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Sheila Teahan

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in 'The Outcry'**

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Sheila Teahan

(De)Facing Aestheticism in *The Outcry*

Writing to Edith Wharton on 19 November 1911, Henry James responds to a now-lost letter in which Wharton had apparently praised his recent novel *The Outcry*, but had also encouraged him to attempt another novel in the mode of *The Golden Bowl*. He writes: ‘You speak at your ease, chère Madame, of the interminable & formidable job of my producing à mon âge another Golden Bowl—the most arduous & thankless task I ever set myself. However, on all that il y aurait bien des choses à dire; & meanwhile, I blush to say, the *Outcry* is on its way to a fifth Edition (in these few weeks) whereas it has taken the poor old G.B. 8 or 9 years to get even into a third ... The vague verbosity of the Oxus-flood (beau nom!) [of *The Golden Bowl*] terrifies me—*sates* me; whereas the steel structure of the other form makes every parcelle a weighed & related value. Moreover nobody is really doing (or, ce me semble, as I look about, *can* do) *Outcries*, while all the world is doing G.B.’s—& vous même, chère Madame, tout le premier: which gives you really the cat out of the bag. My vanity forbids me (instead of the more sweetly consecrating it) a form in which you run me so close.’¹ This extraordinary letter is memorable not only for James’s stunning assertion that ‘all the world is doing G.B.’s’ (rather a disconcerting prospect even for lovers of late James) but for its confidence that his professional future lay in producing more works like *The Outcry*. A redaction in novel form of his play of the same title written in 1909 but never produced in his lifetime, *The Outcry* is, in its two textual incarnations, both James’s last play and his last

1. *Henry James and Edith Wharton Letters: 1900–1915*, ed. Lyall H. Powers (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1990) 197–98.