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The Henry James Review, Volume 38, Number 1, Winter 2017, pp. 37-52 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/hjr.2017.0006>



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Henry James's Impressionistic Satire of the Decadent Movement in the *Yellow Book*

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Henry James published three stories in Henry Harland's journal, the *Yellow Book*: "The Death of the Lion" (April 1894), "The Coxon Fund" (July 1894), and "The Next Time" (July 1895). These stories have tended to slip between the cracks of slowly burgeoning criticism on James's engagements with the Aesthetic and Decadent Movements, which has focused mainly on Aestheticist themes and characters in James's work up to and including *The Tragic Muse* in 1890¹ and James's Decadent style in works after *The Spoils of Poynton* in 1897.² However, they illustrate one of James's most direct addresses to the principle of "art for art's sake" and its place within these twin movements in the short period between 1890 and 1895 when the Decadent Movement flourished. The current essay argues that James's satire of Aestheticism and Decadence in the pages of its mouthpiece, the *Yellow Book*, reveals his own concerns regarding the slippage between "art for art's sake" and its appropriation by these movements. At the same time, considered in succession, these stories increasingly reveal James's own uncertainty regarding how far it is possible to maintain a distinction between the principle of "art for art's sake" and the popular movements it spawned.

After "The Death of the Lion" was published, the American press accused James of becoming "one of the *Yellow Book* clique" and "inextricably in the decadent ranks" (qtd. in Mendelssohn 204–05). Of course, James's engagement with the *Yellow Book* was never this simple. When its editors, Henry Harland and Aubrey Beardsley, approached him to write a story for its inaugural issue the prospect was both an opportunity and a terror. The editorial policy of letting contributors write to any length promised the kind of artistic freedoms James desired and required, and the

fee was very good at a time when—as Michael Anesko (*Friction* 141–43) and others have pointed out—he faced ever-diminishing returns from serial publication, advances, and royalties. Moreover, the possibility of finding alternative markets for his fiction in this new kind of periodical, which did not have advertisements or run serialized fiction, was eminently desirable. Yet the strong association between the *Yellow Book* and “the new and beautiful and interesting disease” of Decadence defined by Arthur Symons in 1893 (“Decadent” 859), another of Harland’s inaugural contributors,³ was less welcome. After “The Death of the Lion” was published, James wrote to William James: “I hate too much the horrid aspect & company of the whole publication. And yet I am again to be intimately—conspicuously—associated with the 2nd number. It is for gold & to oblige the worshipful Harland” (*LL* 269). Speculation over what James meant by “the horrid aspect & company” of the journal need not run very far: the *Yellow Book* presented itself as the voice of the Decadent Movement, from its ostentatious yellow covers to its contributor list and the principles set out in its Prospectus to volume 1.

Worse still, the periodical had enrolled James himself into its strategy to position itself as such. In the only substantial discussions of James’s *Yellow Book* tales in recent years,⁴ “‘The Dreary Duty’: Henry James, *The Yellow Book*, and Literary Personality,” Anne Diebel makes a fascinating case for how Harland and Beardsley used the name of Henry James “as a signifier of indifference to popularity and obsession with formal particularity” for the purposes of marketing the *Yellow Book* (46). Further to Diebel’s point, James’s established reputation as a writer concerned with “art for its own sake” contributed to the attempts of Harland and Beardsley to position the *Yellow Book*—and the fledgling movement of Decadence—within the genealogy of British and French Aestheticism, via a pattern of intertextual references to their Aestheticist forbearers. Arthur Symons had made clear that Decadence, like Aestheticism, was self-consciously rooted in the principle of “art for art’s sake” (“Decadent” 867). The Decadent Movement, as articulated by Symons and illustrated in works by Wilde, Beardsley, and others, takes up Walter Pater’s suggestions in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) that the uncoupling of art from moral and social imperatives performed by “art for art’s sake” entails, in life, the pursuit of sensuality for its own sake, whether this is found in a beautifully produced book, artificial stimulants, overwrought poetics, or deviant sexual practices. From this point though, the Decadent Movement very imperfectly divides from Aestheticism in the early 1890s, with “art for art’s sake” metastasizing into Decadent immorality and sensuality for its own sake. Whereas Pater’s vision of sensuality is in effect always governed by an Epicurean moderation, focused through aesthetics, Decadence broadens the imperative of sensuality from art to all aspects of life, encouraged by this pronounced sense of personal and cultural degeneration. Thus does the excessively ornamented language characteristic of Decadence become emblematic of “a civilization grown over-luxurious, over-inquiring, too languid for the relief of action” (Symons, “Decadent” 859). For Henry James the emergence of Decadence foregrounded two main concerns that he had explored earlier in relation to the Aesthetic Movement: first, the slippage between the principle of “art for art’s sake” as he conceived it into a broader ethos of sensual pursuit and, second, the greatly increased commercialism and self-posturing surrounding this principle as it was used by those associated with Decadence and Aestheticism.

If James stood as a symbol of “art for art’s sake” in 1894, such that Harland and Beardsley wanted to use him to market the *Yellow Book*, it was in part because he had constructed this image himself in contradistinction to the Aesthetic Movement. In *Partial Portraits* (1888) James juxtaposes “art for art’s sake” in the aesthetic ethos of Turgenev with the satirical poseur-aesthetes drawn by George Du Maurier in his “crusade against the ‘aesthetic’ movement” in *Punch* (PP 303, 347). James then dismisses the latter as “a mysterious body of people, devotees of the lovely and the precious, living in goodly houses and walking in gracious garments” and ultimately contrasted with “[a] genuine artist like Du Maurier” (368–69). Identifying his narrative with Turgenev and Du Maurier against the “poseur-aesthetes,” James constructs his own identity as a novelist-artist pursuing art for its own sake and someone definitively not part of the commercial bourgeois movement.

Yet, any clear distinction between “art for art’s sake” and the popular movements that based themselves on this ideal proved difficult for James—so “conspicuously” associated with the *Yellow Book* and, by extension, with the Decadent Movement—to maintain by the mid-1890s. This essay takes up Diebel’s suggestion that James’s *Yellow Book* tales satirize Decadent Aestheticism to present a “meta-commentary on the very act of contributing to *The Yellow Book*” (46). Whilst Diebel’s primary concern is with the economic conditions and dynamics of publicity in James’s relationship with the *Yellow Book*, I read these stories closely in relation to Aestheticism and, particularly, the immediate and evolving context of the Decadent Movement to which, I argue, James’s stories are a direct response.⁵ James would later claim that his *Yellow Book* stories “stand together, to no general intention—they minister only, I think, to an emphasised effect” (NT viii). The “emphasised effect” that links these stories is that of a satire on the radicalism and hedonism purported by the Decadent Movement and, at its forefront, the *Yellow Book*: its exploitation of Walter Pater and himself, Henry James, its cosmopolitan pretensions, and the way that it compromised “art for art’s sake” with commercialism. At the same time, James’s impressionistic mode of satire creates a telling irresolution about the Decadent Movement and its troubled relationship with the principle of “art for art’s sake.”

Revising the Problem of Influence in “The Death of the Lion”

The humor of “The Death of the Lion” was calculated—or perhaps miscalculated, given its mixed reviews—to appeal to the new readerships James hoped to find via the *Yellow Book*. The story is a witty indictment of how Decadents exploited the literary personalities and writings of the earlier proponents of “art for art’s sake,” with telling reference to the pedagogical influence of the British exponent of “art for art’s sake” with whom James identified most closely: Walter Pater.

Despite James’s morbid fascination with Wilde, it was Pater—who in the Spring 1894 Prospectus for the *Yellow Book* was named as a future contributor—with whom he identified more. Recent studies by Andrea Cabus-Coldwell and Maurizio Ascari have shown how James parallels aspects of Pater’s aesthetic theories in *The Princess Casamassima* (1886) and *The Tragic Muse* (1890), respectively (123ff; 46–47). The allusion to Pater in “The Death of the Lion” is more pointed and, perhaps, more personal than those earlier examples. Whilst writing “The Death of the Lion” James missed what would prove to be his last chance to meet Pater. On 10 August 1894, he wrote to Edmund Gosse, who had sent an account of Pater’s funeral:

I don't cease to regret that being last February (I think) at Oxford, and Herbert Warren taking me on the Sunday afternoon to see him, took me to the spare little house where Miss Pater only was drearily visible, instead of to Brasenose, where I learned with a pang, that coming from the curious Bussell, W. H. P. had been "disappointed" at my non-arrival. (*HJL* 484)

James was haunted by Pater, as a figure similar in some ways to himself and one whom he thought would have a significant legacy. In a later letter to Gosse, James concludes that "I quite agree with you that he is not of the little day—but of the longer time . . ." (qtd. in Seiler 293). Moreover, Pater's significance to James was not only literary. At a time when James was beginning to reconsider his own literary values and legacy, "perhaps prompted by the appearance of Harland and other attractive young men eager to call him 'Master'" (Diebel 51), Pater was the closest and most notable example of a proponent of "art for art's sake" who had been taken up by a younger generation, standing perhaps as a rueful reminder to James of how discipleship could adversely affect the reputation of an older writer.

"The Death of the Lion" focuses on the writer Neil Paraday, who lives quietly, writing obscure novels, and not caring that he makes little money. He is depicted as he is drawn into society to be "celebrated" (15), watched by the story's narrator, a journalist and would-be Decadent. Paraday's good humor and politeness make him an easy target for suburban society, represented by Mrs. Weeks Wimbush, a society windbag; Mr. Rumble, a painter and social climber; Mr. Morrow, a journalist; and "Guy Walsingham," a pseudonym for a successful female novelist. Passed around among them, Paraday does not have time to complete his *magnum opus* before his untimely death, and those who claim to love his work lose the uncompleted manuscript on a train, never having read it.

The tale interweaves a number of playful allusions to the *Yellow Book* and its contributors, suggesting that James understood the self-reflexivity that would quickly become characteristic of the periodical and that he was consciously participating in this mode of address. For instance, Katherine Lyons Mix has suggested that "Guy Walsingham" satirizes George Egerton, another inaugural contributor to the *Yellow Book* (171–73). The clearest example of James's *Yellow Book* allusions though may be Paraday's dying words to the narrator regarding his incomplete novel, which he does not know to have been lost:

"It would have been a glorious book."

"It *is* a glorious book," Neil Paraday murmured. "Print it as it stands—beautifully."

"Beautifully!" I passionately promised. (51)

These words echo the Prospectus for the first edition of the *Yellow Book*, in which it is promised that it will be "a book beautiful to see and convenient to handle" (n.p.). Together with suggestions of Paraday's deviant sexuality,⁶ this allusion and others create a tantalizing sense of the contemporary Decadent milieu, designed to engage the *Yellow Book* reader.

Such benign allusions to Decadent figures and values in "The Death of the Lion" prepare the ground for James's more pointed intervention on the mythology around

pedagogic-pederastic influence in the Decadent Movement. Aligning, on one hand, Paraday with the principle of “art for art’s sake” and, on the other, the narrator with the Decadent Movement, James renegotiates prevalent cultural narratives regarding pedagogic-pederastic influence and contamination, which first grew up around Walter Pater’s *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* and which was particularly celebrated in Decadent writing. These cultural narratives and James’s view of them require a brief explanation. In his recent monograph, *Henry James, Impressionism and the Public*, Daniel Hannah traces the development from Walter Pater’s idea of the impressionable subject in his *Renaissance* to the contagious impressions that proliferate from Mark Ambient’s writing in “The Author of Beltraffio.” Hannah shows that repeated references to textual impressions in “The Author of Beltraffio”—echoed, incidentally, throughout James’s *Yellow Book* stories—closely link Pater’s call for his reader-aesthete “to be ever curiously . . . courting new impressions” (*Renaissance* 152) with the fatal moral contagion that kills Ambient’s young son, Dolcino (Hannah 53–60). The depiction of Ambient’s “perverse, seemingly infectious acts of influence” in “The Author of Beltraffio” (60) certainly accords with contemporary, late-Victorian, views on the dangerous influence of the sensuality, atheism, and hedonism at the heart of Pater’s *Renaissance*. In a stern letter, John Wordsworth suggested to Pater, “had you known the dangers into which you were likely to lead minds weaker than your own [with the publication of *The Renaissance*], you would, I believe, have paused” (Seiler 62). In defining Decadence twenty years later, Arthur Symons celebrated the “dangers” of Pater’s influence, claiming him to be the most significant harbinger of Decadence in the English-speaking world (“Decadent” 866–67). Meanwhile, the conception that a book could exert a pernicious influence on impressionable youths was reflected in the influence of “the yellow book” on Dorian’s Decadence in Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (121–23),⁷ and Pater’s influence in particular was taken up later by T. S. Eliot when he wrote that his “view of art, as expressed in *The Renaissance*, impressed itself upon a number of writers in the nineties, and propagated a confusion between life and art which is not wholly irresponsible for some untidy lives” (7).

Bearing this context in mind, it is possible to return to “The Death of the Lion.” This tale challenges the repeated narratives of Pater’s dangerous influence on younger and impressionable, implicitly male, subjects. It reverses the power dynamics of the pedagogic influence and contagion, often centered on Pater, mythologized within Decadence, and represented in “The Author of Beltraffio.” At the outset, the guileless writer Paraday is set in stark contrast to the disingenuous and self-serving hack writer-narrator, who conceives himself as Paraday’s follower. It is not the older writer, Paraday, a believer in “art for art’s sake,” who is a force of corruption but in fact his self-appointed disciple. The narrator positions himself with Paraday against “the public,” whom he mocks as vulgar and terrifyingly modern (*DL* 18). However, his conceit that his interest in Paraday is more worthy than that of Paraday’s middle-class followers is consistently undermined by discontinuities between the events of the narrative and his representation of them. For example, the narrator initiates the end of Paraday’s self-imposed exile in order to secure his own job as a journalist but with ironic lack of self-awareness criticizes others for using Paraday for their own ends. He declares that “Two-thirds of those who approach him only do it to advertise themselves” (32).

The narrator's evocation of Pater's *Renaissance*, as he hears Paraday reading from his unfinished novel, effectively reverses the pedagogic-pederastic power balance between them:

The idea he now communicated had all the freshness, the flushed fairness, of the conception untouched and untried: it was Venus rising from the sea and before the airs had blown upon her. I had never been so throbbingly present at such an unveiling. But when he had tossed the last bright word after the others, as I had seen cashiers in banks, weighing mounds of coin, drop a final sovereign into the tray, I knew a sudden prudent alarm. (*DL* 13–14)

Rowe and Diebel have each noted this scene, but the fact that they do not make the link with Pater's *Renaissance* means that its full significance has been obscured (Rowe 113; Diebel 52–53). The narrator's pastiche of Pater's Botticelli here is calculated to criticize the distortion of Pater's delicate language and intellectual ideas amongst his self-appointed disciples and, by extension, the discourse of pedagogic contamination associated with his name. Venus was, of course, a prominent figure in Pre-Raphaelite and Aestheticist works. However, this passage extends James's earlier engagements with Pater to draw particularly on the significance of Botticelli's Venus in *The Renaissance* as a symbol of cultural renaissance and the open enjoyment of the sensual pleasures of aesthetic experience (Hext 93–96). As Pater writes, the image of "Venus rising from the sea" is "a record of the first impression made by [Hellenism] on minds turned back towards it, in almost painful aspiration, from a world in which it had been ignored so long" (*Renaissance* 40–41). Most immediately, James's allusion to this passage—the most famous literary evocation of Botticelli's Venus in the nineteenth century—links Paraday to Pater's early conception of "art for art's sake" as the return of the Hellenic spirit in the late-nineteenth century. Further, Paraday is linked with the reserved, melancholic sensuality, tinged with the implicit sadness and foreshadowing of death, in Pater's rendition of Venus.

These points notwithstanding, James's extended Paterian metaphor ultimately says more about his narrator than about Paraday. It shows him to be, as Ascari has written of the narrator of "The Author of Beltraffio," "inclined to an aesthetic rewriting of reality" (43). After all, the adoption of Pater's Venus to describe Paraday's reading is ludicrously melodramatic. The jarring clunkiness of the adverb "throbbingly" shows the narrator to be a pretentious and unsophisticated imitator of Pater, entirely lacking the stylistic delicacy that characterizes his prose, or that of James or Paraday, a presentation of botched influence that James would echo in "The Coxon Fund" when Ruth Anvoy steals and garbles the narrator's Paterian metaphor of the crystal man as her own insight (305–06, 327). In "The Death of the Lion," the latent homoeroticism of Pater's text foregrounds the true nature of the narrator's erotic attachment to Paraday (Rowe 115–17), whilst the sudden movement of the passage from Pater's Venus metaphor into an anticipation of Paraday's financial success draws attention to the fragility of the conceit of "art for art's sake" to be able to separate art from the marketplace. It highlights the narrator's precarious position, first, as a journalist very much aware that "the great principle" of marketing a journal is to "create the demand [we] required" (*DL* 8) and, second, as Paraday's disciple who purports a

selfless devotion to art. Such tensions map directly onto the aims of “the worshipful Harland” in pursuing James. But they also evoke James’s own precarious position as a defender of “art for art’s sake” involved in writing for the *Yellow Book* “for gold.”

James had used Pater’s Botticelli as a symbol of Aestheticist-Decadent pretensions before. In his 1883 essay, “George Du Maurier,” with implicit allusion to Du Maurier’s 1880 *Punch* cartoon, “Nincompoopiana (A Test),” in which Prigsby declares “Before a Botticelli I am mute!” (n.p.), James ironically sketched the fashion for aesthetic dress and interior design thus:

The love of Botticelli has actually remoulded the features of several persons. London, for many seasons, was full of Botticelli women, with wan cheeks and weary eyes, enveloped in mystical, crumpled robes. Their language was apt to correspond with their faces; they talked in strange accents, with melancholy murmurs and cadences. They announced a gospel of joy, but their expressions, their manners, were joyless. (*PP* 369)

James’s language here buttresses the suggestion of a distinctly Paterian “gospel of joy” that is, in effect, “joyless.” For in *The Renaissance*, Pater’s ekphrastic description particularly focuses on the “cadaverous,” “subdued” tones of Botticelli’s Venus (40–41). His passage on the painting ends with a reflection on the juxtaposition between these tones of “unmistakable . . . sadness” and the idea of Venus as “the goddess of pleasure” (41). Further to this, James’s use of Pater’s frequently used adjective “strange” operates as an allusion within an allusion. Pater uses this word to describe the “strange draperies” of Botticelli’s Venus (*Renaissance* 40). This word has further significance as Pater’s way of gesturing toward deviant desire.⁸ The reappearance of Botticelli in “The Death of the Lion” links the narrator with the affected and superficial women described in “George Du Maurier.” In effect, James’s depiction divorces the movements of Aestheticism and Decadence from the principle of “art for art’s sake” on which they were founded, showing the self-anointed disciples of Pater not as artists but as pretentious imitators.

Via its allusions to Pater, “The Death of the Lion” makes an important addition to thinking about James’s preoccupation with the dynamics of literary influence and discipleship. The cult of The Master, which he would later nurture via his frequent burning of letters and the selections, rewritings, and prefaces of the New York Edition, “can almost be seen as the author’s attempt to monopolize himself” (Anesko, *Monopolizing* 7). If “The Aspern Papers” foreshadows James’s determined attempts to prevent posthumous biographical criticism of him, then “The Death of the Lion” foreshadows his attempts to control his literary legacy via the cultivation of young literary disciples and the New York Edition.

Provincial Decadence in “The Coxon Fund”

“The Coxon Fund” represents a shift of focus in James’s satire on the Decadent Movement. Concentrating his satirical eye now on the cosmopolitan image of Decadence and the *Yellow Book*, James’s tale suggests that Decadence is, in truth, a movement of middle-class, provincial, busy-bodies and aspiring imitators. The story centers on Frank Saltram’s failure to fulfill his intellectual promise, whilst he moves from house

to house enjoying the hospitality of those who believe him to be a genius. Eventually Saltram talks himself into being awarded the Coxon Fund by young American Ruth Anvoy and ceases even with the effort of trying to write his long-promised *magnum opus*. In 1909, James wrote that

The Coxon fund is such a complicated thing that if it still seems to carry itself—by which I mean if its clearness still rules here, or still serves—some pursued question of how the trick was played would probably not be thankless. (NT xviii)

Its complications center on how to understand Saltram's identity within the middle-class Decadent Movement depicted by James. For whilst James mercilessly parodies Decadent cosmopolitanism throughout the story, he leaves open the question of whether Saltram is himself a middle-class scrounger or whether he has in fact found the key to living for art alone in its purest sense.

Like the Decadent Movement more broadly, the *Yellow Book* positioned itself as a cosmopolitan venture and, in particular, an intensification of what James had termed "the general transfusion" between Europe and America (AP 75). For practical reasons prominent British Decadent writers sought to be cosmopolitan in the 1890s in a way that earlier writers in the aesthetic tradition had not: securing transatlantic publication enabled them to avoid the moral censorship of publishers and circulating libraries in Britain, the most famous case being Wilde's publication of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* in 1890–91 (Brake 421–23). By 1894 the *Yellow Book* was able to exploit the Transatlanticism associated with Decadent writing by boasting its price in exotic dollars (\$1.50) and the names of its American Publisher ("Boston: Copeland & Day") on its front cover. These Transatlantic aspirations are another of the reasons why Harland and Beardsley courted James. In "The Coxon Fund," though, James mocks this cosmopolitan image. The narrator and his circle are identified as people aspiring to be Decadents, with references such as the narrator's "serried rows of [his] little French library" (295). However, they are located within the London suburb of Wimbledon, where Saltram lives a life of middle-class ease with his benefactors, the Kent Mulvilles. James's careful references to Wimbledon Common and the District Railway, as well as the stuffy drawing rooms of this middle-class couple, with their "alters of cushioned chintz" (310), make the spaces of the story claustrophobic. Such chintzy domestic interiors evoke the crowded drawing rooms and lounges of Du Maurier's Postlethwaite and Maundle cartoons, as well as anticipating the way in which the Decadent interiors of Poynton and Waterbath would become the focus of James's satire of Decadence in *The Spoils of Poynton*, the plot for which he began to develop a few months before writing "The Coxon Fund" (NB 136–38). Saltram's triumphs in Wimbledon lead to him being dubbed "the oracle of Wimbledon" (CF 313), and, when the action briefly leaves Wimbledon, it goes not to one of the cosmopolitan centers in which Decadent literature tended to envision itself—Paris, central London, New York—but to the small, fictional, northern city of Clockborough, a "smokily-seeing city" (312), the Yorkshire industrial town of Doncaster (329), and the industrial Midlands city of Birmingham where Saltram travels with other benefactors, the Pudneys. The provincial and industrial centers inhabited by Saltram directly oppose the cosmopolitan image used as a marketing tool by the

Yellow Book. After all, Saltram is artistically and intellectually isolated amidst the small-minded circle into which he is drawn and remains, being too languid to attempt to extricate himself.

James's decision to locate Saltram in the suburbs and industrial towns of England, where he resides with the highest bidder, presents Decadence as a middle-class fiction or a half-serious aspiration that can be bought as easily as William Morris wallpaper. As such it brings to mind the way in which James had reported on *Lady Windermere's Fan* on 23 February 1892:

... there is so much drollery—that is “cheeky” paradoxical wit of dialogue, & the pit & gallery are so pleased at finding themselves clever enough to “catch on” to four or five ingenious—too—ingenious mots in the dozen, that it makes them feel quite “d caden t” & raffin  & they enjoy the sensation as a change from the stodgy. (*LL* 245–46)

In this letter, the middle-class audience is flattered by an intellectual performance tailored to make them feel “clever enough to ‘catch on’” and just racy enough to offer excitement without threatening their conservative moral values. The paradoxical nature of truth and dissolution of rigid Christian moral values that seem to be positioned at the heart of Decadent writing by Wilde's aphorisms are commodified as merely “cheeky” devices for the audience's entertainment. “The Coxon Fund” represents a development in the interest James shows here in the relationship between Decadence, morality, and middle-class conservatism. Certainly, Saltram's benefactors try to commodify him for their entertainment. Unlike the case of Wilde though, who enjoyed playing to the gallery, Saltram is only half-willing to participate. Saltram's supporters have to consciously turn a blind eye to his many unnamed indiscretions because they do not want to be forced to give him up: amongst Saltram's benefactors there is silence about these “unutterable things which in those years our eyes had inevitably acquired the art of expressing” (338), which effectively becomes their acceptance of his rumored indiscretions. These are the great mystery at the center of the narrative, echoing the silences over Dorian Gray's behavior, famously described by Wilde in the *Scots Observer*: “What Dorian Gray's sins are no one knows. He who finds them has brought them” (116). A letter detailing Saltram's indiscretions is locked away by the narrator, unread, and later destroyed, still unread. The letter is a canker that could destroy only Saltram and the provincial, middle-class circle, at which Saltram is the center, were its knowledge to be shared. More than this, James's narrative could not reconcile the sordid details of Saltram's life within its own artistic symmetry. This letter would put the truth of Saltram's behavior beyond reasonable doubt, bringing about a direct conflict between the amoral pursuit of sensuality for its own sake at the heart of Decadence and the conservative principles of the middle classes who affect Decadent interior designs and enjoy feeling “quite ‘d caden t’ & raffin .”

Still, “The Coxon Fund” leaves the question of exactly how Frank Saltram himself comments on Decadence artfully unresolved. Saltram is a figure redolent with Decadent associations, constructed on echoes of some of the most prominent figures connected to Aestheticism and Decadence: Wilde and Swinburne, as well as allusions to S. T. Coleridge. James himself was careful to resist the simple identification between Saltram and Coleridge that many subsequent critics have fastened onto:

he stressed that Coleridge inspired Saltram only as “a dim reflexion and above all a free rearrangement” (*NT* xvii). There are certainly resonances between Saltram’s life with the Kent-Mulvilles in Wimbledon and that of Coleridge with James Gilman in Highgate (which had been a village north of London) between 1823 and his death. The connection between Saltram and Coleridge is not without Decadent resonances. Swinburne had claimed Coleridge as a forerunner of Aestheticism in his 1869 selection of Coleridge’s poems (v–xxiii), an impression that was seconded, albeit on different grounds, by Pater’s eponymous essay on the poet (*Appreciations* 105–06). Still, Michèle Mendelssohn is right to note that Saltram actually bears more resemblance to Oscar Wilde than to Coleridge (233n16). The clearest examples are Saltram’s dedication to putting his “genius” into his personality, his pudgy middle-aged figure, and dandyish attire and the story’s dialogue that pastiches the aphoristic, Wildean exchanges James found excessively droll in *Lady Windermere’s Fan* (*CF* 303, 323). Elsewhere, there are also resonances between Saltram’s domestic circumstances and those of Swinburne: since 1879 Swinburne had lived with Theodore Watts-Dunton at Number 2, The Pines, in Putney just north of Saltram’s Wimbledon. In a relationship paralleled by Saltram and the Kent-Mulvilles, Swinburne had moved to The Pines to be financially and emotionally cared for by Watts-Dunton, himself a contributor to the *Yellow Book*.⁹ Edmund Gosse, the closest mutual friend of Swinburne and James, blamed Swinburne’s move to The Pines for the decline of his later poetry. Despite his ambivalence about Swinburne,¹⁰ James was deeply curious about what he phrased, in accordance with Gosse’s view, “the early setting-in of his arrest of development [as a writer]” (*HJL* 638). Saltram’s long “meditative walks” over the Common (*CF* 300) further tease the reader with their recollection of the fact that Swinburne also walked daily over Putney Heath and Wimbledon Common, whilst Saltram’s character is animated by a similar enigmatic naivety and haunting gaze that would feature in Max Beerbohm’s description of Swinburne in his essay, “No. 2. The Pines” (45). Of course, Saltram is not a pastiche of Swinburne any more than he is a pastiche of Wilde or Coleridge. He comes into existence as an ambivalent *impression* of the kind Mark Ambient creates, the effects of which are irreducibly ambiguous. As James wrote in his *Notebooks*, this tale was to be

an Impression—as one of Sargent’s pictures is an impression. . . . That has the great advantage, which perhaps after all would have been an imperative necessity, of rendering the picture of Saltram an implied and suggested thing. (160)

James’s composite allusions in the character of Saltram position him between the Aesthetic and Decadent Movements. In this one character, James effectively conjures both the fading radicalism and infirmity associated with the older Coleridge and Swinburne and the commercialism and sexual deviancy of Wilde in the 1890s. The way that James distances Saltram from the narrative means that it is not possible to resolve which, if any of these characters, most defines him. Exactly how Saltram relates to the movements Swinburne and Wilde were so strongly identified with cannot be determined.

Saltram’s problematic identity is closely related to the underlying ambiguity of how “The Coxon Fund” comments on the Decadent Movement and its relation to

“art for art’s sake.” The story never resolves whether Saltram represents the persistence of “art for art’s sake” in spite of the middle-class movement that surrounds him, or whether he is as small-minded as they are. The evidence is mixed. Saltram’s existence amongst a small provincial group, which he impresses with his “fine talk” (298), means that he has no artistic influence or legacy. To stress this point to his reader, James silences Saltram in the narrative: the narrator says that he is a great speaker but he remains a shadowy figure, whose dialogue only appears in echoes when it is repeated by others. Meanwhile, Saltram’s pudgy body and the formless days, in which he often gets out of bed at lunchtime, embody the “disease of form” identified by Symons with the Decadent Movement (“Decadent” 859). In the context of the *Yellow Book*, this formlessness, implicit in Harland’s policy of letting writers define their own word limit, had given the infamous over-writer James space to extend “The Coxon Fund” to 25,000 words. Saltram, though, illustrates the dangers of formlessness, with his lack of discipline undermining his ability to even begin writing. Yet, Saltram’s conversation and disorganized days extricate him from the heteronormative conventions of those around him.¹¹ Like Gabriel Nash in *The Tragic Muse*, Saltram is “a native inhabitant of the dialogue-world who has strayed into a novel,” reminding us that “dialogue is a homosexual genre, not only through its Socratic associations, but also through its negative relations with realist fiction” (Womack 148). It is through dialogue, therefore, that Saltram is liberated to defy the conventions of bourgeois plot, middle-class morality, and the capitalist marketplace. Ultimately, the narrator acknowledges the singular quality in Saltram’s autonomy. The “massive, monstrous failure” of Saltram’s artistic productivity (*CF* 293) recedes and he is transfigured:

I stopped short as he turned his face to me, and it happened that for some reason or other I took in as I had perhaps never done before the beauty of his rich blank gaze. It was charged with experience as the sky is charged with light, and I felt on the instant as if we had been overspanned and conjoined by the great arch of a bridge or the great dome of a temple. . . . I had told Miss Anvoy that he had no dignity, but what did he seem to me, all unbuttoned and fatigued as he waited for me to come up, if he didn’t seem in short majestic? (350)

The qualities that were hitherto apparent markers of Saltram’s laziness and fecklessness, here, render him transcendent. In this moment he is set above the petty people who surround and squabble over him. His dignity and majesty are founded on the fact that he is not subject to their moral principles or standards of success, and the image of his face “charged with experience” draws these qualities together in an echo of Pater’s view, in the conclusion to *The Renaissance*, that in life, “[n]ot the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end” (165).

It is uncertain whether Saltram’s transfiguration in this scene is an assertion that he exists for his own sake or whether this vision of Saltram is merely the fancy of the narrator who, like many of Saltram’s followers, needs to believe in him. Still, Saltram’s “failure” to produce measurable, sellable, artistic *output* may be the only way that he could side-step the tensions between the marketplace and “art for art’s sake.” Were Saltram to complete and publish a written work as his supporters want him to, like Neil Paraday he would be entered into the literary marketplace where

his work would become subject to its definition of success. Paraday's lost novel and Saltram's fine talk allow them to exist as artists forever in the realm of artistic possibility, never sullied by those "mounds of sovereigns." Still the irresolution over what precisely Saltram represents divides him from Paraday. The later tale suggests a blurring of lines between the writer of "art for art's sake" and the movement that loosely appropriated this principle, perhaps even to the point where it is no longer possible to tell the difference between them.

"Art for art's sake" vs. the Decadent Marketplace in "The Next Time"

Owing to its explicit concern with the publishing industry, "The Next Time" has attracted more scholarly commentary than James's other *Yellow Book* stories. However, critics have yet to bring the explicit economic concerns of the tale together with the equally explicit context of the Decadent Movement and James's difficult position in relation to it via the *Yellow Book*.

The story of Ralph Limbert, an Aesthetic novelist who is unable to write works with enough commercial appeal to support himself and his family, is not just the story of a Jamesian writer ostracized by the publishing industry at large; more specifically, it is the story of how "art for art's sake"—represented by Ralph Limbert—comes to be at odds with the commercial strategies of the Decadent Movement, represented by his publishers, editors, and public. In this way, "The Next Time" extends James's meditation on the dynamics between "art for art's sake" and the Decadent Movement into a question of whether it is possible to compromise the principle of art for its own sake for financial success in the literary marketplace.

Katherine Lyons Mix, Richard Salmon, and Anne Diebel are amongst the critics to have discussed how "The Next Time" evolved in dialogue with James's own heightened frustrations at being undervalued in the literary marketplace himself (166–67; 71–74; 54–56). There are two main catalysts of these frustrations, which have direct relevance to James's view of Decadence in the spring of 1895. The first is that, although James claimed to have begun writing for the *Yellow Book* in large part "for gold," he protested against the sum of £35 offered by Harland and Lane for "The Next Time" and wrote to Lane that he could not contribute to the *Yellow Book* again for such a small sum (Diebel 50).¹² The second is that James records that he had the idea for "The Next Time" on 26 January 1895, just a few weeks after *Guy Domville* had its disastrous premiere at the St. James Theatre. This humiliation, as has been well-documented, was thrown into greater relief by the success of Wilde's *An Ideal Husband*, which opened on the same night.¹³ "The Next Time" is born out of the way that James felt undervalued by the very periodical that had courted him, in part, by claiming to stand up for "art for art's sake," whilst the failure of *Guy Domville* stood in bleak contrast to the triumph of Wilde's commodified version of "art for art's sake." Anesko makes the point that James would not allow himself to be a martyr in the literary marketplace as Limbert is (*Friction* 143).

As in James's earlier *Yellow Book* stories, "The Next Time" is founded on impressionistic glimpses of figures and tropes associated with Decadence, though the absence of the playfully humorous allusions seen in "The Death of the Lion" indicates a more somber tone. Limbert formulates and reformulates the Gautierian-Swinburnian-Paterian principle of "art for art's sake" as an attempt to reify his early

disinterest in the market. The narrator records, for example, that his idea of success rests on “some stray dictum to the effect that the man of his craft had achieved it when a beautiful subject of his expression was complete” (TNT 32). Later, when Limbert becomes disillusioned, he declares to the narrator:

We've sat prating here of “success” like chanting monks in a cloister, hugging the sweet delusion that it lies somewhere in the work itself, in the expression, as you said, of one's subject or the intensification, as somebody else somewhere says, of one's note. (35)

The first simile evokes Pater's view in his 1889 essay, “Style,” that “the disinterested lovers of books, will always look to it, as to all other fine art, for a refuge, a sort of cloistral refuge, from certain vulgarity in the actual world” (*Appreciations* 14). Indeed, with his final musical metaphor, James crystallizes Pater's discussion of the principles of prose writing in “Style,” which, with self-conscious debt to Flaubert's letters, uses musical metaphors throughout to evoke perfect prose style. The irony at the heart of “The Next Time” is that “art for art's sake” turns out not to be a principle that can be rejected at will. The fact that Limbert can only write artistically perfect but commercially unsuccessful works means that “art for art's sake” ultimately reemerges an *a priori* principle of creation.

In the tale, the incontrovertible identification between Limbert and “art for art's sake” puts him at odds with the element of the publishing industry that would claim him as its own if only he could commercialize his aesthetic values to make them more marketable: the Decadent press. James particularly identifies Limbert's publisher with The Bodley Head—later remembered by Holbrook Jackson as “the chief home of the new [Decadent] movement” (45). Further to this, Limbert's relationship with a new and pretentious periodical called the *Blackport Beacon* illustrates James's own wry cognizance of how he had been used by Harland and Beardsley. Limbert is appointed to write for the *Blackport Beacon* “precisely because his name, which was to be on the cover, *didn't* represent the chatty” (TNT 34), only to be fired because he is too highbrow. James is fictionalizing the point made by Diebel that Harland and Beardsley used his name in the *Yellow Book* for cultural capital (46) whilst, as in “The Coxon Fund,” subverting its cosmopolitan pretensions with the fictional town of Blackport, an amalgam of the northern towns of Blackpool and Southport.

Limbert's situation opens a broader issue than James's personal frustrations with the *Yellow Book* and the reception of *Guy Domville*: it uses its impressionistic allusions to the Decadent Movement in order to question how prose of the kind Pater advocates in “Style” is valued in the fiction market. James suggests tensions between Limbert's writing, *for its own sake*, the public's conception of this, and the Decadent industry that publishes it. Limbert's writing itself is defined on only one occasion, with an ambiguous allusion to Pater. When the narrator describes Limbert's novel, *The Major Key*, as “that fiery-hearted rose as to which we watched in private the formation of petal after petal” (TNT 25), he conjures both the most famous sentence of Pater's career, “to burn always with this hard gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy is success in life” (*Renaissance* 153), and W. H. Mallock's parody of Pater as Mr. Rose in *The New Republic* (1877).¹⁴ In effect, despite the narrator's declarations of Limbert's artistic brilliance, there is a nagging doubt as to whether Limbert is a

maverick novelist in the “art for art’s sake” tradition, who is misunderstood by the public, or whether he is a writer whose affectations separate him from those who would be his public. Like the character of Saltram and the “impressions” made by Mark Ambient, Limbert’s writing is also an *impression*, the effect of which is as indeterminate as when the narrator reflects on Limbert’s first novel: “We had at times some dispute as to whether ‘The Major Key’ was making an impression, but our difference could only be futile so long as we were not agreed as to what an impression consisted of” (28). Such tensions extend to the production of Limbert’s *The Major Key*, which echoes the “Keynotes” series of books, illustrated by Aubrey Beardsley, and published by The Bodley Head, between 1894 and 1897. It also evokes the short story collection, *Keynotes* (1893), published in that series by regular *Yellow Book* contributor George Egerton.¹⁵ The production of the novel is gently mocked, as the narrator explains that, like the “Keynotes” series and the *Yellow Book*, Limbert’s *The Major Key* is published in “lemon-coloured volumes, like a little dish of three custards” (28). James might be evoking a number of reviews parodying the color of the *Yellow Book*, but a poem entitled “Jaundice” from the April 1894 edition of *Punch* is the closest: “Leaves—like Autumn leaves—the tint of custard, / Cover like a poultice made of mustard, / General aspect bilious” (203).

James’s *Yellow Book* stories show disdain for the exploitation of the first British proponents of “art for art’s sake,” especially Pater, as well as for the cosmopolitan pretensions and the concessions to the market that were particular features of the Decadent Movement, with a sharp satirical wit rarely seen beyond his private letters. Still James cannot, and does not, simply dismiss the Decadent or Aesthetic Movements. His satire is measured with the haunting questions of what it would mean for him, as a writer on the peripheries of the Aesthetic and Decadent movements, to write simply for its own sake and what, of the original vision of “art for art’s sake,” is retained within the fledgling Decadent Movement. Ultimately, James is unable to answer these questions. In each of his stories the resolution becomes more uncertain. Whilst there are clear distinctions between the motivations of Neil Paraday and the narrator in “The Death of the Lion,” Frank Saltram is an indeterminate figure whose motivations are never clear. The distinction between “art for art’s sake” and the popular movements based on it, which had been a cornerstone of *Partial Portraits*, becomes increasingly unsustainable. Finally, Limbert illustrates the limitations of novels written on the principle of “art for art’s sake” if they cannot find a readership.

NOTES

¹Examples include the majority of the essays collected in Izzo and O’Hara. These essays illustrate a trend to approach James’s engagements with Aestheticism between 1873 and 1890 via his depictions of aesthetes (e.g., Gilbert Osmond, Gabriel Nash, and Hyacinth Robinson), as well as his interactions with figures closely associated with Aestheticism (e.g., Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde). Mendelssohn pays close attention to James’s personal and literary antagonism—and fascination—with Wilde beginning with their first meeting in the early 1880s continuing through to his Wildean depiction of Gabriel Nash in *The Tragic Muse*. Other recent works that reveal James’s occupation with the themes and characters of Aestheticism include Francescato.

²The rich seam of criticism regarding particularly Decadent influences on James’s prose style in the novels of his third phase was first suggested by Freedman. Teahan takes up Freedman’s suggestion that *The Sacred Fount* (1901) is “a decadent novel par excellence: in its equation between the acts of narration and sexual obsession and madness; in its imaging of human relations as a form of vampirism; even in the art that ‘its characters gaze upon’” (Freedman 203; Teahan 109–10). Sherry uses illustrations from *The Awkward Age* (1899) and *The Wings of the Dove* (1902) to suggest that James’s late prose style elides its narrative’s moral authority into free indirect discourse, to buttress immorality with the beauty of its expression, “demonstrating the poetics of decadence in practice” (116).

³Symons's poem "Stella Maris" in Issue One attracted some of the strongest criticism in reviews of the *Yellow Book*.

⁴For earlier discussion of these stories see Mix's *A Study in Yellow: The Yellow Book and its Contributors* (1960), which describes some of the key circumstances and relationships surrounding James's contributions. Bass's essay "Lemon-Colored Volumes and Henry James" (1964) is also useful background, framing James's stories in the *Yellow Book* between "The Author of Beltraffio" (1884), "The Lesson of the Master" (1888), and *The Ambassadors* (1903) in order to discuss how they extend James's presentation, and exploration, of the narrators' identity as a would-be aesthete.

⁵James made minor changes to the texts, refining the language in places and making alterations to punctuation, before their republication (alongside "The Lesson of the Master" and "The Figure in the Carpet") in the New York Edition. Given that the current essay deals specifically with James's relationship with the *Yellow Book* I will quote exclusively from the original *Yellow Book* texts.

⁶Rowe discusses Paraday's sexuality at greater length (113–17). Deviant sexuality is a significant element in James's relationship with Aestheticism and Decadence, and it is notable that each of his *Yellow Book* stories features a close homosocial bond between the narrator and the writer, offset by an unsatisfactory heterosexual romance.

⁷As Dierkes-Thrun has recently argued, using evidence from Wilde's typescript, the "yellow book" in *Dorian Gray* is likely to be *Monsieur Vénus* by Rachilde (1884). However, it should not be forgotten that the influence of Pater's *Renaissance* is never far from Wilde's mind. Wilde was a self-appointed disciple of Pater's work when he arrived at Oxford in 1874 and in *De Profundis* he writes that *The Renaissance* "has had such a strange influence over my life" (169), echoing his narrator in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

⁸"A Study of Dionysus" (1878) is one of various examples. In this essay, Pater describes the influence of Dionysus, whom he links closely with his friend, the artist and convicted sodomist, Simeon Solomon. Amongst these examples is a description of "that strange dance of the Bacchic women" (*Greek* 53). Wilde's use of the word "strange" also alludes to the sexual deviancy implicit in Pater's use of this word (*De Profundis* 169).

⁹Watts-Dunton published two poems with the general title of "Two Letters to a Friend" (in July 1895) in the same volume containing "The Next Time." These poems were published under the name Theodore Watts, as he changed his name to Watts-Dunton only in 1896 for legal reasons.

¹⁰James had a long-standing, though grudging, respect for Swinburne's prose style but was intensely irritated by his critical (in)capacities. For example, James wrote in an 1876 review that "Mr. Swinburne in these pages is as hysterical and vociferous as usual" (*EL* 1283).

¹¹These include the romantic subplot between the narrator and Anvoy, which mirrors the heterosexual romantic subplot between the narrator and the American ingénue in "The Death of the Lion." In each case, the romance is unresolved, contributing to the sense of unsatisfactory loss at the end of the tale.

¹²James originally intended to write *What Maisie Knew* as a 10,000 word story for the *Yellow Book* (Mix 169). However, the only further piece he published there was an extensive review of the collected letters between Sand and de Musset, entitled "She and He: Recent Documents" (January 1897). The *Yellow Book* published its final issue in April 1897.

¹³In a letter to William James reflecting on the failure of *Guy Domville*, Henry draws an extensive comparison between the way in which his own "delicate, picturesque, extremely human and extremely artistic little play, was taken profanely by a brutal and ill-disposed gallery" and "the thing that is now succeeding at the Haymarket—the thing of Oscar Wilde's" (*HJL* 507, 509).

¹⁴In the New York Edition James extends this sentence, adding at the end "and flame after flame" (*NT* 175), which serves to emphasize the link with Pater's "gem-like flame."

¹⁵In addition to Mix's suggestion, noted above, that Egerton is satirized in "The Death of the Lion," it is relevant that Egerton contributed a short story titled "The Captain's Book" to volume 6 of the *Yellow Book*, in which "The Next Time" appeared. An illustration of Egerton by Walton had also been published in the previous edition of the *Yellow Book* (7).

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