillation reflects the uncertainty that the Princess has brought upon herself by her rejection of traditional social standards.

The Princess's uncertainty about her position in society closely associates her with the dispossessed Hyacinth Robinson. M. E. Grenander has pointed out that the Princess may be unsure about her social position because, like Hyacinth, she is a bastard. Perhaps a more immediate explanation for her uncertainty is that she shares Hyacinth's contradictory attitudes toward art and culture. Like Hyacinth, she realizes that the radical movement has no room for taste and fine perception. She finds it difficult to relinquish these luxuries, however,
because she has become too fond of the aesthetic life. Her divided loyalties force her to assume a hypocritical position. Even after she has moved to her ugly house at Madeira Crescent, she retains some of her former elegance. She still owns a piano (albeit a cheaper model), she still keeps excellent tea in her crude crockery, she still has a few little treasures safely preserved in storage, and she still enjoys the services of her faithful maid Assunta. These few concessions to the genteel life represent the Princess's secret and perhaps unconscious attempt to achieve a compromise between culture and radicalism. Unlike Hyacinth, she is not willing to accept the painful consequences of her divided loyalties.

The other radicals in the novel find it less difficult to relinquish the world of art and culture. Paul Muniment, for example, expresses no interest whatever in the cultural refinements that have enchanted Hyacinth and the Princess. In fact, he does not have the taste to distinguish rare beauty from common gaudiness. Muniment reveals his coarse nature most amusingly when he visits the Princess at her new home in Madeira Crescent. Upon inspecting the furnishings that the Princess has carefully chosen for their gaudiness, the gauche chemist's assistant compliments her on her beautiful home. Muniment's lack of taste is matched by his unimaginativeness. He reveals the aridity of his mechanical intelligence when he criticizes his sister
coffee (not tea, par exemple!) and listening to the music of the spheres" (I, 96). The placidity of this vision contrasts sharply with the anarchists' murderous tactics. Although Poupin has committed himself to these tactics, his emotional inclinations make him reluctant to undertake any political action. The conflict between Poupin's feelings and his ideology also causes his ambivalent attitude toward Hyacinth. As an artist, Poupin sympathizes with his young friend's desire to lead an aesthetic life, but as a revolutionist, he must condemn such a life for its wastefulness.

Poupin's mixed feelings toward Hyacinth make him reluctant to give the young man the fatal message from Hoffendahl. Hyacinth finally receives this message from the stalwart Schinkel, a man whose loyalties lie wholly with the radical movement. Schinkel's enormous pipe and the perpetual bandage around his neck suggest the shabbiness and simplicity of his life. The only source of warmth in his lonely bachelor's existence is his devotion to his fellow radicals. For some unexplainable reason, he conceives a special fondness for Hyacinth. This affection does not weaken his sense of duty, however, and he faithfully gives his young friend the message that will lead to his death. This display of unswerving loyalty to the cause illustrates the narrowness and simplicity of Schinkel's moral outlook. Unlike Hyacinth, the pragmatic
Rose for having "too poetical" a mind. Later, Muniment confesses the limitations of his consciousness to Hyacinth: "'You like excitement and emotion and change, you like remarkable sensations -- whereas I go in for a holy calm, for sweet repose'" (II, 212). Unfortunately, Muniment's desire for coolness and detachment prevents him from appreciating things of grace and beauty.

Among the other revolutionists in the novel, the only one who maintains any loyalty to the world of art is Eustache Poupin. A bookbinder by trade, Poupin shares Hyacinth's deep devotion to the aesthetic ideals of his craft. His devotion to radicalism is less certain. Although he participated in the Paris Commune of 1871, he has not undertaken any significant political action since his exile to England. In fact, his only radical activity since leaving France is his participation in the comical debates at the Sun and Moon Cafe. Although Poupin has been granted pardon and permission to return to his native land, he chooses to remain in England where his stories of heroism and self-sacrifice can be better appreciated. This choice, and the political inertia which it represents, are partially caused by Poupin's attachment to the artistic life. His desire for passive perception and peaceful contemplation is apparent in his vision of a post-revolutionary society that would "cover the globe with boulevards, radiating from Paris, where the human family would sit in groups, according to affinities, drinking
German is not distracted by mental subtleties. His intellect is slow and plodding and his reflections are limited to the practical issues of daily life. Schinkel's dullness is amusingly illustrated in his narration of his meeting with Hoffendahl's courier. The German explains to Hyacinth that he sat staring at the messenger for fifteen minutes before he realized that the man wanted to talk to him. Despite his simplicity, Schinkel is an important enough character to appear in the last scene of the novel. His reflection that Hyacinth's gun would have served much better for the Duke ends the book with a chilling impression of the single-mindedness of the radical cause.

In comparison with the radicals, Captain Godfrey Sholto assumes a far more ambiguous position in the conflict between culture and radicalism. One of the Princess's most ardent followers, Sholto first introduces Hyacinth to his royal patroness. At first the Captain appears to share the Princess's interest in the opposing forces of culture and radicalism, but soon it becomes apparent that he sincerely cares for neither. Sholto's attendance at the radical debates in Bloomsbury, his visit to the Muniments', and his friendly interest in Hyacinth all suggest that he is truly committed to the radical cause. One shortly discovers, however, that Sholto's only commitment is to the Princess, and that his excursions into the lower classes are actually attempts
to provide that remarkable lady with a supply of "little democrats." Sholto frequently reveals his insincerity in the patronizing tone he assumes when speaking to his social inferiors. Eventually he confesses his real feelings about the radical movement to Hyacinth: "I believe that those on top of the heap are better than those under it, that they mean to stay there, and that if they're not a pack of poltroons they will!" (II, 72-73). Although Sholto feels only contempt for the radical cause, his antipathy is not based on any sincere attachment to the cultural achievements of existing society. The Captain presents an exterior of refinement and sensibility in his magnificent possessions, but he lacks the taste to appreciate their true beauty. Instead of being motivated by the desire to save the triumphs of civilization, he is driven merely by his snobbery and selfishness. He reveals the real baseness of his nature in comments of this sort:

"That was rather a nice little girl in there; did you twig her good bust? It's a pity they all have such beastly hands" (I, 331).

After hearing this remark, Hyacinth "could quite well see what Lady Aurora had meant by calling Captain Sholto vulgar" (I, 337). Hyacinth's judgement of Sholto suggests the essential opposition of the situations and attitudes of these two men. While Hyacinth suffers from his attraction to the conflicting forces of culture and radicalism, Sholto remains unharmed because he does not
care for either.

With the exception of Eustache Poupin, all the committed radicals in the novel are opponents of art and culture. In their fervent desire for social equality, they choose to renounce the great triumphs of taste and learning because all these achievements depend on injustice and exploitation. They also repudiate art because it diverts one's attention from the more important cause of the revolution. Besides these fairly understandable reasons for the radicals' opposition to culture, there is another, less obvious, explanation for their attitude. In James's view, art and radicalism must inevitably be enemies because the former fosters and requires order while the latter seeks to destroy it. In reply to H. G. Wells's assertion that he was a radical at heart, James wrote,

No talent, no imagination, no application of art, as great as yours, is able not to make much less for anarchy than for a continuity and coherency much bigger than any disintegration. There's no representation, no picture . . . that isn't by its very nature preservation, association, and of a positive associational appeal -- that is the very grammar of it; none that isn't thereby some sort of interesting or curious order; I utterly defy it in short not to make, all the anarchy in the world aiding, far more than it unmakes -- just as I utterly defy the anarchic to express itself representationally, art aiding, talent aiding, in short you aiding, without the grossest, the absurdest inconsistency.21

In other words, art must always champion order because
order is its guiding spirit and ultimate goal; because of its essential opposition to order, radicalism can neither inspire nor create any great work of art. Moreover, the radical movement must seek to destroy art because art is one of the most powerful representations of the "continuity" and "coherency" of culture.

The radicals' opposition to art casts serious doubts on the system of values upon which their cause is based. In James's view, art serves a moral purpose by comprehending and affirming the value of life. In a letter to Henry Adams, he states that the creative process demands that the artist cultivate and treasure the impressions of his experience upon his consciousness:

I still find my consciousness interesting -- under cultivation of the interest. Cultivate it with me, dear Henry -- that's what I hoped to make you do -- to cultivate yours for all that it has in common with mine . . . You see I still, in presence of life . . . have reactions -- as many as possible -- and the book I sent you is a proof of them. It's, I suppose, because I am that queer monster, the artist, an obstinate finality, an inexhaustible sensibility. Hence the reactions -- appearances, memories, many things -- go on playing upon it with consequences that I note and "enjoy" (grim word!) noting. It all takes doing -- and I do. I believe I shall do yet again -- it is still an act of life.22

The artist must value both the "reactions" of his consciousness and the "consequences" of those reactions. In a word, he must value life -- both the life that creates impressions upon his mind and the life that he re-creates from these impressions.
The destitute old painter in James's story "The Madonna of the Future" may well be speaking for his creator when he says, "'No one so loves and respects the rich realities of nature as the artist whose imagination intensifies them.'"^23 This statement suggests another important part of James's theory of art: that art not only affirms but also creates and intensifies life. As James wrote in another letter to H. G. Wells, "It is art that makes life, makes interest, makes importance . . . and I know of no substitute whatever for the force and beauty of its process."^24 In James's view, the artist portrays not the facts of life, but life's essence. James elaborates on this concept of the artist in his story "The Real Thing." The artist-narrator of the story attempts to portray members of the aristocracy by using real aristocrats as models, but he fails to achieve the realism he seeks because he is copying the facts of his models rather than their essence. He paints convincing aristocrats only when he uses lower class models, for they, despite their social position, understand the "style" of the aristocracy. The obvious message of this story is that the artist's task is not to copy life, but to improve upon it. This view of art does not imply any contempt for life; on the contrary, the artist who holds this view must respect and seek to understand life in order to achieve the sort of realism he desires.

In The Princess Casamassima, Hyacinth Robinson comes
to adopt James's attitude toward art. During his trip to Europe, he gains a new appreciation of the power of art to add meaning and intensity to life. In his letter from Venice he tries to explain the feeling of joy and fulfillment he has experienced because of his contact with the artistic treasures of France and Italy. He tells the Princess, "'I'm very happy -- happier than I've ever been before save at Medley'" (II, 143). Hyacinth's appreciation of the cultural triumphs of Europe is intensified by his discovery that a few fortunate souls have been able to create and preserve something worthwhile amid the chaos and uncertainty of human life:

"It's not that it hasn't been there to see, for that perhaps is the clearest result of extending one's horizon -- the sense, increasing as we go, that want and toil and suffering are the lot of the immense majority of the human race. I've found them everywhere but haven't minded them . . . . What has struck me is the great achievements of which man has been capable in spite of them -- the splendid accumulations of the happier few, to which doubtless the miserable many have also in their degree contributed" (II, 144-145).

This passage suggests Hyacinth's new awareness that he has given so much attention to the unhappy facts of life that he has ignored life's joyful essence. The most important lesson that Hyacinth learns from his pilgrimage to France and Italy is that life holds the possibility of being meaningful and worthwhile. This is the essential message he has found in the works of art he has come to cherish.

The anarchists, on the other hand, deny both the
sacredness of life and the value of art. Their cooperation with Hoffendahl's bloody plans reveals their lack of concern for others. In their single-minded devotion to the cause, the conspirators are even willing to sacrifice the life of their friend Hyacinth. The radicals' contempt for the sacredness of life is closely related to their rejection of art and culture. One of Schinkel's thoughts concerning this relationship is especially illuminating:

Mr. Schinkel took it upon himself to reply that they were talking about a man who hadn't done what he had done by simply exchanging abstract ideas, however valuable, with his friends in a respectable pothouse (I, 349).

The man whom Schinkel is speaking of here is the murderous anarchist Hoffendahl. Schinkel is probably correct that Hoffendahl has spent little time "simply exchanging abstract ideas." If he had spent more time in this pursuit, he might have been more reluctant to implement his violent tactics. Like the other revolutionists, Schinkel and Hoffendahl deny themselves the life-affirming powers that are necessary for the creation and appreciation of art. In the simple words of an unnamed radical, they "don't care for the imagination" (I, 346). This attitude prevents them from understanding the important moral message that is contained in all great cultural achievements.

Instead of showing James's naivety or cultural insularity, the portrayal of the conflict between culture and radicalism in The Princess Casamassima reveals the
author's profound understanding of a problem which all revolutionists must face and attempt to resolve. As Hyacinth painfully learns, any advocate of a new social order must decide just how far he intends to participate in the destruction of existing culture. In this sense, the novel is "pre-political"; that is, it concerns basic questions about individuals and societies that must be answered before one can go on to consider specific political doctrines.
Notes

1For a more complete discussion of the relationship of these two novels, see John L. Limmey, "The Bostonians and The Princess Casamassima," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 9 (1968), 537-546.


5The Liberal Imagination (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1953), p. 64.


8The Background of The Princess Casamassima, University of Florida Monographs, Humanities, no. 5 (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1960), pp. 18-33.

9All references to The Princess Casamassima are to The Novels and Tales of Henry James, vols. five and six (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908).

10"The Political Vocation," p. 166.

11Ibid., p. 171.


20. Maxwell Geismar (Henry James and the Jacobites, p. 74, n.) suggests that this speech is evidence of James's condescending attitude toward the lower classes. It is doubtful, however, that Sholto is speaking for James on this occasion.
Bibliography


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