



PROJECT MUSE®

Framed

Miller, Elizabeth C

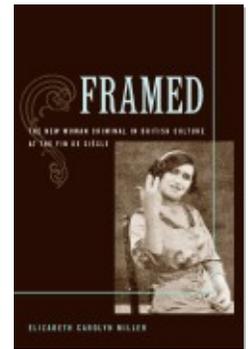
Published by University of Michigan Press

Miller, Elizabeth C..

Framed: The New Woman Criminal in British Culture at the Fin de Siecle.

Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008.

Project MUSE., <https://muse.jhu.edu/>.



➔ For additional information about this book

<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/6420>



DYNAMITE, INTERRUPTED

Gender in James's and Conrad's Novels of Failed Terror

Henry James's 1886 novel *The Princess Casamassima* and Joseph Conrad's 1907 novel *The Secret Agent* are in many ways two very different works—different in tone, style, and narrative voice—but both participate in a popular genre of crime narrative that emerged in 1880s Britain: the “dynamite novel.” Dynamite narrative treats the characteristically modern topic of political terror; it doesn't always include literal dynamite—the mode of terror may be an explosion, an assassination, or some other threat to the social order—but always depicts a politically motivated criminal plot.¹ Both James's and Conrad's dynamite novels are set in 1880s London and concern the same constellation of issues regarding gender, terrorism, and individual liberty within modern economic and political systems. As with other crime narratives that I discuss in this project, female criminality plays a central role in their investigations of these issues. James and Conrad imagine the impulse to “terrorize”—to threaten the destruction of civilization—in feminine terms, and present a feminized culture of consumerism as an anarchic force threatening civilization. In both novels, masculinity and femininity are central thematic concerns, and changing gender roles represent and convey broader changes in the organization of modern society.²

In this chapter, I explore the relationship among three seemingly distinct facets of late-Victorian society that both James and Conrad link to

the proliferation of political terrorism in London: the rise of first-wave feminism, the social-scientific theorization of masculine degeneracy, and the emergence of late-capitalist consumer culture.³ Both novels insist on the interrelation of these issues, and make a case for such an interrelation by means of a shared literary premise: the fictionalization of failed historical attempts at political violence, mounted by radical political groups in late-Victorian London. Given all of the successful terrorist attacks undertaken in 1880s London, such as the dynamiting of two underground railways in October 1883, the 1884 bombings of Victoria Station in February and Scotland Yard in May, or the near-simultaneous attacks on the House of Commons, Westminster Hall, and the Tower of London on 24 January 1885, it is surprising that the two most canonical literary representations of late-Victorian terror should use futile attempts at political violence as their climactic, or anticlimactic, events. According to an 1894 report in London's *Strand Magazine*, without counting "minor explosions," there were eighty-six "important dynamitic efforts" in Britain between 1881 (the year of the first such attack, which occurred in Salford on 14 January) and 1892, in addition to a number of assassinations ("Dynamite" 120).⁴ Rather than documenting how terrorism had traumatized the national psyche during the final decades of the nineteenth century, however, James and Conrad depict societies seemingly impervious to it.

If terrorism is defined as a strategy of desperation on the part of an individual, or small minority of individuals, to produce an effect upon otherwise untouchable structures of power, then these narratives—depicting *failed* terror—seem to question all individual efficacy in the face of monolithic institutions. On the surface, this seems an odd conclusion for Conrad and James to reach, since they lived in a society so frequently disrupted by terror. The late-nineteenth-century rise in weapons of mass destruction such as dynamite would appear to make lone individuals *more* capable of influence through large-scale violence: certainly, many radical revolutionists of the time imagined this to be the case.⁵ Instead, Conrad and James use terrorist acts to symbolize the negligible power individuals actually have to effect social change in the modern world: to wreak destruction may be possible, they suggest, but to modify social conditions is not. In the period of Britain's history with which James and Conrad are concerned, the consolidation of consumer capitalism and the expansion of legal interventionism provide a context for such a reading. Lauren Goodlad has argued that John Stuart Mill, for example, came in his later work "increasingly to believe that the diminished power of individuals

was an inevitable product of modern historical conditions” (224); James and Conrad likewise represent, through the vocabulary of masculine degeneration, diminished individual freedom in the face of late-capitalist consumerism and newly consolidated state control over individuals.

In a political and cultural climate steeped in the language and ideals of personal liberty, James and Conrad attempt to delineate this historical condition in individual rather than systemic terms; they imagine the individual’s new relation to economic and political structures in the terms provided by late-Victorian gender discourse. Theories of gender gave them a model for conceptualizing the modern individual’s complex relationship to power. Terrorism functions in both novels as a metaphor for individual efficacy within a dauntingly complex and crowded society, but gender comes to symbolize one’s access to power within that society. The two novels are deeply interested in the significance of contemporary controversies surrounding gender and sex roles, such as the scientific theorization of degenerative masculinity, the rise of first-wave feminism, and the perceived feminization of public culture via the expansion of consumerism. By interlacing topics central to these gender debates with narratives of failed terror, I argue, James and Conrad pinpoint the particular use-value of gender ideology in the political imaginary at this time.

In other words, both novels show that the reassessment of conventional Victorian gender ideology in the last two decades of the nineteenth century was a central component in the way that the new political and economic conditions of modern society were imagined and understood. Categories of masculinity and femininity were useful metaphors to make sense of the individual’s changing relation to power, and gender roles function in these novels to signify an emerging conception of the individual within the modern nation-state. James and Conrad suggest that the prototypically modern subject—hemmed in by over-civilization—inhabits a feminine role of pliant consumption. Conventional anxiety about degenerative masculinity thus functions, in these texts, to convey individual powerlessness within apparently monolithic structures of power. As we have seen in other texts, however, female criminals in crime fiction of this period are not so easily relegated to pliant or disciplined symbolic roles. While the novels’ male characters are tragically relegated to positions of “feminine” submission, the female characters are subversively criminal, modeling the peculiarly feminine and necessarily consumerist means by which agency is enacted in modern society.

James's and Conrad's means of representing terror strikes a dissonant note in the context of late-nineteenth-century dynamite fiction. Far more common were narratives that exploited fear of terrorist attacks for sensational effect, emphasizing the fragility rather than the imperviousness of the social order. In Grant Allen's 1894 story "The Dynamiter's Sweetheart," for example, a young American woman in Paris, Essie, falls in love with a fiery, hypermasculine, daredevil revolutionist who attempts a terrorist explosion. Allen sets the story in France rather than Britain, but presents a vast underworld of organized terrorists across Europe. The group is advanced and proficient beyond Essie's imagination: "Her simple little New England mind could not grasp the full awesomeness of Continental Anarchy" (146). Clearly, for English readers, the prospect of such a sophisticated movement only a channel away would be unsettling. A whole subgenre of fiction organized around a similar economy of fear and sensation emerged in England in the 1880s, and remained popular in the decades prior to World War I. It was not uncommon for such narratives to depict foiled acts of terror, as James and Conrad do; dynamite, bombs, and "infernal machines" were, after all, quite unreliable technology. *The Princess* and *The Secret Agent* are nevertheless unusual, however, in the extreme ineffectiveness that plagues their radical groups. In these novels, radical inefficacy actually becomes a source of terror in itself. James and Conrad were obviously influenced by Robert Louis and Fanny Van de Grift Stevenson's immensely popular 1885 burlesque of the dynamite genre, *The Dynamiter*, which I discuss in the next chapter, but *The Princess's* and *The Secret Agent's* elements of generic parody serve a much different function.⁶ Both novels clearly evoke the dynamite genre, and both authors' letters indicate that they hoped the novels would be popular, but their focus on inept terrorists and unthreatening political crime make them uniquely skeptical participants in this popular fictional discourse.⁷

James gleaned the idea for the plot of *The Princess Casamassima* from an 1884 conspiracy to assassinate the German emperor during a state visit to England, a plan that fell apart when a key collaborator withdrew.⁸ This collaborator became the inspiration for Hyacinth Robinson, James's protagonist, who ends the novel by killing himself with the gun intended for the assassination. Similarly, Conrad's novel is based on Martial Bourdin's abortive and self-destructive endeavor to blow up the Greenwich Observatory in 1894 (though *The Secret Agent* is set in 1886). In Conrad's



FIG. 2.—“BABY'S BOTTLE?”

FIG. 3.—EXPLOSIVE COAL.

Fig. 26. From “Dynamite and Dynamiters” (120)

novel, the bomber's brother-in-law is the agent provocateur of an anonymous Eastern European embassy with a mandate to scare Britain into undercutting civil liberties in favor of stricter legislation against political radicalism.⁹ (Under the Extradition Act of 1870, Britain had extended a liberal policy of asylum toward political criminals, much to the annoyance of other European governments.) *The Secret Agent* is thus doubly skeptical of the putative threat implied by the idea of “terrorism”: not only is the attack bungled, so the only casualty is the bomber himself, but an official state government actually authorizes the undertaking.¹⁰ Conrad undercuts conventional depictions of terror as an individual, rather than governmental or collective, category of crime. Moreover, both Conrad and James challenge the central message at the heart of contemporary accounts of terror: that terrorism should be a persistent source of fear, cementing the appeal of state protectionism.

An 1894 article in the *Strand* called “Dynamite and Dynamiters” is typical of the discourse surrounding terror from which James and Conrad depart. This piece is the first in a series called “Crime and Criminals,” which provided readers with documentary reports about various kinds of crime. The author warns of the dangers of “dynamiters” and catalogs, James Bond style, various weapons and devices a terrorist might use. A total of twenty-six photographs accompany the article, so readers can visualize the effects of terrorism as well as the “infernal devices” themselves. Most of the weapons appear eerily innocuous: one bomb, for example, is disguised as a baby bottle (figure 26). Some of the images depict



FIG. 21.—EXPLOSION AT SCOTLAND YARD.

Fig. 27. From “Dynamite and Dynamiters” (130)

contraptions used in notorious bombings, or pistols from infamous assassinations; others portray the damage incurred in various attacks, such as the 1884 bombing of Scotland Yard (figure 27) or the 1885 bombing of the Tower of London (figure 28). Citing Colonel Majendie, chief inspector of explosives, the article describes how state authorities combat and defuse terrorist threats, but insists that the public at large needs to be more aware of how bombings are accomplished in order to prevent them. The article presents terrorism as an imminent, persistent danger, and focuses on how dynamite technology allows a lone individual to create the kind of mass destruction previously limited to government militaries: “it is only by becoming on a more familiar footing with the manners and customs of those enterprising individuals who seek to shatter anything between our nerves and our residences, either by relieving us of our purse or planting a dangerous species of explosive at our front doors, that we are the better able to take care of ourselves, our relatives, and our belongings” (119). These terrorists are free agents—“enterpris-

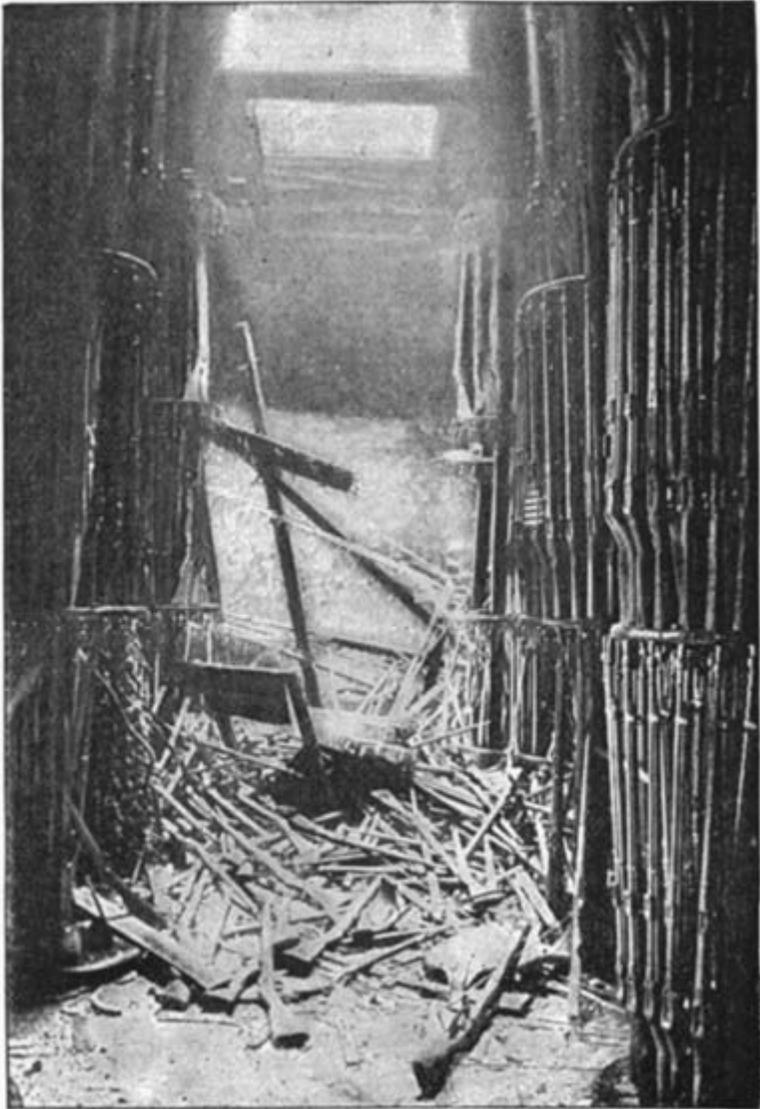


FIG. 24.—EXPLOSION AT TOWER OF LONDON—THE BANQUETING HALL.

Fig. 28. From "Dynamite and Dynamiters" (131)

ing individuals”—whose motivations are comparable to a purse thief. The article also suggests that terrorists are frightening and unpredictable in their choice of targets. Any harmless citizen may, for example, become the victim of a dynamiter with an explosive cigar:

A gentleman who has no great love for you, and who fully appreciates the weakness of human nature of the male persuasion in seldom refusing a cigar, offers you one out of his case:—

“Something very choice, sir, I assure you,” he says. He is a perfect stranger to you, but—well, a cigar’s a cigar, and you accept the kind offer. The benevolent cigar proprietor sees you light up, and you puff away in peace. He is suddenly called away. The cigar explodes!
(121–22)

In this account, dynamiters are savvy, pervasive, independent, and utterly volatile, a depiction that stands in sharp contrast to the terrorists of *The Princess* and *The Secret Agent*, who are confused, incompetent, and altogether less scary. Unlike the article in the *Strand*, and unlike the bulk of dynamite fiction, a reader is not likely to emerge from these novels fearing imminent, indeterminate danger from terrorists. In Conrad’s depiction of his bomber’s target, for example, he emphasizes the hopelessness of the terrorist enterprise rather than its menace; the Greenwich Observatory represents that which is most indifferent to human intervention: time, astronomy, and the inexorable laws of nature.

James’s and Conrad’s departure from their contemporaries, in focusing on abortive attempts to engender terror and on the unfeasibility of the terrorist enterprise, perhaps accounts for another remarkable similarity between the two novels: both sidestep the topic of Ireland and Home Rule. This is a striking omission, as Barbara Melchiori and Eileen Sypher also discuss, considering that Fenians committed nearly all of the terrorist acts in late-Victorian Britain.¹¹ Avoiding the “Irish question” altogether, James and Conrad make their terrorists anarchists, socialists, and nihilists, a surprising choice considering that these groups produced very little “terror” in Britain, and since neither novel has a sincere interest in exploring these political philosophies. Indeed, James’s slippage between the terms *anarchism*, *nihilism*, and *socialism* suggests a confusion on the part of the characters—or, some would say, the author—about their motivating ideology.¹² Conrad’s novel, meanwhile, features a militant group “open to all shades of revolutionary opinion” (62), but if its members operate from various ideological perspectives, they share a tendency to—

ward inconsistency of belief. James's and Conrad's neglect of Irish nationalism and their disengagement from radical political discourse powerfully inflect a key theme that the two novels share: masculine degeneration. Rather than representing terrorism's failure as reassurance of Britain's prowess in exterminating political crime or in defusing radical political ideas, the novels instead render abortive terror as symptomatic of a national crisis in masculinity. The attempts at political violence, sublimated in both novels into acts of self-destruction, signify nothing so much as the terrifying combustion of the individual masculine body.

Debates about a degeneration of masculinity surfaced in scientific and cultural discourse in the 1880s and persisted at least until World War I.¹³ These debates were informed by a widespread public sense, during the period in which James and Conrad were writing, of Britain's imperial and economic weakening after a century in which it had been the most powerful nation in the world. In an 1885 letter to Grace Norton, James wrote of his adopted homeland, "the 'decline,' in a word, of old England, go[es] to my heart," and imagined that he would be alive to see "this great precarious, artificial empire . . . expended, struggling with forces which, perhaps, in the long run will prove too many for it" (*Letters* 67). James's and Conrad's contemporaries often attributed Britain's national decline to a host of concerns about gender, as Elaine Showalter has discussed, focusing on a fear that British men were becoming degenerate and effeminate while British women were becoming deviant and masculine. In 1904, alarmed by more than a decade of disproportionately unfit military recruits, the British government formed the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration to address the perceived crisis in masculinity. The Boy Scouts is one enduring legacy of this cultural moment.

Critics have uncovered a fixation on the degenerate masculine body and on eroding masculinity in a number of late-Victorian genres, including aestheticism, decadence, and New Woman fiction. The colonialist adventure stories of authors like Conrad, Rider Haggard, Rudyard Kipling, and Robert Louis Stevenson have likewise been read as a "male romance" genre depicting the regeneration of English masculinity in the invigorating lawlessness of the colonial frontier.¹⁴ Amid this cultural context, the diminished agency of the male revolutionaries in James's and Conrad's novels is particularly evocative: each has a cast of enervated and ineffectual male radicals whose representation is steeped in the language of degeneration. The revolutionists are threatening not because of their action, but because of their inability to act; the menace that

they represent is not one of anarchic violence, but submissive debility. As imagined by James and Conrad, feminine—rather than masculine—qualities constitute the heart of the terrorists' physical corruption; both novels use the rhetoric of gender, body, and sexuality to describe a condition of political inaction and paralysis.

The Princess's revolutionaries are notably passive and sedentary. They are, as a contemporary critic wrote in the *Athenaeum*, "a set of people who . . . had not among them so much purpose as would be required to drown a kitten" (Hayes 175). Their regular meetings at the Sun and Moon pub have "plenty of palaver," but never any action (280). Predictably, James imagines their "palaver" as rubbish: "there were nights when a blast of imbecility seemed to blow over the place, and one felt ashamed to be associated with so much insistent ignorance and flat-faced vanity" (280). Regenia Gagnier has argued that James's working-class characters in *The Princess* tend to "grotesque stereotyping" (*Subjectivities* 112) and "objectification" (114), but in a sense his characterization goes beyond stereotyping to create an altogether new form of deprecation. It is customary to depict proletarian rhetoric against the establishment as "ignorant" or "flat-faced," but James more unusually depicts the meetings as entirely lacking in active, physical menace. This is not Edmund Burke's rough, brutish mob; this is a group with bodily as well as mental inertia. Even amid what James calls "the deep perpetual groan of London misery," which "seemed to swell and swell and form the whole undertone of life" (283), the talk at the Sun and Moon remains "loud, contradictory, vain, unpractical babble" (291). Hyacinth, the novel's protagonist, begins to feel that the "blundering, divided counsels he had been listening to only made the helplessness of every one concerned more abject" (293). The emasculation of this "helpless" group is obvious when one member compares his comrades to "a collection of pettifogging old women" (291); at another point, the narrator describes one participant as a closet hairdresser with a "high, lustrous curl" atop his head (290), and continual references to the group members' "vanity" (280, 291) associate them with a characteristically feminine weakness.

James also associates Hyacinth, initially an enthusiastic advocate of these meetings, with effeminacy and masculine degeneracy. Hyacinth believes, following conventional scientific wisdom, that his "natural portion" is "an inherited disposition to crime" (371), handed down from his mother who murdered his father. He is referred to as "a thin-skinned, morbid, mooning little beggar, with a good deal of imagination and not much perseverance" (72). The term "morbid" connotes possession of a

corrupt physical trait, and if Hyacinth lacks “perseverance,” he lacks one of the most valued characteristics of Victorian masculinity. Hyacinth’s physicality, as Wendy Graham also discusses, matches the androgynous quality of his name: James writes, “he had never got his growth. . . . His bones were small, his chest was narrow . . . his whole figure almost childishly slight” (104). As a child, early in the novel, he is “exceedingly diminutive,” and his “features were smooth and pretty; his head was set upon a slim little neck” (62–63).¹⁵

The men of *The Secret Agent* are also physiologically inferior, and in describing them, Conrad makes overt reference to scientific theories of degeneracy. Stevie, would-be bomber of the Greenwich Observatory, is practically a poster child for degeneration. Son of an alcoholic and brother of a murderess, he has a “vacant droop of his lower lip” (49), and his address is sewn inside his coat so he won’t get lost. The novel presents Stevie’s debility, as well as his sister Winnie’s tendency toward criminality, as metaphorical assaults on patriarchy and male authority: Stevie’s abusive father was “a man wounded in his paternal pride . . . since one of his kids was a ‘slobbering idjut and the other a wicked she-devil’” (220). Degenerative masculinity and unruly femininity are here correlated with the failure and breakdown of paternal rule over the home—a salient topic of the day, in the context of debates about interventionist legislation and the sanctity of domestic patriarchy. Though his sister and mother describe Stevie with euphemisms such as “delicate” or “queer,” Alexander Ossipon explicitly associates him with the theories of Cesare Lombroso: “Very good type, too . . . of that sort of degenerate. It’s good enough to glance at the lobes of his ears. If you read Lombroso” (77). Ossipon functions as *The Secret Agent*’s parody of scientific socialists such as the eugenicist Karl Pearson. An ex-medical student who goes by the nickname of “the Doctor,” he is a disciple of Lombroso who has authored a “popular quasi-medical study . . . entitled *The Corroding Vices of the Middle Classes*” (77). He is ironically described, however, as “cast in the rough mould of the Negro type” (75). Degeneracy, as I discuss in chapter 1, was thought to manifest in atavistic, “primitive” features—in other words, features similar to non-European races. The narrator’s description thus implicates “the Doctor” in the same racist system of typology that he projects onto others.¹⁶

The novel’s other revolutionists are as inconsistent as Ossipon and even less effectual than Stevie. Michaelis, a Marxist materialist, finds so much comfort in the inevitability of the historical dialectic that he feels no need to act in the revolutionary cause: “he saw already the end of all

private property coming along logically, unavoidably” (74). Consequently, he has no qualms about living fat off the patronage of a wealthy aristocratic woman. His ineffectiveness as a “voice” against capitalism is implied by his dampened speech: he has “a voice that wheezed as if deadened and oppressed by the layer of fat on his chest” (73). Karl Yundt, another anticapitalist rhetorician, is similarly ineffectual. Though he self-identifies as a “terrorist,” he is ironically afflicted with gout, the disease of wealthy decadence (74). Like an aristocrat, he enjoys a leisured existence: “The famous terrorist had never in his life raised personally as much as his little finger against the social edifice” (78). The Professor, an associate of the group who makes bombs, is likewise weak and sickly. He serves as the novel’s mouthpiece for Nietzschean individualism, but is apparently no *Übermensch*: “The lamentable inferiority of the whole physique was made ludicrous by the supremely self-confident bearing of the individual” (88).

Meanwhile, the novel’s titular secret *agent*, Adolph Verloc, shows no penchant for agency: he has “an air of having wallowed, fully dressed, all day on an unmade bed” (46), and holds a “philosophical unbelief in the effectiveness of every human effort” (52). The narrator refers to Verloc as “burly in a fat-pig style” (52), and here, as in *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad uses obesity to signify a repudiation of the militaristic restraint with which he had lived during his years at sea. Conrad typically depicts such discipline and efficiency as the hallmark of masculine productivity; thus the narrator’s denunciation of the anarchists’ obese and lethargic bodies illustrates the distinctively physiological way that the novel conceptualizes and represents male dissipation. In both novels, the failings of the men are identified as failings in their bodily productivity and physiology.¹⁷

This focus on the degenerate male body extends to the novels’ depiction of male sexuality: the men cannot produce, nor can they reproduce. Throughout *The Princess*, Hyacinth’s desultory attempts at sexual intimacy prevent him from cementing his masculinity through heterosexual conquest. He pursues two women from vastly different backgrounds, but in the end, both reject him for another man. Hyacinth explicitly links his sexual unproductiveness to what he sees as a biological defect—his criminal inheritance: “He would never marry at all—to that his mind was absolutely made up; he would never hand on to another . . . the inheritance which had darkened the whole threshold of his manhood” (105). His only “bedroom scene” involving a woman occurs at the novel’s conclusion, when the Princess finds him in bed, dead, with a

pistol: “she flung herself beside the bed, upon her knees. Hyacinth lay there as if he were asleep, but there was a horrible thing, a mess of blood, on the bed, in his side, in his heart. His arm hung limp beside him, downwards” (590). The sexualized quality of this suicidal tableau suggests a latent morbidity in Hyacinth’s sexual makeup.

Earlier in the novel, Hyacinth has a different kind of “bedroom scene” that parodies a ceremony of marriage, but rather than making his vow to a wife, he pledges himself to the great socialist leader Hoffendahl.¹⁸ The scene provides a brief glimpse into the revolutionary organization, which is structured around a patriarchal hierarchy, excluding women to maintain a homoerotic dynamic and a male familial bond. Hyacinth compares his oath, for example, to the “vow of blind obedience” taken by “the Jesuit fathers . . . to the head of their order” (333). As Deborah Esch also points out, Hyacinth’s bedroom vow to Hoffendahl closely resembles a man-to-man wedding ritual. Calling the ceremony “the most important event of his life,” Hyacinth says, “I pledged myself, by everything that is sacred . . . I took a vow—a tremendous, terrible vow—in the presence of four witnesses” (327). He calls Hoffendahl “the very remarkable individual with whom I entered into that engagement” (329). When the Princess asks about the nature of his vow, Hyacinth says, “I gave my life away” (327); Hoffendahl “will require my poor little carcass” (329). The ceremony thus celebrates Hyacinth’s yielding of his body to another man, parodying the origin of the wedding ritual—the passing of the woman’s body from the father to the husband—and creating a nonprocreative union. During the ceremony, three men witness the vow, including Hyacinth’s surrogate father Poupin.

In *The Secret Agent*, persistent motifs of masturbation and pornography likewise underscore the novel’s emphasis on what was at the time considered male sexual perversion.¹⁹ The anarchists of *The Secret Agent* meet in the back room of Verloc’s pornography shop and are frequently associated with the sexual perversion of nonprocreative autoeroticism: the Professor, for example, wanders the streets of London like a masturbatory suicide bomber, “keeping his hand in the left pocket of his trousers, grasping lightly the indiarubber ball” that will detonate the bomb he keeps on his person (102). Onanism is imagined here as not only nonprocreative, but downright destructive.²⁰ The Professor’s “frenzied puritanism of ambition” (102) is sublimated through the stroking of his “detonator,” which resembles “a slender brown worm” (91). Similarly, the narrator links Yundt’s unproductiveness as a terrorist to his sex-

ual inadequacies: he is characterized by a “worn-out passion, resembling in its impotent fierceness the excitement of a senile sensualist” (74). None of the men in the novel has any children. By focusing on the non-reproductive sexuality of the anarchists, Conrad emphasizes the dissipated morbidity of their bodies. In both novels, male sexual fruitlessness explicitly parallels male terrorist fruitlessness.

SEXUAL TERROR: ANARCHIC FEMALE CRIMINALITY

In James's and Conrad's portrayal of impotent and unproductive male terrorists, we can recognize a broader shift in the cultural understanding of criminal deviance. Martin Weiner, among others, has outlined this development: the focus of social anxiety about deviant behavior, he claims, underwent a sea-change at the end of the Victorian period, wherein “fears of a dam-bursting anarchy began to be replaced by opposing fears of a disabled society of ineffectual, devitalized, and overcontrolled individuals molded by environmental and biological forces beyond their control” (12). *The Princess* and *The Secret Agent* develop this new concept of social deviance in their treatment of masculinity, and both novels attribute such “overcontrolled” individuals to a political, social, and economic organization that has become too large, too complex, or too sophisticated to register the existence or resistance of the individual actor. I would also argue, however, that this new understanding of criminality is really only apparent in the novels' *male* criminals. Like other authors from this period, James and Conrad draw on an alternative conception of social menace in their portrayal of female deviance, which indeed constitutes a potential “dam-bursting anarchy” in the texts. The incapacity of the novels' men is set against the violent energy of the women, so that although James and Conrad depict male criminals as effeminate to indicate their paralyzed political agency, the female characters simultaneously challenge this association of femininity and inaction.

The precipitating event of *The Princess's* plot, for example, is when Hyacinth's mother murders his father, while the climactic action of *The Secret Agent's* plot is when Winnie Verloc murders her husband. These two emblematic scenarios are both stabbings committed with long knives and are both crimes of passion (unlike most murders by real Victorian women, which were typically premeditated, according to Judith Knelman and Lucia Zedner). Both murders result, too, from a denial of

agency on the part of the male victim. Lord Frederick disputes that he is Hyacinth's father, abjuring his sexual agency or potency.²¹ Similarly, Verloc disavows his responsibility for Stevie's death, imagining himself a passive player in a chain of causation beyond anyone's foresight or control: he "accepted the blow in the spirit of a convinced fatalist. The position was gone through no one's fault really. A small, tiny fact had done it. It was like slipping on a bit of orange peel in the dark and breaking your leg" (215). The novels thus share, at their narrative cores, men who deny their own capacity for productive or effective action, and are consequently killed by murderous women brandishing phallic knives. Enebrated masculinity and female criminality don't just coexist in these novels, but mutually constitute one another.

The Princess's central concern with female criminality is apparent from its opening scene, when Mrs. Bowerbank, warden of the Millbank women's prison, visits Amanda Pynsent ("Pinnie"), the guardian of young Hyacinth. Millbank is the prison where Hyacinth's mother is serving her sentence for the murder of Lord Frederick, and Bowerbank visits to ask if Florentine Vivier, now on her deathbed, can see her son before she dies. This opening scene provides readers with a synopsis of the crime at the heart of Hyacinth's existential dilemma: as Bowerbank describes it, "nothing was proved except that she stabbed his lordship in the back with a very long knife, that he died of the blow, and that she got the full sentence" (57). In many ways, Florentine's murder of Lord Frederick resembles a revolutionary political assassination. The murderer is lower class and French, while the victim is an aristocrat; besides the obvious allusion to the Revolutions of 1789 and 1848, as well as the 1871 Paris Commune, France remained a hotbed of radical activity at the time *The Princess* was published.²² We learn, too, that Florentine's father, whom Hyacinth is named after, was himself an ardent French radical. Florentine's method of killing Lord Frederick—stabbing him in the back with a very long knife—is likewise reminiscent of a stealthy assassination rather than the impassioned intimacy of a face-to-face impulse. The novel thus begins with a successful assassination by a woman, and ends, in contrast, with Hyacinth's suicidal desertion of his own mission to assassinate the duke. James depicts Hyacinth's decision as a rejection of his maternal "criminal inheritance," but the link between gender and politics at the heart of the narrative is nevertheless explicit in this juxtaposition: of the two contrasting assassinations that bookend the novel, the one that is accomplished is feminine and subversive, while the aborted attack is degenerately masculine.

Against the backdrop of Florentine's crime, the beginning of *The Princess* presents other images of criminalized women, and even harmless Pinnie begins to imagine herself an offender in the presence of the prison warden. Pinnie sees Bowerbank as "an emissary of the law" (58), and during her visit Pinnie is "unable to rid herself of the impression that . . . somehow the arm of the law . . . was stretched out to touch her" (59). Bowerbank is described as a "big, square-faced, deep-voiced lady who took up, as it were, all that side of the room" (61), and as "a high-shouldered, towering woman, [who] suggested squareness as well as a pervasion of the upper air" (55). Representing, in Pinnie's mind, a vast, undivided system of law and imprisonment—"square" in its unaccommodating indifference—Bowerbank intimidates her listener: Pinnie "felt herself to be, in an alarming degree, in the eye of the law; for who could be more closely connected with the administration of justice than a female turnkey, especially so big and majestic a one?" (56). After Bowerbank's visit, Pinnie describes to her neighbor Mr. Vetch how she came to adopt Hyacinth, and "defended herself as earnestly as if her inconsistency had been of a criminal cast" (71).

Pinnie's rigorous internalization of her society's legal institutions may make her the paradigmatic Foucauldian subject, as Mark Seltzer has argued, but Seltzer does not account for the fact that in this novel, Pinnie's sense of her own criminality is inseparable from her gender. The book's initial chapters present a peculiarly feminized scenario of social order, enforced by Bowerbank (particularly remarkable since female prison wardens didn't even exist in Britain at the time in which the novel is set), internalized by Pinnie, with Florentine as the disciplined violator.²³ Seltzer notes that Millbank Prison, where Bowerbank is a warden and Florentine a prisoner, was built according to Jeremy Bentham's panoptical scheme, and that James visited the prison in preparing to write the novel, but he neglects the significant fact that it is a woman's prison. James presents the modern "justice" system as quite conspicuously feminine: maternal in its control over the person—Bowerbank, unsurprisingly, has seven children of her own (55)—and feminizing in the submission it induces in Pinnie and in the confinement it confers on Florentine. Social order is maintained, the novel suggests, through systematic effeminization at every level of organization, and femininity functions here as a metaphor for the kind of individuality demanded by modern social systems and highly structured "maternalistic" bureaucratic institutions. Just as we saw in the Sherlock Holmes stories, new social controls in modern society are depicted as emblematic of women's increasing public power.

Pinnie's fantasies of criminal culpability are soon literalized in a stay (however short) at the women's prison, for she and Hyacinth do ultimately visit Florentine at Millbank, and the symbolic value of this institution looms large in the novel. In a narrative focused on a group of male revolutionaries plotting a political crime, it is striking that the only actual prisoners are female, reinforcing the novel's depiction of antisocial agency as feminine, but also portraying incarceration as an inherently feminine condition. The trip to the prison aggravates Pinnie's internal sense of perpetual wrongdoing, and she has "no confidence that once she passed through the door of the prison she should ever be restored to liberty and her customers" (78). Strangely enough, however, the female criminals inhabiting the prison seem to be hardly women at all. They are "dreadful figures, scarcely female . . . of lumpish aspect" (82). Pinnie remembers Florentine Vivier as the lively woman that her name suggests, "pretty" and "her idea of personal . . . brilliancy," but now "there was no beauty left in the hollow, bloodless mask that presented itself. . . . She looked unnatural. . . . Above all she seemed disfigured and ugly, cruelly misrepresented by her coarse cap and short, rough hair" (84).²⁴ That *The Princess* presents female prisoners as unwomanly may seem to contradict the assertion that the novel depicts imprisonment as inherently feminine, but the androgyny of the female prisoners suggests here that they have lost their identity or personhood through institutionalization; they are now merely "lumpish" with faces like "masks." James describes an exhaustion of identity within modern institutions, and uses femininity to indicate the pliancy, confinement, and submission that institutionalization entails.

In a novel riddled with women criminals, beginning with a dramatic scene in a women's prison, *The Princess's* title character is nevertheless its most subtly worked-out study in female transgression, and she is a far more effective antisocial force than the women of Millbank. Few critics have remarked how odd it is that James named the book after the Princess Casamassima, formerly Christina Light of his 1875 novel *Roderick Hudson*. In the novel that bears her name, she is completely absent from the first third of the text, and Hyacinth remains the focus throughout. Possibly, James was influenced by Ouida's 1884 novel *Princess Napraxine*, which features an eponymous protagonist who closely resembles James's princess.²⁵ In any case, James's title plainly acknowledges the Princess Casamassima's symbolic import in his novel: a revolutionary and a would-be terrorist who yearns to destroy civilization, she is the heart of James's investigation into gender, modern subjectivity, and social order.

Through the course of the narrative, the Princess follows a trajectory of opinion that is opposite from that of Hyacinth and the other male characters in the book; as Hyacinth, Vetch, and even Paul Muniment become gradually reconciled to the status quo, the Princess's opinions become more and more militant.²⁶ In a novel about political radicalism, she is the most militant character: she divests herself of her wealth in the second half of the book, and toward the end, tries to usurp Hyacinth's mission to assassinate the duke.²⁷ Despite her profound revolutionary commitment, however, her male co-conspirators remain suspicious of her desperation to "go deep" in the movement. Even her lover Paul tells her: "I don't trust women—I don't trust women!" (456).²⁸

The Princess's attempts to enter into the radical underworld are frustrated again and again in the course of the novel, primarily due to her sex. Her difficulty in becoming involved in the revolution led to her meeting Hyacinth in the first place. She calls him up to her box at the theater, she says, "to ascertain what really is going on; and for a woman everything of that sort is so difficult" (197). Despite all her attempts, however, the Princess is never really accepted into the revolution's inner ranks. After she donates much of her fortune to the cause, Paul tells her: "I should let you know that I *do* consider that in giving your money—or, rather, your husband's—to our business you gave the most valuable thing you had to contribute." The Princess asks: "You don't count then any devotion, any intelligence, that I may have placed at your service[?]" Paul responds: "You are not trusted at headquarters." "Not trusted! . . . I thought I could be hanged to-morrow!" "They may let you hang, perfectly, without letting you act" (579). The Princess's fervor to act for the cause is inhibited by the male revolutionaries, although none of them, ironically, can act on their own. At one point, inspired by Hyacinth's vow to Hoffendahl, the Princess asks: "Don't they also want, by chance, an obliging young woman?" Hyacinth replies: "I happen to know [Hoffendahl] doesn't think much of women. . . . He doesn't trust them" (329). Given the outcome of the novel, this statement is laden with dramatic irony: the Princess would have been a far more effective assassin than Hyacinth, as she herself is perfectly aware. As radical as the revolutionary brotherhood's opinions are about class, government, economics, and property, they see these as having nothing to do with women's interests. In contrast, the novel itself insists on the significance of gender in conceptualizing politics.

The Princess's interest in the cause began, in fact, as a way to escape the patriarchal hegemony that she also encounters among the revolu-

tionists. Speaking of her marriage to Prince Casamassima, she tells Hyacinth (as the narrator summarizes): “If he could have seen her life . . . the evolution of her opinions . . . would strike him as perfectly logical. She had been humiliated, outraged, tortured; she considered that she too was one of the numerous class who could be put on a tolerable footing only by a revolution” (250). Hyacinth gleans that her unhappy marriage had made her “modern and democratic and heretical” (251). Indeed, the root of the Princess’s personal animosity toward the social order is not only the disparity between rich and poor—as with other members of the group—but the economic restrictions on women that forced her into a prostitutional marriage: “in the darkest hour of her life she sold herself for a title and a fortune” (259). The source of her revolutionary fervor is a deep reservoir of rage against the society in which she “had been married by her people, in a mercenary way, for the sake of a fortune and a title, and it had turned out as badly as her worst enemy could wish” (249). The Princess has become conscious of her objectification within a marriage that amounted to an economic exchange. Being objectified and prostituted in this way gives her common ground with socialist laborers who are subject to the instrumental logic of capitalism.

The Princess thus becomes involved in the revolutionary movement largely because she believes, in the tradition of Marxist feminism, that socialism alone has the capacity to improve the condition of women. She says to Paul: “Don’t you consider that the changes you look for will be also for [women’s] benefit? . . . If I didn’t hope for that, I wouldn’t do anything” (498). This was also the hope of late-Victorian feminists like Eleanor Marx, who thought socialism was more likely to meet feminist goals than the bourgeois women’s movement of the day. If the Princess believes socialism will answer “the woman question,” however, the male revolutionaries in her circle are much less interested in ameliorating sexist oppression. Paul tells her: “I don’t think [the changes] will alter your position” (498); even his sister Rosy, he says, “will continue to be, like all the most amiable women, just a kind of ornament to life” (499). Indeed, Paul does not seem to believe sexist oppression exists at all; when the Princess says, “It’s far better, of course, when one is a man,” he responds, “I don’t know. Women do pretty well what they like” (451–52).²⁹

Thwarted, the Princess attempts to build a homosocial, familial alliance of her own with another female revolutionist. When she meets Lady Aurora Langrish, an aristocratic woman who also wants to level the class system, the two women immediately connect. Lady Aurora tells

Hyacinth: “If I were a man, I should be in love with her” (429), and the Princess says, “dear lady, we must make a little family together” (433). Lady Aurora responds to her advances, “indulging in the free gesture of laying her hand upon that of the Princess” (435), and soon the Princess is “always inhaling Lady Aurora’s fragrance, always kissing her and holding her hand” (483). Some critics have interpreted the Princess’s attraction to Lady Aurora as an example of her fickleness or whimsicality, as though she temporarily abandons the revolution to fraternize with Lady Aurora in the slums. I view this relationship instead as an extension of her revolutionary spirit. Denied a role in the “official” movement to bring down the social order, the Princess’s antisocial rebellion begins to manifest in other arenas, including the sexual. The Princess and Aurora’s sexually charged friendship suggests a connection between political and sexual dissidence, also apparent in the novel’s male characters.³⁰ Both women are sexual threats within their society because of their unwillingness to fulfill “normal” sexual expectations. The Princess has abandoned her husband and developed the reputation of being “a bedizened jade” (207), whose “own husband has had to turn her out of the house” (204). Paul calls her “a monster” (227) who reels in unsuspecting, lower-class men and “swallows ’em down” (226). Lady Aurora also opts out of the sexual script. One of seven unmarried daughters born to a man with a title but little wealth, she has declassed herself: “I do as I like, though it has been rather a struggle. I have my liberty, and that is the greatest blessing in life, except the reputation of being queer, and even a little mad, which is a greater advantage still” (221). Hyacinth admires her, and believes she “was not a person to spare, wherever she could prick them, the institutions among which she had been brought up and against which she had violently reacted. . . . she appeared to have been driven to her present excesses by . . . the conservative influences of that upper-class British home” (222).

In depicting Lady Aurora and the Princess, James gestures toward lesbianism as an avenue of political and sexual rebellion, but ultimately retreats from this line of contention. The Princess’s revolutionary deployment of her sexuality remains a key focus of the text, but shifts from same-sex desire to cross-class desire. Aurora and the Princess share a fascination for working-class men, and both women are attracted to Paul. For a while, nonetheless, their alliance is a success: they work in the slums together, and the “two ladies had liked each other more, almost, than they liked any one” (438). As Paul’s relationship with the Princess develops, however, the union between the women fades. When Hy-

acinth goes to see Aurora near the end of the novel, each recognizes that “the Princess had . . . combined with [Paul] in that manner which made [Hyacinth’s] heart sink and produced an effect exactly corresponding upon that of Lady Aurora” (540).

The Princess fails to establish a female familial revolutionary association structured according to homosocial bonds like that of the men, but she remains a sexual radical: Paul, not Lady Aurora, becomes the new object of her monstrous desires. Paul is far below the Princess in social rank, but their relationship is marked by a deployment of power on his part, enjoyed by the Princess in a way that can only be described as masochistic. When Paul speaks rudely to her, she “blushed on hearing these words, but not with shame or with pain; rather with the happy excitement of being spoken to in a manner so fresh and original” (449–50). She decides this “very different type of man appeared to have his thoughts fixed on anything but sweetness; she felt the liveliest hope that he would move further and further away from it” (450). The Princess encourages Paul’s sadistic impulses—telling him, “you are the sort of man who ought to know how to use [women]” (453)—as a means, it seems, of gratifying masochistic desires.³¹

The Princess’s masochism sexualizes her political efforts for the revolution, suggesting that her seemingly politically motivated degradation is actually pleasurable. When she gives up her large country house to move to a “mean and meagre and fourth-rate” section of London, Hyacinth believes she “wished to mortify the flesh” (417). Her new eating habits, devoid of past luxury, are also called “mortifications” (422). In pathologizing the Princess’s sacrifices for the cause, the novel appears to dull the impact of her pleas for class equality and women’s rights; but in the context of James’s broader treatment of political agency, the Princess’s complex relationship to power actually better suits her for revolutionary political action in the modern capitalist state. In divesting herself (and the royal family of the Prince) of inherited wealth, she is the only revolutionist in the novel who enacts positive action for political change—and it is clear that she is willing to sacrifice much more than money. She is of course much wealthier than most characters in the novel, but other socialists such as Paul and Hyacinth repeatedly say that if they had wealth, they would enjoy it rather than give it away. When Hyacinth receives a small inheritance from Pinnie and Vetch, he promptly splurges on a trip to the Continent, where his revolutionary opinions dissipate, replaced by passions for “culture,” “art,” and “civilization.”

The Princess, thrilled by “mortification,” is the only character in the

novel who can resist such enticements. Embracing a nunlike dress and an austere mode of life, she appears to reject the consumerist spirit of the era. By continually emphasizing her “capriciousness,” however, James also hints that the Princess’s new asceticism is itself a manipulation of image for effect—a maneuver in perfect accord with a consumerist model of femininity. In a subtle way, James presents this maneuver as a model of political effectiveness: the Princess’s powerless image paradoxically endows her with political power. Indeed, even her sexual “mortifications” indirectly promote her interest in destroying social hierarchies: in the context of her relationship with Paul, the Princess’s masochism may be submissively feminine, but her “brutish” lover is still a chemist from Lancashire with a “vulgar nose,” an alcoholic father, and a laundress mother. The Princess deploys her image and sexuality as assaults on a society she is bent on annihilating. Her pleasure in performing austerity, and in being submissive to those “below” her, threatens the foundations of power in her society, especially since she is still married to the Prince. Denied involvement in the revolutionary committee, she achieves complex subversive action in other arenas through indirect, seemingly mortifying means.

The Secret Agent follows a trajectory similar to *The Princess*, contrasting degenerate masculinity with female criminal agency, but closes less ambiguously in a sequence of violent deaths and an eruption of nauseous despair. In James’s novel, the Princess models an indirect yet effective program of feminine rebellion in a climate of political paralysis; Conrad, however, aligns female criminality with forces of entropy and degeneration at work in modern civilization, the same currents that characterize the novel’s depiction of modern economic and political institutions. Early in the novel, for example, Verloc goes to see Vladimir at the embassy and is ordered to commit an act of terrorism that will convince the British government to curtail civil liberty and crack down on political radicalism. This scenario is deeply ironic, not only because an official state government is waging the renegade crime of terrorism—as though civilization has turned in on itself and commenced eating its own tail—but also because the “radicals” in this text seem such unlikely representatives of individual liberty. Instead of personifying the freewheeling, reckless menace of the embassy’s imagination, they resemble characters in ancient Greek tragedies, playing out a fate, moved and buffeted by forces they do not understand. In lieu of gods and divinities, modern bureaucracy and statecraft are the omnipotent yet careless and injudicious forces that control the characters’ destinies. At the behest of the embassy,

Verloc essentially performs an impersonation of independent mutinous agency; this sets off a causal chain of events, involving many individuals, none of whom are aware of the complex institutional catalyst at the heart of his “act.” Describing Verloc’s encounter with Winnie after Stevie’s death, the narrator asks: “How with his want of practice could he tell her what he himself felt but vaguely: that there are conspiracies of fatal destiny?” (216).³²

Within this thick atmosphere of skepticism regarding individual liberty and agency, the novel is conversely haunted by the specters of female criminal agency and individual feminine betrayal, indivisible from its central concern with masculine inaction. During the scene in the embassy, for example, Vladimir reminds Verloc of his past failure as an “agent,” when he succumbed to the swindle of a seductive female traitor: “The unlucky attachment—of your youth. She got hold of the money, and then sold you to the police—eh?” This memory still brings Verloc shame and humiliation: “The doleful change in Mr Verloc’s physiognomy, the momentary drooping of his whole person, confessed that such was the regrettable case” (58). Verloc’s career as a counterfeit “agent” has been threatened by feminine betrayal, foreshadowing the imminent sedition of his wife. The men in the novel are utterly implausible as embodiments of autonomous menace, yet female characters continually disrupt the novel’s otherwise skeptical narrative of independent agency.

Moreover, masculine incapacity to act correlates directly with feminine mutiny: Verloc’s betrayal at the hands of the woman traitor, for example, results in his imprisonment. James’s novel made symbolic use of female imprisonment to emphasize the criminality of *The Princess’s* women, but Conrad instead depicts male incarceration, emphasizing how imprisonment debilitates and controls male subjects. Conrad’s prisoners are former inmates now seemingly conditioned to social inaction and docility. Verloc, as he explains to Vladimir, received “[f]ive years’ rigorous confinement in a fortress” as a result of the female traitor (57); here incarceration is a form of humiliating emasculation, since Verloc’s punishment is inseparable from the woman who put him there. Near the end of the novel, after Stevie’s death, Verloc actually looks forward to returning to custody: “A term of imprisonment could not be avoided. He did not wish now to avoid it. A prison was a place as safe from certain unlawful vengeance as the grave, with this advantage, that in prison there was room for hope” (214). Habituated to the emasculating protectionism of the prison, Verloc now views it as a place of safety and hope.

Conrad similarly links Michaelis's prison term to the erosion of his masculine agency: "He had come out of a highly hygienic prison round like a tub, with an enormous stomach and distended cheeks . . . as though for fifteen years the servants of an outraged society had made a point of stuffing him with fattening foods in a damp and lightless cellar. And ever since he had never managed to get his weight down as much as an ounce" (73). Michaelis ends his sentence not a "hardened" criminal, but softened, stuffed, and curvily effeminate. In Conrad's vision, the prison symbolizes an overly maternal, overly interventional society, and bears an eerie resemblance to Michaelis's vision of a utopian socialist future, spelled out in his *Autobiography of a Prisoner*. In fact, the novel explicitly links the hygienic prison of Michaelis's past with his dream of what the world would be like under socialism: the Professor says that Michaelis's book reveals "the idea of a world planned out like an immense and nice hospital, with gardens and flowers, in which the strong are to devote themselves to the nursing of the weak" (263). The Professor can barely contain his disgust at this proposition, suggesting that "extermination" is a fitter future for "the weak" (263).³³

As the character most plainly associated with Marxist socialism, Michaelis's vision of a "hospital society" is Conrad's critique of a socialist political program that was gaining significant support in his time. *The Secret Agent* began serialization in October 1906, and the Labour Party, which coalesced out of a number of earlier socialist and labor union groups, had emerged in the January 1906 election as a serious political force, winning twenty-nine parliamentary seats. To many, the election appeared to portend the rise of thoroughgoing socialism in Britain.³⁴ Conrad's novel feminizes this political trend by associating it with stifling governmental maternalism. The novel's distaste for socialist governance also manifests itself in a persistent undercutting of some of the most "feminine" aspects of the socialist platform: public parks and public education, which made gardening and child-rearing the domain of the state. By 1906, "Garden Cities" and green space were all the rage in British urban planning, due to the influence of socialist thinkers such as William Morris and Raymond Unwin.³⁵ Parks are a regular motif in *The Secret Agent*, but Conrad emphasizes their railings and fences: Karl Yundt takes a daily walk near the "Green Park railings" (81); as Verloc walks to the embassy, he looks "through the park railings" and reflects, "all these people had to be protected" (51). Signifying the confinement of nature, parks resonate with the novel's maternalist vision of socialism. Public education was also a key cause for early socialists, and the Fabians in partic-

ular had made it their business to win seats on school boards, provide schoolchildren with a daily lunch, and otherwise ameliorate the vast educational gulf between the poor and the rich. Women socialists like Annie Besant were especially active in this area, but they ought not have bothered, Conrad's narrator insinuates, to provide literacy to the likes of Stevie: "Under our excellent system of compulsory education [Stevie] had learned to read and write, notwithstanding the unfavourable aspect of the lower lip" (49).

To suggest the imminence of such "maternalist" governance, *The Secret Agent* includes a political subplot involving imaginary socialist legislation. When the assistant commissioner visits Sir Ethelred, a prominent government official, Ethelred is busy, as his assistant Toodles says, with a "Bill for the Nationalization of Fisheries. They call it the beginning of social revolution. Of course, it is a revolutionary measure" (149). At a historical moment when a new political party was advocating the nationalization of industry and a host of new public services, Conrad's novel forecasts a dystopian socialist future: an overly controlled population, grown fat, lazy, and docile under rigid social planning and organization. Conrad employs the repellent imagery of femininity to weave this futuristic nightmare and to express the peril at the crux of his vision: interventionism, socialism, and the burgeoning welfare state, he suggests, entail the castration of the populace.

Conrad's novel orchestrates fear of the feminine in multiple ways. Male radicals have been mothered into inaction, but at the same time, women characters embody reckless impulsiveness rather than overcontrolled docility. Verloc's imprisonment is caused by a woman's betrayal, but in the case of his wife, his failed masculinity is also a *catalyst* for female criminality. Verloc's acute passivity and his incapacity as an agent bring about his violent death at the hands of Winnie. Her crime, like Florentine's "assassination" in *The Princess*, resembles the kind of seditious menace in which Verloc only pretends to engage. In the early nineteenth century, according to Knelman, a wife who murdered her husband would be charged with "petty treason"—worse than a murder charge—"because the obedience owed to a husband by his wife was similar to that owed to a king by his subject" (53). This law was obsolete by the 1880s, when the novel is set, but Conrad nonetheless invokes a flavor of regicide in the depiction of Verloc's murder by continually emphasizing Verloc's absolute authority over the family and the supremacy of his patriarchal rule. Stevie, as Winnie constantly reminds her husband, "just worships" him (178), with a "blind docility" and "blind devotion" that

she has indoctrinated into her brother's mind (210). Indeed, the "submission and worship were so apparent that Mr Verloc" had developed "a great opinion of Stevie's loyalty" (211).

Verloc's relationship with his wife similarly resembles one of feudal fealty: "Mr Verloc loved his wife as a wife should be loved—that is, maritally, with the regard one has for one's chief possession" (174); Winnie, in return, "had a loyal respect for [her husband's] rights" (182). Conrad also compares Verloc to the king Odysseus and Winnie to his long-suffering wife, Penelope (176). Such continual reminders of Verloc's potent power in the home make the murder at the end of the story all the more mutinous. In the paragraph just before the stabbing, Conrad again recalls Verloc's powerful status in the marriage: "Mr Verloc was heard with an accent of marital authority. . . . 'Come here,' he said in a peculiar tone, which might have been the tone of brutality, but was intimately known to Mrs Verloc as the note of wooing. She started forward at once, as if she was still a loyal woman bound to that man by an unbroken contract" (234). The intermingling of brutality and sexuality here, alongside the "bound" language of feudalism, remind us that although the Verloc marriage is overlaid with sentimental domestic ideology, at its foundation is a rigid power differential. The novel's revolutionaries speak provocatively of their desire to bring down established hierarchies of power, but the only such "leveling" that occurs in the text is in the domestic—not political—sphere. Winnie unseats the ruler of her home, in sharp contrast to the novel's revolutionaries, who seem utterly incapable of deposing anyone, perhaps in part because they cannot identify a discrete figurehead in their society's complex distribution of power. Like James, Conrad underscores the irrelevancy and powerlessness of his political dissidents by setting them against a successful feminine act of domestic rebellion.

The murder scene itself accentuates this contrast, depicting a stark opposition between Winnie's active, murderous rage and Verloc's ineffectuality. Just as Florentine murdered Lord Frederick by stabbing him in the back, Winnie's attack is similarly nonconfrontational: "[Verloc] waited. Mrs Verloc was coming. . . . He was lying on his back and staring upwards. . . . The knife was . . . planted in his breast. It met no resistance on its way. . . . turning slightly on his side with the force of the blow, [Verloc] expired without stirring a limb, in the muttered sound of the word 'Don't' by way of protest" (234). Verloc's death registers the pathological flaccidity of his entire life: the softness of his chest, the ease with which the knife penetrates, and his lack of responsiveness suggest

that his passivity is as central to the crime as Winnie's rage. Afterward, Winnie's "mental state was tinged by a sort of austere contempt for that man who had let himself be killed so easily. He had been the master of a house . . . now he was of no account in every respect" (237). Surprisingly active in its violence, Winnie's blow is "plunging" with "force" (234), though she is not depicted in the novel as a particularly strong or threatening woman. In contrast with the powerful physique of Mrs. Bowerbank, the prison warden in *The Princess*, Winnie is small with a "full, rounded form" (47). Her "full bust" and "broad hips" (46) characterize her as soft and hyperfeminine. Using gendered language to defamiliarize his depiction of crime and agency, Conrad's scenario challenges conventional understandings of individual strength, power, violence, and action.

THE NEW WOMAN CONSUMER: CAPITALISM AND CULTURAL DECLINE

That James and Conrad deploy images of degenerate masculinity and female criminality in narratives of unproductive political terror begs two key questions: Why do they find terrorism, and specifically failed terrorism, to be the battleground of masculinity, femininity, and gender? And why do they employ anticapitalist political dissidents as the figural agents of this message? I have already noted how extraordinary it is that the novels ignore Fenianism and Irish nationalism, which were so relevant to late-Victorian political crime. If relevancy was not their motive, James and Conrad might have chosen to take up a range of revolutionary ideas circulating in this period—including feminism—as the basis for their characters' political platform. Why do they both focus on anticapitalist dissidents? And how does this choice relate to the primacy of gender in each novel's depiction of politics and power?

To address these questions is to address another compelling similarity between the two novels: they depict a London dreadfully transformed according to the mandates of consumer capitalism. Conrad's novel is disparaging, to say the least, of Michaelis's vision of Marxist socialism, but like James, his novel acknowledges capitalism's failures. Both novels are set in "the depressed '80s," when poverty was rife amid a severe economic recession. James and Conrad show the government's inadequacy in addressing the grotesque inequality festering in London. As Winnie innocently asks her brother, "Don't you know what the police are for, Stevie? They are there so that them as have nothing shouldn't take any-

thing away from them who have.” “Not even if they were hungry?” “Not if they were ever so” (170). As representatives of governmental power, Winnie suggests, the police exist to enforce a brutally unequal distribution of property. Neither novel depicts socialism positively, but both acknowledge the hunger and poverty it seeks to redress.

The revolutionaries in both novels can agree on the evil of capitalism, but are nevertheless surrounded by and entrenched in a capitalist culture of consumption. A key character in *The Princess*, Millicent Henning, functions as a love interest for Hyacinth, but economically and culturally, she represents his adversary. Throughout the novel, despite his poverty, Hyacinth is continually associated with art and is said to have an innate sensitivity to aesthetic beauty. He exercises this instinct through his trade, bookbinding, in which James depicts him as something of a prodigy. A painstaking craftsman, Hyacinth symbolizes the value, authenticity, and “aura,” in Benjaminian terms, of original creation, while Millicent is associated with cheap, homogenous, mass-produced goods. She is employed by one of the new department stores mushrooming in London’s West End, where she works as a model for the store’s premanufactured clothing: “she put on . . . articles to show them off to the customers, and on her person they appeared to such advantage that nothing she took up ever failed to go off” (96). Though Hyacinth “laughed [her] establishment to scorn, and told her there was nothing in it, from top to bottom, that a real artist would look at” (162), Millicent nonetheless brags to Hyacinth about her professional success: “You should see me work off an old jacket!” (112). Although her job evokes a traditional conception of the consumer marketplace as an arena in which feminine bodies are objectified, the novel also details her own love for “wandering through the streets of London and gazing into shop-windows” (95). Millicent, shop-commodity by day, is herself an enthusiastic consumer by night. James uses the choices she makes as a consumer, however, to exhibit an absence of discernment and taste among the segment of the market that she represents. Hyacinth calls the objects of her desire “the insipid productions of an age which had lost the sense of quality” (163). Thus James depicts the market for cheap, mass-produced goods as feminine in both its buyers and sellers.

Where does this woman-to-woman cycle of consumption leave the city’s men? Hyacinth, as suggested by his diminutive appearance, is slowly being edged out of London’s new consumer economy by Millicent and her ilk of modern, cheap, mass-produced, women-centered shops. From the beginning of the novel, Hyacinth is set in opposition to

the consumer tide that Millicent embodies. In his childhood, Pinnie, who has a dressmaking shop of her own, was “perfectly determined he should never go into a small shop . . . giving change for a shilling across a counter” (118). Vetch, who “saw clearly that a charming handicraft was a finer thing than a vulgar ‘business’” (119), instead helps him get a position with a respected bookbinding firm. Hyacinth becomes a master of his trade, but his trade itself is becoming obsolete. Rapid shifts in the publishing industry meant that most bookbinding was being done by machines, not men.³⁶ Hyacinth’s artistry and livelihood are set to be displaced by the culture of inexpensive, mass-produced commodities favored by Millicent.

Because of her connection to this new feminized marketplace saturated with cheap goods, Millicent comes to represent a voracious, threatening, vulgar female appetite to consume. At one point in the novel, the narrator claims that her “sociability was certainly great, and so were her vanity, her grossness, her presumption, her appetite for beer, for buns, for entertainment of every kind. She represented, for Hyacinth, . . . the eternal feminine” (159). Here, “the eternal feminine” signifies not only the eternal urge to consume, but the eternal urge to consume indiscriminately. Hyacinth, the novel makes clear, will be a victim to this consumptive urge. Metaphors in which Millicent eats the protagonist abound in the novel. Pinnie regards her as a “ravening wolf” and Hyacinth as “an unspotted lamb” (95); she warns him early in the courtship, “I’m not ready to see you gobbled up before my eyes!” (155). At another point, Millicent declares, “I could swallow him at a single bite!” (99). Millicent is thus imagined as a genial yet monstrous figure. James’s novel pays little attention to the economic stringencies that a London shopgirl like Millicent would have faced.³⁷ Instead, Hyacinth is the symbolic victim of her interminable, tasteless urge to consume.

At the end of the novel, James takes this economic allegory even further, hinting that Millicent is to blame for Hyacinth’s death. Hyacinth’s last action, before committing suicide, is to visit her at work. He fantasizes about escaping his oath via a romantic elopement: “a vision rose before him of a quick flight with her, for an undefined purpose, to an undefined spot . . . he might at least feel her arms around him” (584). After finding he has been beaten by his rival, however, Hyacinth leaves the shop without proposing such a flight: “She was exhibiting [an] article to the Captain, and he was lost in contemplation . . . his eyes travelling up and down the front of Millicent’s person, he frowned, consideringly, and rubbed his lower lip slowly with his walking-stick. Millicent stood ad-

mirably still, and the back-view of the garment she displayed was magnificent" (585).³⁸ Hyacinth's unnarrated suicide takes place in the gap between this paragraph and the next; he is dead in his next appearance in the novel. James thus implies that Millicent's disloyalty drove him to suicide. Given her economic resonance in the novel, in this scene, Hyacinth is metaphorically made redundant by vulgar feminine consumerism.

Millicent's insatiable urge to consume is also an anarchic threat to civilization, as James indicates through constant references to her "primitive" revolutionary instincts. Millicent is not at all interested in socialist revolution, yet Hyacinth sees her as embodying its spirit, which he links with a kind of primitivism. He refers to "her primitive, half-childish, half-plebeian impulse of destruction, the instinct of pulling down what was above her, the reckless energy that would, precisely, make her so effective in revolutionary scenes" (268), "her primitive passions" (387), and the "primitive comfort" she affords (584).³⁹ To Hyacinth, she "summed up the sociable, humorous, ignorant chatter of the masses, their capacity for offensive and defensive passion, their instinctive perception of their strength on the day they should really exercise it" (160). Through such references, James links consumer culture and the feminization of public culture via consumerism to the destruction of civilization at the hands of "primitives." It is not the socialist militants who will topple history and tradition; vulgar, feminine consumerism is the barbarian at the gate. Capitalism does not represent the status quo, as the revolutionaries understand it, but turns out to be the very force that is destroying society. Millicent's association with consumption thus unalterably colors her association with revolution: "Hyacinth could easily see her (if there should ever be barricades in the streets of London), with a red cap of liberty on her head" (161). The cap would be purchased, no doubt, out of the window of the nearest shop.

Throughout *The Princess*, James depicts Millicent not as a unique or exceptional character, but a new urban "type" of femininity; she embodies a broader consumerist-feminist revolution occurring in the London streets. The narrator calls her "the genius of urban civilization" (93): "She was, to her blunt, expanded fingertips, a daughter of London, of the crowded streets and hustling traffic of the great city; she had drawn her health and strength from its dingy courts and foggy thoroughfares" (92-93). This link with the city suggests that Millicent represents the expansion of roles and opportunities that London offered women in this era. She is shamelessly comfortable in the city, believing herself to be

“perfectly acquainted with the resources of the metropolis” (91), and “trot[s] about” alone, at night, on various errands (276). When Hyacinth “had said to her that the less a respectable young woman took the evening air alone the better for her respectability,” she “remarked that if he would make her a present of a brougham, or even call for her three or four times a week in a cab, she would doubtless preserve more of her social purity” (276). Millicent knows that “street-walking” at night casts doubt on her “social purity,” yet makes a convincing argument for rebelling against such strictures: as a working woman, she can’t do errands during the day, yet can’t afford the luxury of cabs in the evening.⁴⁰

James’s contemporary critics were remarkably interested in Millicent, discussing her at length in almost every review of the novel, and suggesting that she personified a recognizable shift in urban femininity. Many of the reviewers note her correspondence to a familiar new “type” of woman: the *Saturday Review* called her “a cockney *pur sang* . . . a capital study” (Hayes 183); the *Literary World* dubbed her “the most real character in the book . . . a delightful type of the blooming cockney girl” (Hayes 190); the *New York Times* identified her as “the type of the London girl. . . . Her physical structure is of the opulent kind, and her bodice hardly restrains her bouncing charms” (Hayes 179); and Annie Logan, writing in *The Nation*, commented that “the London shop-girl Millicent Henning—who, by the way, is typical—is perfect in her superabundant health and slang . . . and her hopeless, unconscious vulgarity” (Hayes 193).

The growing economic significance in London society of women like Millicent, and the shops that employed them, is signified not only by her continuous eating and drinking—as though she is ravenously gobbling up the city—but by her larger-than-life size. In contrast to Hyacinth’s small bones and elfin stature, Millicent is sturdy and enormous. She has “large protrusive feet” (91), and Pinnie declares her “too tall for a woman” (92). Millicent is proud of her substantiality; she brags to Pinnie, “I enjoy beautiful ’ealth,” and “spoke with a certain artless pride in her bigness and her bloom, and as if, to show her development, she would have taken off her jacket or let you feel her upper arm” (92). Her insatiable consumption puts a strain on Hyacinth’s meager finances during their evenings together. On the first such outing, Hyacinth invites her to a coffeehouse, and her appetite on this occasion is characteristically voracious: she “partook profusely of tea and bread and butter, with a relish of raspberry jam, and thought the place most comfortable, though he himself, after finding himself ensconced, was visited by doubts

as to its respectability, suggested, among other things, by photographs, on the walls, of young ladies in tights” (107). The coffee shop offers a public forum for female consumption, but is also feminized through its decor, which exhibits public, sexualized, and commodified images of the female body.

The Secret Agent likewise depicts a feminized modern culture of consumption, primarily through the representation of Verloc’s pornography shop. Like Millicent’s department store, and like the coffee shop described above, Verloc’s shop trades in publicly visible commodified images of the female body: “The window contained photographs of more or less undressed dancing girls” (45). These are often sold by a woman, and the novel regularly repeats the image of Winnie Verloc behind the counter. Winnie is, in fact, Conrad’s parodic version of a popular character of the day—the shopgirl—who had inundated contemporary novels and films and who signified, as with Millicent Henning, women’s expanding public presence. According to Lise Shapiro Sanders, the shopgirl “embodied the very moment at which fantasy entered the process of consumer exchange: her vocation required that she mediate the desires of consumers on the other side of the counter,” even “men who might desire the shopgirl herself as another type of merchandise” (1). Verloc’s shop caters to male customers, and Conrad describes Winnie behind the counter in sexualized terms: “a young woman with a full bust, in a tight bodice, and with broad hips” (46); this links the pornographic images Winnie sells with the woman selling the images, as Brian Shaffer also points out. The narrator also calls attention to the “artistic arrangement of [Winnie’s] glossy dark hair,” implying that she herself is ready to become photographic “art,” but notes “her full, rounded form” (47). Winnie is eroticized and glamorized like the “dancing girls” she sells, but Conrad emphasizes her fullness, roundness, and three-dimensionality, in contrast to the flat, two-dimensional women in the pictures.

Still, Winnie’s customers are dismayed, not pleased, at encountering the flesh-and-blood version of the commodity they seek to buy: “the customer of comparatively tender years would get suddenly disconcerted at having to deal with a woman, and with rage in his heart would proffer a request for a bottle of marking ink, retail value sixpence (price in Verloc’s shop one and sixpence), which, once outside, he would drop stealthily into the gutter” (46). The femininity in which the shop trades is flattened, commodified, and artificial: by contrasting the customer’s reactions to two-dimensional pornographic images versus the real thing (Winnie), Conrad indicates that Verloc’s customers are buying a

fetishized femininity that is an invention of consumer capitalism. Moreover, the passage depicts Winnie as a feminine intrusion into a form of commercial exchange—the buying and selling of pornography—that is customarily man-to-man. The unwelcome feminization of this particular area of commerce hints at the broader inroads women are making into male space.

The inflated cost of Verloc's ink accords with the novel's systematic account of consumer capitalism as an economy driven by imaginary value, disposability, and commodity fetishism. Like the young man in this scene, consumers in this novel do not so much patronize businesses as become "trapped" by them. Ossipon, for example, imagines Verloc's shop as a "police trap" (100), and an Italian restaurant visited by the assistant commissioner is similarly described as "one of those traps for the hungry . . . baited with a perspective of mirrors and white naperies" (151). The reflective, blank surfaces of the restaurant suggest its insubstantiality, deceptiveness, and the false promise of its "bait." The commodity it serves is twice described as "fraudulent cookery" (151, 152), an inauthentic product, an imaginary sham.

The charade of capitalist value and the dehumanizing aspects of capitalist exchange are similarly apparent in the taxi ride the assistant commissioner takes to the Italian restaurant: "Tendering a coin through the trap door the fare slipped out and away, leaving an effect of uncanny, eccentric ghostliness upon the driver's mind" (151). Like the restaurant and like Verloc's shop, the taxi is described with the image of a "trap." The assistant commissioner metonymically becomes "the fare," and the driver barely registers the "ghostly" rider's humanity; the moment of "tendering" is anything but tender. The economic exchange in the taxi, like those in the shop and restaurant, is depicted as unreal and vaguely hostile. Walter Benjamin writes: "There are as many nuances of payment as there are nuances of lovemaking—lazy and swift, furtive or brutal. What does this signify? The shame-reddened wound on the body of society secretes money and closes up. It forms a metallic scab" (*Arcades* 492). Conrad's novel similarly reveals a society in which human exchange has become a shameful reminder that everything, and everyone, has a price affixed to it.

The underground beer hall patronized by the Future of the Proletariat is likewise described as unreal and inauthentic. It is located in the basement of the Silenus Restaurant, ironically named for a mythic lover of wine—not beer. Instead of windows, its walls have "fresco paintings," providing the illusion that one is drinking and dining "al fresco": "the

fresco paintings ran flat and dull all round the walls without windows, representing scenes of the chase and of outdoor revelry in medieval costumes” (88). The music in the hall is also illusory: “An upright semi-grand piano near the door, flanked by two palms in pots, executed suddenly all by itself a valse tune with aggressive virtuosity” (88). Like the assistant commissioner’s taxi ride, the player piano is associated with illusion and ghostliness: “The piano at the foot of the staircase clanged through a mazurka with brazen impetuosity, as though a vulgar and impudent ghost were showing off. The keys sank and rose mysteriously” (92).

Like the Silenus, the Italian restaurant, and the taxi ride, Verloc’s shop has a flimsy and tenuous connection with material reality. The shop is described as “a square box of a place” (45), and is just one of many packages in the novel that seem to contain very little. Some of the shop’s products include “a small cardboard box with apparently nothing inside” (46), “closed yellow paper envelopes, very flimsy” (45), and other empty objects “looking obviously and scandalously not worth the money which passed in the transaction” (46). Even the women in the pictures are merely a commercial manipulation of the visible: “Now and then . . . one of the faded, yellow dancing girls would get sold to an amateur, as though she had been alive and young” (46). Here, Conrad associates consumerism with elusive, imaginary value and the empty, feminine manipulations of both product and seller. Just as James dwells on the ephemeral worthlessness of the cheap goods that Millicent buys and sells, in contrast to the intrinsic or authentic value of Hyacinth’s bookbinding, so Conrad emphasizes the illusory emptiness of the pornography sold by Winnie. Although critics tend to correlate mass-produced pornography with the degradation of the female body, considering it a consumerist manifestation of sexist oppression, Conrad uses it to symbolize the feminizing spirit of consumerism, gradually infecting all of public culture.⁴¹

James locates civilization in art, while Conrad locates it in masculine endeavor, but both see feminized consumer culture as its anarchic antithesis. In this way, James and Conrad participate in what Andreas Huyssen has described as a characteristically modernist rejection of feminized mass culture, as a means of shoring up their own literary value and timelessness: “aesthetic discourse around the turn of the century consistently and obsessively genders mass culture and the masses as feminine, while high culture . . . clearly remains the privileged realm of male activities” (47). That James’s and Conrad’s novels both are and are not “dynamite novels” suggests their conflicted relationship with the consumer

marketplace: both authors want to sell, yet also exhibit distaste for popular fiction. The novels distinguish themselves as “literary” products by associating modern consumerism with cheap, mass-produced, worthless texts. On the second page of *The Princess*, for example, a young Hyacinth engages in the sort of window-shopping that the novel more commonly associates with women:

the boy was often planted in front of the little sweet-shop on the other side of the street, an establishment where periodical literature, as well as tough toffy and hard lollipops, was dispensed . . . attractively exhibited in the small-paned, dirty window. He used to stand there for half an hour at a time, spelling out the first page of the romances in the *Family Herald* and the *London Journal*, and admiring the obligatory illustration in which the noble characters . . . were presented to the carnal eye. (54)

Associating popular papers with candy and carnality, James presents them as ephemeral, easily digestible, and unsophisticated: texts that appeal to a child. The stories’ “obligatory” illustrations suggest they are products of formula rather than art, separating them from James’s novel. *The Princess* was published serially in the *Atlantic Monthly*, but this was not the sort of journal to print illustrated fiction; hanging over the first installment of James’s novel, in the September 1885 issue, is the magazine’s banner: “A Magazine of Literature, Science, Art, and Politics.” Conrad likewise describes mass-produced texts in terms of ephemerality and disposability: he refers to “a dismal row of newspaper sellers” who “dealt with their wares from the gutter;” to an “eruption of the damp, rubbishy sheets of paper soiled with printers’ ink;” and to “posters, maculated with filth.” Despite being widely consumed by passers-by, these newspapers and posters remain culturally insignificant: “the effect was of indifference, of a disregarded distribution” (101). In the first pages of the novel, he describes the radical newspapers sold in Verloc’s shop as “obscure” and “badly printed” (45), the flotsam and jetsam of modern print culture.

Through these representations of ephemeral texts, James’s and Conrad’s argument about terrorism and individual political expression becomes even more peculiarly gendered. As two authors who self-consciously position themselves against a dominant cultural condition—characterized by proliferating, feminized, mass-produced literature and culture—James and Conrad share many of the same concerns as the novels’ terrorists, who pit themselves against prevailing social orthodoxy and

struggle to find a way to express divergent ideals. At the beginning of *The Secret Agent*, Vladimir tells Verloc that “bombs are your means of expression” (67), but as the botched bombing later in the story suggests, even the most radical of individual expressions are now absorbed within modern economic and social structures. Novels are also individual expressions meant to reach masses of people; in their depiction of terror, James and Conrad are not only pessimistic about political expression, but about the entire project of individual creation. The fear that they grapple with, as authors, is not all that different from the fear that haunts the Professor, Conrad’s “perfect anarchist”: “he felt the mass of mankind mighty in its numbers. They swarmed numerous like locusts, industrious like ants, thoughtless like a natural force, pushing on blind and orderly and absorbed, impervious to sentiment, to logic, to terror, too, perhaps. . . . he had such moments of dreadful and sane mistrust of mankind. What if nothing could move them?” (103). James’s and Conrad’s novels seem to ask the same question, to worry that the reading public is too accustomed to modernity’s shocks to be moved anymore. The authors inflect their critiques of feminized mass culture with a version of “the anxiety of influence”: an anxiety about their own capacity to influence.

The novels not only reject a feminized culture of consumption, then, but correlate that culture with threats to masculine identity, linking the enervated, ineffectual terrorists to the meretricious deceits of modern consumer capitalism. They suggest that in such a society, the traditionally feminine subject position of the prostitute becomes the ineluctable position of all citizens. Both novels feature male revolutionaries who succumb to such commodification. Conrad’s anarchist Ossipon survives by a habitual exchange of romance for money, sponging off young bourgeois women whom he meets “on benches in Kensington Gardens” or “near area railings”: this “put some material means into his hand. He needed it to live” (266). Yundt and Michaelis also depend on women for their idle existences. Similarly, in *The Princess*, Paul Muniment embarks on a sexual relationship with the Princess while securing from her a huge sum of money for the cause. He reaps the economic rewards of a semi-romantic friendship with Lady Aurora and a less ambiguous relationship with the Princess. In both novels, the new social order accommodates only those men willing to enact prostitutional commodification. Ending his novel with a final portrait of Ossipon, who now feels too “menaced” (266) to make his living off women, Conrad writes that his “robust form . . . was marching in the gutter as if in training for the task of an inevitable future. Already he bowed his broad shoulders, his head of am-

brosial locks, as if ready to receive the leather yoke of the sandwich board” (269). Wearers of the sandwich board—a nineteenth-century invention—sell their bodies like prostitutes, as Susan Buck-Morss has described; that Ossipon will bear “the yoke of the sandwich board” suggests that his body will be emasculated and commodified under consumer capitalism. He will not demolish the system, but the system will demolish him.

Ending on this ominous note, Conrad’s novel seems adamantly dismissive of the possibility for individual agency within modern social and economic conditions, though the fact that he publishes the novel at all suggests individual expression is not an *entirely* hopeless enterprise. He tosses his fictional bomb into the firmament, while maintaining the impossibility of its effect; as the Professor says, “The condemned social order has not been built up on paper and ink, and I don’t fancy that a combination of paper and ink will ever put an end to it” (95). James’s novel makes a similar critique, but one that is less categorical in scope. Both novels use the language and ideology of gender to conceptualize individuals’ relation to power within a complex economical and political reality, and both novels suggest that individual action must be different—must be “feminine”—to produce effects in the modern world. While Conrad finds such a condition to be perverse, and presents civilization’s restraints on masculinity as a tragic condition of modernity, James can’t help but admire women like Princess Casamassima and Millicent Henning, who have learned to survive and even thrive through bodily manipulation and masquerade. As the Princess and Millicent illustrate, covert exercise of power through image proves to be a successful mode of action, despite its collusion with a distasteful, feminized consumer capitalism.