Social Reality in

The Princess Casamassima

Henry James was very enthusiastic concerning The Princess Casamassima as he was writing it: "The subject of the Princess is magnificent," he rhapsodized, "Oh art, art ... what consolation and encouragements ... are like thine? The Princess will give me ... joys too sacred to prate about."[1] He was disillusioned when the book aroused only a couple praiseful remarks among a torrent of scathing comments. The reviewers generally agreed with each other that James was a "social" writer effetely treating a subject too remote from his experience. The "Contemporary Review" commented that Mr. James was "far too dainty an artist" to be earnest about anything.[2] The "Dublin Review" added that Mr. James was "out of his element among the social deeps where he has here sought his subject."[3] James gloomily reported to one of his most faithful admirers, William Dean Howells, that the succession of The Bostonians and The Princess Casamassima had "reduced the desire, and the demand, for my productions to zero."[4]

Later literary critics (almost the only persons who seemed to read The Princess Casamassima) brought against it accusations exactly opposite to those advanced by James'

contemporaries. Now it was censured as an attempt to treat a silly and unhistorical subject, English anarchism, with lugubrious earnestness. The result was Gothic melodrama, the delicacy of a novel of social manners tacked onto an unsuitably lurid plot. With the increased respect for "impressionistic" rather than "naturalistic" treatments of social problems, however, The Princess Casamassima began to receive praise for its prose style, its variegated elements, and the "modernity" of its theme. Lionell Trilling even claimed it to be "one of the most masterly comments on human life that has ever been made,"[5] a statement, I suppose, meant to rank The Princess with, say, Hamlet, Oedipus Rex, or The Possessed -- In any case, it is interesting to see a work that within a period of eighty years has suffered so many varieties of praise and dispraise. Perhaps an examination of the qualities of The Princess Casamassima will reveal why it has attracted such violent extremes of judgement.

Although many persons have sought to establish the value of The Princess Casamassima by attacking or defending the verisimilitude of its descriptions of the anarchist movement, James himself declared that his purpose was not to give a full and naturalistic account of anarchism. In his Preface of 1908 he formulated an answer to those who would accuse him of lack of

knowledge in such matters: " ... knowledge, after all, of what? .... If I made my appearances live, what was this but the utmost one could do with them?"[6] Rather than reporting known details, he wanted chiefly to give his impressions of "some sinister anarchic underworld" which he imagined, a presentation of "vague motions and sounds and symptoms."[7] Surely, he felt, he could choose any fictitious basis he wanted for his plot, providing he developed it consistently and well. Furthermore, the subject of The Princess was not anarchism but Hyacinth's entire consciousness, only part of which was concerned with his reaction to the London revolutionary society. James compared his hero to Hamlet[8]; like Hamlet Hyacinth suffers from divided emotions, responding to the wealth and grandeur of London aristocratic life, yet simultaneously aware of his own inability, bounded by poverty and lack of "connections", to achieve any portion of it.[9] The ideology or condition of anarchism itself filled only a small part of Hyacinth's consciousness; the movement was more important to him for secondary reasons -- it provided an outlet for his generalized restlessness and frustration, and an opportunity for him to associate with revolutionists such as the Poupins, the Princess, and Paul Muniment. Thus James felt The Princess Casamassima should chiefly be judged by its presentation of a mind divided against itself, and by its ability

to record sinister "impressions" of an underground movement.

Yet James did not intend for his "impressions" to form an imaginary world in direct contradiction to the world of historical actions. One of the doctrines of his creed was that "impressions", carefully gathered and manipulated, formed a higher truth which subsumed rather than contradicted the mere world of political and social data. James expected to be accused of "sketchiness and vagueness and dimness"[10] in his presentation of the anarchists, but he made considerable effort to avoid the imputation of direct inaccuracies. He began general reading on socialist movements -- French radical newspapers, Theophile Gautier's Taubleau de siège, an account of the Paris Commune, J. Zeller's Les Tribuns et les révolutions en Italie, and the Communist Jules Valles' Jacque Vingtras.[11] Furthermore, James considered himself generally knowledgeable on socialism; from childhood he had known the various shades of reformers who befriended his Fourieristic father. He had maintained a long friendship with Turgenev and visited him in Russia, meeting in his entourage nihilists and emigre revolutionaries. He had some interest in anarchist movements; at the period of The Princess or somewhat afterwards he met and was impressed with the anarchist leader Prince Kropotkin.[12] While writing The Princess Casamassima he expressed

the wish to visit Ireland in order to see a country in the state of revolution.[13] Also he carefully chose as his novel's plot one used previously by Turgenev in an unpopular short work of fiction, Virgin Soil, a work James considered badly executed, but which was presumably accurate in its study of revolutionary psychology. James' chief mistake was to transfer what he knew of the more organized and militant Russian and continental socialist and anarchist movements directly to a London background. He falsely assumed that there was in Britain a somewhat uniform anarchist movement capable of sustaining a conspiracy against the aristocracy similar to that which made repeated attempts on the Russian Czar's life during the same period. In this error he was encouraged and abetted by misleading and alarmist statements in the British newspapers of his day.

Anarchy and terrorism were in themselves very timely subjects in the London of the mid-1880's. Between May, 1883 and the period in which James was composing his novel, 1885-86, a large series of terrorist incidents occured in London. In May, 1885 an explosion in the Local Government Board Offices occurred simultaneously with an unsuccessful effort to blow up the Times. In the first half of 1884, after a series of railroad explosions, terrorists struck at Scotland Yard, St. James Square, and the Nelson Column. In December someone

tried to blow up London Bridge, and in January of 1885 there were explosions on the Metropolitan Railway, in the House of Commons, in Westminster Hall, and in the Tower of London. In July, 1885, when James began writing his "revolutionary" novel, visitors to the Tower, the Nelson Monument, and Westminster Hall still found them closed.[14] These acts may have been committed by dissidents over the Irish question or by persons suffering discontent for many other reasons than the espousal of "anarchy". Yet the Times classified all of these acts together, and advanced repeatedly the hypothesis that a general "international society" was operating for the "overthrow of governments."[15] It reported at length every known visit of an anarchist to London and the existence of several meetings and conclaves of anarchists in America and Europe, but it seldom reported, or understood, the disputes between the various radical factions or the disparities of opinion under the catchword label "socialist". British readers of the time were thus induced to an exaggerated sense of the unity behind these terrorist "outrages". It is unfortunate that James chose as one of the chief sources of his sense of the "loose appearances" and "vague motions" of anarchism a British newspaper which misinformed him as to the extent and nature of that movement. Although the analogy is oversimplified, James' exclusive dependence on the Times suggests

someone who today would write a novel of American communists and fellow-travelers in the 1950's using as a primary source the editorials and reportages of the Chicago Tribune and the transcribed deliberations of the House Un-American Activities Committee ....[16]

James also tried throughout The Princess Casamassima to conform his characterizations of revolutionists with what the newspapers reported of the character of specific radicals and terrorists. Both Hyacinth and Muniment correspond vaguely to descriptions of accused terrorists which have been found in the Times.[17] The Princess is indeed a strange figure, but existed aristocratic women anarchists; a "good-looking and remarkably intelligent" Russian noblewoman was condemned to death at the age of 27 for participation in a plot to assassinate Alexander III, and another woman of noble family assisted with an attempt to blow up Alexander II's train in 1879.[18] The Times reported on a Hoffendahl-like figure, Friedrich Reinsdorf, who in Germany incited others to attempt to blow up Emperor William I and other luminaries but took no part in the action himself. He was described as "believed to be in possession of a dangerous power of molding others to his will."[19] In a vague suggestion of the qualities of Hyacinth, there was even a case reported of a young

proletarian Frenchman who had been able to successfully pass himself off as a gentleman.[20] Several trial reports described the accused as being better educated, or more carefully dressed, than was usual for their class.

In one case, however, James may have been misled by a contemporary report on the character of revolutionaries. James probably read a report in the Spectator for August 8th and 15th, 1885, which greatly exaggerated the ease and inevitability with which a young European artisan might become a perpetrator of violent acts against the government. It proclaimed of one accused conspirator that he "was just the stuff out of which Anarchists are made, and may be regarded as the natural product of the age in which we live. Fairly educated, conscious of abilities above his position, vain and aspiring, with little moral principle, and without any sort of religious belief, it was almost inevitable that he should gravitate towards Socialism, and become a potential rebel against the existing order ...." (underlining mine).[21] This description of the conspirator could have been written of Hyacinth by an unsympathetic observer. According to a statement made by James many years later, he came to feel (shortly after the appearance of this article) able to manipulate his plot for the first time.[22] Perhaps he accepted

the Spectator's view of the extremist political tendencies of restless European artisans, then made the further mistake of assuming that the Francophile and half-French Hyacinth would have similar instincts. Thus Hyacinth is expected to automatically "drift" into radicalism.

The result of the too easy assumption of Hyacinth's revolutionary tendency is an imbalance in the plot. The novel is presumably the account of a struggle within Hyacinth between his equally powerful aristocratic and proletarian impulses. Yet while the growth of Hyacinth's aristocratic tendencies are carefully catalogued, James does not describe adequately the springs of emotion or thought deep enough to motivate his vow to commit a violent act against the upper classes. Because he assumes that inherent in his hero's station and heredity is a penchant for movements of "the people", he partially neglects to show the slow growth by which such a tendency is developed and reinforced. As a result Hyacinth seems to die from a vow to a cause he has superficially believed in, in obedience to the spiritual leadership of a man he has only once seen, and only a couple of times in the vaguest of terms mentioned. Intricacies and frustrations of plot and circumstance, more than a division within Hyacinth's own nature, seem to be the arbitrary

agents of his death. In this manner James' attempt to construct his novel in harmony with newspaper reports concerning anarchy misled him into postulating a London anarchist conspiracy related to continental societies, and into exaggerating the unity and complexity of British anarchist movements. Also he was perhaps persuaded by generalizations on the appeal of violent forms of radicalism to young artisans into dispensing with some of the evidence of such an appeal to Hyacinth.

What is the importance to The Princess Casamassima of such inaccuracies as James imbibed from mass media? They do not so much vitiate as simply change the quality of the novel. Against a painstakingly detailed and accurate description of a man's physical and social perambulations through the London of the 1880's, is a plot evocative of continental conventions or Russian, rather than British history. The effect might have seemed to English readers of the time to be a strange aggregate of would-be naturalism and vaguely conceived "it-could-happen-here" fictionalizing. They themselves were concerned about anarchism in a practical way and wished specific information, not "fanciful" plots emphasizing an undocumented terror.

Now, however, some of the disparity between background and plot seems to enhance rather than disfigure the novel.

The slight mental strain needed to place an anarchist conspiracy into an actual time in London contributes to the sense of the strangeness and dissonance of the events described. Through the "European" nature of the plot, London comes in some way to resemble the mainland of Europe, and is "darkened" by its union with cultures older and more restless than its own. By his alterations James has simply heightened his presentation of the violence and power of the movement in which he has ~~chosen to~~ embodied his sense of sinister destructive forces opposing the way of life he revered.

The Princess Casamassima is probably less concerned with "revolutionary" movements than with the respective merits and cross-evaluations of the various segments of a stratified society. James chose to polarize these elements, and oppose the glittering facade of the aristocracy with a deep and vengeful sentiment of the masses. Wishing to incarnate this sense of generalized social restlessness and and revolt into the presentation of a single movement, he chose for his purpose the most extreme political ideology of his time, anarchism, about which he knew little, but which became for him a symbol of political destructiveness and blind proletarian revenge. The contrast between the characterization

and plot of The Princess and the actual condition of English anarchism shows that James is more concerned with the quasi-abstraction of violence and destructiveness than with their specific manifestations. In this way the contrast between the London of James' contemporaries and that of The Princess Casamassima emphasizes the loosely allegorical quality of the novel. Formerly James had written novels of the brilliance of great houses and salons; here he juxtaposes to his salons of light another world, and being the apologist of refinement, art, and manners, he can only express that world as one of physical darkness and spiritual deprivation. The Princess Casamassima becomes a novel of light and dark images intermingling and producing, from time to time, some of the grey tones of moral ambiguity and inconclusiveness.

One of the special merits of The Princess Casamassima is this preservation throughout all of the images of splendor and darkness of a sense of the shifting and inaccurate quality of morality and conviction. If all of the "light" images had accompanied good persons and actions, and "dark" images the opposite, The Princess Casamassima might indeed have been a melodrama of civilization threatened by the danger from without. Yet James preserves the confusion in our

minds as to whether the "brilliant" aristocracy is of sufficient merit to claim allegiance, as well as, more subtly, whether its members are truly "aristocratic" or not. Millicent Henning, Miss Pynsent, and Mr. Vetch are all seemingly "proletarian" or petit bourgeoise associates of Hyacinth. Yet Millicent is the avowed envier and admirer of the rich, and her chief desire that of marrying a "swell"; Miss Pynsent is the fond source of Hyacinth's self-image as a young crypto-aristocrat, and Mr. Vetch is a faded gentleman who, in an humble way, retains the personal mannerisms and knowledge of "society" which had been to some degree his. Paul Muniment is perhaps a clearer case of non-aristocratic tendencies; he is constantly reported by his sister to avow the invertedly anti-aristocratic statement that the upper classes should not help the poor, that they should seize their time while they had it. If he were an aristocrat, he once stated to Hyacinth, he should certainly not think of those less fortunate. Yet it is perhaps because the young man quietly identifies with the class he intends to despoil that he is able to contemn any efforts to ameliorate his condition or that of his sister, and to reject the love of Lady Aurora and the magnificence of the Princess. Thus all of the seemingly lower class persons who influence Hyacinth have either had prior experience of, or maintain a strong admiration or envy towards the

aristocracy.

Neither do the "aristocratic" persons who enter the book seem unambiguous. The Lady Aurora seems scarcely a member of her own social class; in ~~an almost pathetic~~ reaction to her overcrowded, unloving home and her own personal peculiarities, she has escaped into a crypto-proletarianism. She identifies with and finds her friends (until Christina) among the lower classes, and loves with sad perseverance the archetype of proletarian ambition, Paul Muniment. The nervous frenzy of her general manner and of her discomfort with her family scarcely suggest her as an ideal of "aristocratic" personal manner. Even as the previous friends of Hyacinth wish to be high-born, she would gladly relinquish her position and be one of them. Likewise Christina Light does not seem "aristocratic" in any usual definition of the term. Christina was an illegitimate child born to New England parents, who from ambition married their daughter to an Italian nobleman whom she hated. Only by the grace of the husband whom she has left does she possess title and money. She seeks with intolerant vengeance to plunge herself into the cause of "the people", and rudely rebuffs Hyacinth's attempts to converse with her of anything that has formerly been in her world. The theatricality and self-satisfaction of her

conversion to anarchy -- she is always proclaiming herself to be in the thick of things -- suggest that it is not so much motivated by an aristocratic condescension as by, perhaps, a mingling of the desire to imitate such a condescension and the need to flee her past environment. At the end her husband withdraws support from her, not in anger at her "noble" enterprises, but on the more sordid grounds of probable adultery. The Princess becomes so violently "revolutionary" that Hyacinth cannot even continue to love her from afar (someone should tabulate the total number of platonic relationships in James); she detests the qualities in him which remind her of herself and her past life. She is a bourgeoise who has so identified with and assumed upon (while hating) the life of wealth that her restless self-revulsion takes the form of a frenzied attempt to throw contempt upon her own adopted class.

Hyacinth's environment, then, is scarcely composed of separated "aristocrats" and "proletarians". Each person is only partially in psychological accord with the external social position in which he is found. Hyacinth is of course the fullest expression of ambiguity of station, a man who instinctively loves all of the manners and tastes of aristocracy, and who develops along the line of his predilections to an amazing degree during his short contacts with the

Princess and with Europe. As he reaches out both towards external proletarianism (Paul Muniment) and external aristocracy (the Princess), he finds himself betrayed, strangely enough, by their intimacy with each other.

Simultaneously James has created persons whose "social" position is ambiguous and those whose full morality cannot be immediately or easily discerned. Hyacinth is seeking not so much ideological as "social" goals -- to be accepted by and to understand the persons whom he meets. In a way The Princess Casamassima becomes a mystery story, not through suspense of incident but of character. Hyacinth commits himself to disparate causes in order to obtain knowledge of the nature of their adherents, and he pays for such knowledge by the necessity of his death. Neither a "good" or a "bad" cause fails him, but only the mingled evil and unobtainable good of every cause which has attracted him. Thus The Princess Casamassima is a description of opposing aristocratic and proletarian forces struggling against and within an ill-fated human soul. It does not oversimplify its morality; the aristocracy is not found to be all "righteous" and the proletariat "evil", or vice versa. Perhaps The Princess' original readers were critical because they expected a story which dealt with different social classes to be a "social-problem" novel, and, like many novels of this

category -- for example, Dickens' Hard Times or Bleak House -- they demanded that it point a moral and berate the culprit. Like these novels, The Princess Casamassima combined sporadic naturalistic description with a plot that could be vaguely construed as the presentation of moral conflict, yet in total contrast to all "social-problem" novels, James is not in the least concerned with the plight of the poor. Hyacinth is disinterested, even disgusted with the poor of London; he finds them physically revolting and consoles himself with the thought that their condition is rendered inevitable by their own ignorance. He returns to his old home with Miss Pynsent and can see no redeeming qualities in its physical dinginess. "Revolution" seems almost divorced from "humanitarianism" within the soul of this hero, and it is Hyacinth's social-problem, not that of the poor, with which the novel is concerned.

James has therefore been accused of flimsiness of treatment simply because his plot was mistakenly considered as a treatment of the merits of class dissatisfaction. The naturalistic details have been considered discordant with a plot concerning the consciousness of an "arty" young man, merely because in literature (unlike life) naturalistic details are supposed to conduce to the desire for social

amelioration. James should not be blamed because Hyacinth's concern (or his own) for the poor is less than that later prescribed by literary convention. Accusations of James' "thinness" of treatment, however, may have also arisen from causes other than that of his decision not to present a brief for the impoverished. James weakens the effect of the subject he has chosen by manifestly condescending to Hyacinth. He states carefully in his preface that he has tried not to permit Hyacinth's consciousness to range beyond the perceptions that an artisan might actually possess. In the commendable spirit of realistic restraint, however, James over-diminishes his hero by constantly applying to him such epithets as "poor" and "little", and by handling him so gingerly and from the outside that we often do not know what he "thinks", especially as Hyacinth nears death. Whatever chances his "poor" hero indeed had to be profound James has stripped from him, revealing chiefly the pettiness of his external circumstances and frustrations, not the specific intellectual and emotional struggles which brought him to his end. Hyacinth's death seems pathetic, not noble, and yet one senses that if one had seen his mental state more fully, one might have mitigated one's decision . . . . By condescending to or silencing his hero, James has to some extent weakened the effect of the struggle which he presents. A further

weakening of effect is produced by the fact that, as I have mentioned, the plot presumbably centers around an ideological conflict, whereas Hyacinth's actual mental processes are only indirectly concerned with anything except his own social relationships. It is these inconsistencies in execution, however, and not the lack of social concern or consistent "realism" often adduced against it, which produce any attenuation of the novel's intensity.

In spite of this The Princess Casamassima is for many reasons uniquely interesting among James' novels. In spite of its "disparities" in treatment, imagined or actual, it is virtually a literary type unto itself -- an aristocratic-industrial novel, a juxtaposition of Jamesian vague immensities and Zolaist detail, a carefully-constructed and almost mechanically operating plot combined with the presentation of the expanding consciousness of a single character, the simultaneous exploitation of the themes of "social revolution" and the vagaries of social preferment, a treatment of the psychology of anarchists juxtaposed with descriptions of the glories of Venice .... The very construction of a plot which does not derive completely from character analysis is new for James; the addition of conventional determinism to James' preoccupation with inner consciousness

seems to create an effect of fullness and diversity not found in novels which merely explore the inner character. One senses that in The Princess Casamassima James is aware of both the inner and outer world.

The Princess Casamassima is also unique among James' novels in that it brings James' sensibilities not only to one class or separated segment of reality but to the entire span of social classes. Indirectly he deals with a subject he never attempts before or afterwards -- the relative claims and attitudes of different levels of society. His plot, however arbitrary, departs from his usual theme of social marriage (or almost-marriage) to one that requires for its execution the creation of a greater variety of character "types" than he was ever again to achieve. In so doing he exhibits his power to draw his incidental characters (Millicent, Miss Pynsent, Rose, etc.) from far other backgrounds than those to which he was generally thought to be restricted. And he exhibits a tolerance which he is seldom elsewhere given field for -- the ability to sympathize mildly with "reforming" motives, more than was common for one of his class -- even while condemning on every practical ground the usual results of such actions.

Yet even more important, his sundry characters from

all social classes are permitted to have opinions on each other, to reflect credit and discredit upon each other by contrast and comparison. No class escapes the scathing eye and tongue; Hyacinth makes caustic observations on all the world, which comments on him in like manner. The result is no paean or slightly modified eulogy -- as The American occasionally seemed to be of Newman, The Bostonians of the eternal feminine in Verena, and The Portrait of a Lady of Miss Archer. "Brilliant" as the Princess may be, she escapes criticism much less than many another wealthy Jamesian American, fancy and foot-free in Europe. Instead she is tested by her relationship with Hyacinth, and shown to be, despite her glowing pretentions, as concerned with "personal associations" as with the plight of the working classes. And even in these personal associations she occasionally lacks perception; although she has a generalized affection for Hyacinth, she is too selfish to realize what the full effect of her coldness will be upon him. Each individual, even as each social class, is brought in turn before a common tribunal, and shown to be simultaneously meritorious and defective.

The Princess Casamassima has a further distinguishing feature among James' novels. All of James' works are built

to an unusual extent around his perception of the character of specific geographical locations. Each great Jamesian metropolis seems to have a personality greater-than-the-individual-life which his novitiates must come to understand and reckon with. He often constructs his action around shifts from metropolis to metropolis -- Paris, Rome, Venice, London, New York, Boston. In The American his hero travels from Paris to Rome to Paris to London to Paris, in The Wings of the Dove the action is divided between London and Venice, and in The Portrait of a Lady, Isabel Archer travels from England to Rome. Often the "touristy" nature of their globe-hopping is too apparent, and James can scarcely develop the quality of each specific city. The Princess Casamassima is one of his few novels which concentrates on one city alone, London, perhaps his favorite city, with only occasional shifts as Hyacinth takes one small journey to Paris and Venice. As a result, the constant repetition of detailed descriptions causes us to feel the denseness of the city; we learn Hyacinth's impressions not as those of a man who has "observed" the city in general but of one who has walked ceaselessly from place to place. Hyacinth's perambulations bind all parts of London together; we have with him the sense of incessant motion and constant within a confined area. All of the characters are tied to their location, and the usual number of Americans

abroad is reduced to only one, Christina. By concentrating fully upon London, James was able to represent the effect his city might have upon an inhabitant.

In this way, James intended The Princess Casamassima to be a "realistic" novel to a greater extent than, as a result of inaccuracies which he imbibed from the newspapers, it was ever able to be. Yet at the same time he was undoubtedly attracted to these same inaccuracies because they described an anarchism more formidable, melodramatic, and sinister than that of the England of his time. James uses his own sometimes distanced impressions of Hyacinth's consciousness of both anarchists and aristocrats to register the interrelated friendships and hatreds of persons from all strata of society and of all types of character. No other book James wrote attempts to fuse so many disparate social elements into a common presentation of one individual life. F. W. Dupee called The Princess Casamassima a study in the vie de Londres; the study takes the dual form of reproducing both the grand effects of social life and the everyday details of the street. The highly contrived plot becomes a ballet of artistic and social extremes, played aginst a background of naturalistic description of London life. It is a great pity that James'

audience resented his simultaneous interest in social conflict and in the desirablility of culture. Their derision encouraged James to return to novels of the drawing room, relinquishing the considerations which he had treated with great originality and skill in The Princess Casamassima.

Footnotes

1 The Notebooks of Henry James, ed. F. O. Mattheisen and Kenneth B. Murdock, New York, 1947, pp. 68, 69.

2 Philadelphia, L (December, 1886), 899-900, in W. H. Tilley, The Background of The Princess Casamassima, Gainsville, Florida, 1961, p. 60.

3 C (January, 1887), 197-198, in Ibid.

4 cited in an editorial comment in James' Notebooks, op. cit., p. 69.

5 quoted on back cover of The Princess Casamassima, intro. by Clinton F. Oliver, New York, 1964 (Harper Colophon Edition). From The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society, New York, 1950. Could not obtain book.

6 James, The Princess Casamassima, vol. I, New York, 1908, pg. xxii.

7 Ibid., p. xxi.

8 Ibid., p. viii.

9 Ibid., vi.

10 Ibid., xxii.

11 Oscar Cargill, The Novels of Henry James, New York, 1961, p. 152.

12 Leon Edel, Henry James: The Middle Years, New York, 1962, p. 186.

Footnotes, con.

13 Cargill, The Novels of Henry James, op. cit., p. 149.

14 Tilley, The Background of The Princess Casamassima, op. cit., pp. 19, 20.

15 terminology taken from Times' comments after Alexander II assasinated in March, 1881, in Ibid., p. 12.

16 Analogy contributed by my husband, William Boos, who is no lover of James.

17 Tilley, The Background of The Princess Casamassima, op. cit., pp. 40-42, 45-49.

18 Ibid., p. 50, 51. The woman first mentioned was named Figner, alias Vera Filkpana, described as "one of the moving spirits in nearly every plot and attempt at political assasination since 1879. The second woman was Sofia Perovskaya, who with her companions tunneled under roadbed; Sophia cheered her companions with a "silver laugh", meanwhile holding a nitroglycerine revolver prepared to kill them all if need be. Tilley mentions three other women revolutionaries.

19 Ibid., pp. 37-40.

Footnotes, con.

20 Charles Marlandon, reported in Times, June 27, 1885, in Ibid., 42.

21 Ibid., p. 45.

22 In Preface to 1908 edition, op. cit., pp. xx, xxi.

Suggested Reading

The most essential writings concerning The Princess Casamassima are James' Preface of 1908 (contained both in the New York Edition and in The Art of the Novel, a collection of James' prefaces by R. P. Blackmur), and his brief notations in his Notebooks. The Preface outlines James' remembrances of the genesis of the novel from "the habit and interest of walking the streets." He discusses the situation and limitations in consciousness of Hyacinth, analyzes the character of the Princess, and defends the book against those who would attack his method of recounting impressions. The Notebooks contain only a couple of pages written on The Princess, but they describe his early mingled enthusiasm concerning his subject and his vagueness concerning its execution. Also there are a few notations of London slang collected for use in the novel. James' preoccupations in his Preface to Roderick Hudson are chiefly remarkable for their similarity to those of his Preface to The Princess.

Complete bibliographical information on all of the editions of The Princess Casamassima is given by Edel and Lawrence's A Bibliography of Henry James. E. H. Tilley has a remarkably patient monograph on James' readings in the London newspapers, The Background of The Princess

Casamassima. He tries to prove that James was remarkably complete in his research simply because he followed the papers. Discovery of a Genius contains an enthusiastic review of The Princess by William Dean Howells.

The best extended treatments of The Princess Casamassima which I have found are in Cargill's The Novels of Henry James, Edel's Henry James: The Middle Years, Anderson's The American Henry James, and F. W. Dupee's Henry James. Cargill contains more information on James' use of Virgin Soil than I have found elsewhere. Joseph Warren Beach is an exception to the rule of early hostility to the book; his The Method of Henry James devoted to it four very praiseful pages as early as 1918 -- "It is a miracle of pitch and tone," etc. In general, The Princess Casamassima has suffered (benefited?) from an absence of the extensive criticism which James' other major novels have received. Several works tend to mention it only in passing, as Stevenson's The Crooked Corridor and Gale's The Caught Image (classification of images -- finds Princess has images of water, flowers, art, religion). Bowden's Themes of Henry James has an intelligent summary of Hyacinth's development, as does Wright, The Madness of Art. I was prepared to be sympathetic to an attack on the too-worshipful attitude usually maintained towards every aspect of James, but Geismar's Henry James and the Jacobites is the work of a man too full

of spleen to take his points carefully and one by one.

Since both Trilling and Spender respectfully identify with the artist-as-political-commentator, they construct thorough and serious defenses of The Princess Casamassima. Spender describes James' political observations as "remarkable, and curiously undated. Hyacinth, with his strong leaning towards the upper classes, and yet his feeling that he is somehow committed to the cause of the workers, might to-day have become a Socialist Prime Minister, who, at the height of his power, would dismay his followers by too frankly going over to the other side.... Hyacinth himself is a feeble revolutionary, as his existence as a bastard makes him a living contradiction in terms of class .... In these novels of James' first period, we see him at work observing European society, and we are able to read into his conclusions." (1935 ed., pp. 44, 46) Trilling writes five years later with kindred interest in the novel's undatedness: "But the two books on which James placed the blame for his diminishing popularity were The Bostonians and The Princess Casamassima, and of all James' novels these are the two which are most likely to make an appeal to the reader of today.... The social texture of his work is grainy and knotted with practicality and detail." And on its themes: "We know much about misery and downtroddeness and of what happens when strong gifted personalities are put at a hopeless diadvantage, and about the possibilities of extreme violence, and about the guilt and

unreality which may come to members of the upper classes and the strange complex efforts they make to find innocence and reality, and about the conflict between the claims of art and social duty -- these are among the themes which make the pattern of The Princess Casamassima. (1950 ed., 58-61)

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