

## HENRY JAMES'S "GREVILLE FANE": A TALE OF TWO STORIES—NARRATED AND UNNARRATED

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Henry James wrote a series of tales that deal with literary life in the 1890s, at the time of his "friction with the market."<sup>1</sup> His "friction with the market" resulted from the drastic changes in the literary scenes in England and America. Responses to these changes happening around the eighties took shape in debates on readers and reading, but James did not join the debate officially, unlike his friend William Dean Howells, who was actively engaged in it to shape American readership and reading practices.<sup>2</sup> When he commented on this changing literary scene, he was always careful to go no further than to offer his factual observations and refrained from stating his personal views.<sup>3</sup> But if, as James suggests at the beginning of "Greville Fane," there are two documents, the literary column—what the novelist "said," and the story—what he "thought" but did not say in the column, then these tales of literary scenes can be read as documents of what the author thought but did not say in public documents.<sup>4</sup> In this study, I will discuss "Greville Fane" as just such a document in order to explore how James, as a contemporary witness, and a deeply involved one, responded to the drastic changes by placing the story in its historical context.

### I. *Literary Scenes in the 1880s and 1890s*

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the literary scenes in England and America were drastically changing in the production, circulation and consumption of books. Overall, improvement in literacy, economic improvement and an increase in leisure helped to create popular readers, and the publishing industry was firmly established to satisfy or create their demands for reading material. Technological advances in printing and the solidification of distribution systems made it possible for publishers to offer books at lower prices than ever. In short, more and more reading materials, especially fiction, were being offered to more and more readers. What is notable about this reduction in prices is that books of better quality began to be published at lower prices. In antebellum America, cheap books or magazines were

<sup>1</sup> Michael Anesko, "Friction with the Market": *Henry James and the Profession of Authorship* (Oxford University Press, 1986), Marcia Jacobson, *Henry James and the Mass Market* (University of Alabama Press, 1983).

<sup>2</sup> Kelly J. Mays, "The Disease of reading and Victorian periodicals," John O. Jordan and Robert L. Patten eds., *Literature in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-century British Publishing and Reading Practices* (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> Henry James, "Mrs. Humphry Ward," *English Illustrated Magazine*, February 1892, rpt. *Henry James: Literary Criticism* (Library of America, 1984), "The Question of the Opportunities," *Literature* 26 March 1898, rpt. Leon Edel ed., *The American Essays of Henry James* (Princeton University Press, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> Henry James, "Greville Fane," *Henry James: Complete Stories, 1884-1891* (The Library of America, 1999), p. 219. All references to the text hereafter are indicated in parentheses.

still associated with cheapness of content, but owing to the lowering of printing costs, cheapness was no longer necessarily an index to the content of the reading material. Especially in the 1870s and 1880s, a flood of publications generally labeled “cheap books” became available and most of them were still “trash.” “Cheap library” series like the Seaside Library or Lovell’s Library, nevertheless, included not only popular novels which can be designated as “dime novels” but also works by highly acclaimed authors like Jane Austen, Emily Bronte, Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin.<sup>5</sup> George Munro, the successful publisher of the Seaside Library, sold his books for twenty or twenty-five cents per copy.<sup>6</sup> On the one hand, all this should be welcomed as one means of promoting the democratization of culture and knowledge or closing the gap between classes in terms of cultural consumption; on the other hand, it leads to a confused state in determining values, because the prices, formats and publishers of the books alone cannot be relied on in determining the quality of a book, and any judgement about its value is ultimately entrusted to the reader.

Howells’s *The Rise of Silas Lapham* gives us an insight into the reading practices of the new readers and the established readers’ attitude toward them. In the novel, Howells, using reading practices as an index to their taste and cultural capital, contrasted the Coreys, an old established family, and the Laphams, who are nouveaux riches. Conversations between Irene, one of Lapham’s daughters and Tom Corey are especially revealing. Irene, a new inexperienced reader who has received no reading instruction beyond school education, has no regard for the author of the novel she is reading nor any idea whether the novel is newly written or merely reprinted. During the conversation, Irene confesses she does not know *Middlemarch* was published a while ago, and she read it because “it’s just got into the *Seaside Library*” (italics mine).<sup>7</sup> Here, the Seaside Library is an actual library located near the Laphams’ summer house, but Howells is obviously hinting at Munro’s Seaside Library series. Thus Irene is such a benighted reader that she is quite at a loss about which books the library in their newly built house should be furnished with, and asks for Corey’s advice. Although not a great reader, Corey is able to fall back on his inherited cultural values and names authors and books one by one which he deems should embellish any decent library. Here the passage almost reads like Howells’s own reading instruction to the reader. When he reports about the conversation to his father, Corey, admitting his mediocrity as a reader, still confesses his irrepressible wonder at “what the average literature of noncultivated people is”: “I read with some sense of literature and the difference between authors. I don’t suppose that people generally do that; I have met people who had read books without troubling themselves to find out even the author’s name, much less trying to decide upon his quality. I suppose that’s the way the vast majority of people read.”<sup>8</sup> The figure of a new reader portrayed here may not necessarily reflect the actuality, but it does at least reflect how a new inexperienced reader is conceived by experienced readers. The new reader delineated through Irene is a deplorably inept reader who has neither ability nor sense of distinction at all, whether it is about the author’s name,

<sup>5</sup> Barbara Sicherman, “Reading and Middle-Class Identity in Victorian America: Cultural Consumption, Conspicuous and Otherwise,” Barbara Ryan ed., *Reading Acts: U.S. Readers’ Interactions with Literature, 1800-1950* (The University of Tennessee Press, 2002), p.141.

<sup>6</sup> For ongoing research in cheap literature, see *American Women’s Dime Novel Project*. Ed. Felicia L. Carr. September 20, 2002. 1 August 2003 <<http://chnm.gmu.edu/dimenovels/index.html>>.

<sup>7</sup> William Dean Howells, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885; rpt. Signet Classic, 1980), p.103.

<sup>8</sup> Howells, *op.cit.*, p.108.

publication chronology, or quality. These readers must have seemed to the educated readers quite helpless in the flood of books, and at the same time, their existence implies a potential threat to the cultural hierarchy that warrants the social hierarchy. The emergence of new readers entails dissolution of the privileged status of "reading" hitherto enjoyed by limited social groups, and threatens to undermine their cultural hegemony, unless multiple practices comprehended under the category of "reading" are somehow discriminated and hierarchized. One of the means for discriminating reading practices is to classify readers according to what they read, but the changes in the literary market have made the discrimination increasingly difficult, as illustrated in the case of the Seaside Library series where any novel, whether it is the work of a highly acclaimed author or of an obscure author, is uniformly sold at 25 cents. The disappearance of distinction or blurring of the boundary is especially threatening to old dominant groups, who are compelled to rely on their cultural capital to maintain their dominance over the new middle class and the nouveaux riches with their economic capital. When the privileged status of reading is lost and qualitative differences of cultural products, in a commodified status, are replaced by quantitative market values, their cultural capital is inevitably deflated and therefore their dominance loses its validity. If they want to prevent this deflation, it is absolutely necessary for them to instruct new readers in selecting reading materials and stratifying readers according to the difference in what they read.

In this flood of books—which almost always means fiction in the last few decades of the nineteenth century—literary magazines or general magazines should be expected to function in the same way as newspapers did in categorizing, classifying and arranging the multitudinous data of daily events in an understandable form. Literary magazines, among others, were an indispensable mediator between books and the reading public, and through this mediator, the readers, especially new readers like Irene, should be instructed as to which books are worth reading, how they should be read and what should be the criteria in selecting reading materials, by book reviews or criticism. Howells, who held the editorship himself, believed literary periodicals would enlighten benighted readers and help them refine "their taste" with the assistance of "the disciplined and experienced editors," "who exercise their selective function with the wish to give them [readers] the best things they can."<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, what was happening in the field of book publishing was also happening in magazine publishing: in the 1890s, low-priced magazines of better quality began to be published and the field of magazine publishing was increasingly competitive. Older "quality magazines" were not unaffected by this advent of cheaper magazines and were compelled to cut prices for survival or change their editorial formula. The following comment on the advent of ten-cent magazines by the *Independent* reflected the anxiety that the reduction in price of high quality magazines might cause on the part of the established class: "What will be the effect on the higher-priced illustrated magazines, like *Harper's*, the *Century*, and *Scribner's*, it may not be easy to foresee; but it seems probable that they will not find it wise to reduce their price to a like figure.... The reason is that they will wish to maintain that higher, purer literary standard which succeeds in securing the best but not the most numerous readers..."<sup>10</sup> The conservative *Independent* feared that the reduction in price of these periodicals would entail derogation of their "higher

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<sup>9</sup> William Dean Howells, "The Man of Letters and a Man of Business" (1893), *Literature and Life* (Harper and Brothers, 1902), pp.9-11.

<sup>10</sup> Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines: 1885-1905* (Harvard University Press, 1957), p.7.

purser literary standard.” After all, these “quality magazines” did not cut their prices so much as anticipated, but they certainly changed editorial policies to widen their audience.

These changes in American periodicals seriously affected James’s literary life, for he derived his major income mainly from payments from these periodicals rather than from book sales. Whether they were novels or stories, James usually published them in magazines in one serialized form or another, and then had them collected in book form for sale. This publishing custom was quite advantageous to authors, because they could receive double income, from payments from magazines and from book sales. The foremost “quality magazine,” the *Atlantic Monthly*, with its high literary tradition, accepted his first novel and after that always faithfully supported him. In general, James had been successful in the American periodical market until the mid-eighties, but American monthlies then began to hesitate to publish his fiction. Beginning in 1890, even the *Atlantic*, the faithful supporter of James’s fiction, showed hesitation in publishing him, for in the increasingly competitive market the *Atlantic* editors were compelled to change their editorial policy and they attempted to survive by “closing the gap between literature and journalism,” “between highbrow and middle-class popular culture.”<sup>11</sup> Their rejection of James’s fiction itself is quite emblematic of the completion of the transition in the relationship between publishers and authors, which began around 1850.<sup>12</sup> Unlike antebellum authors who basked in favorable treatment from publishers who looked upon themselves as literary patrons, authors could no longer expect indulgent treatment. James knew his fiction was getting less popular by the declining sales of his books, and this rejection brought him into direct confrontation with the pressures from the marketplace, and the realization of the necessity to negotiate with the market in some way. Since he earned his livelihood solely from writing in this period, then, negotiation with the marketplace became a vital issue in a more practical sense, rather than merely as a matter of aesthetic principle.<sup>13</sup> In negotiating with the marketplace, he seriously engaged himself in playwriting, and at the same time he wrote many tales for magazines with different readerships, including ones he had never written for before. About one third of James’s tales dealing with literary life were written in this period, which indicates how deeply he was affected by the changes in the literary scene. Dramatizing the changing literary scene in these tales, James examined the influence the changes might have on both novelists and readers and also explored the possibilities of the novelists in the marketplace. Through the dramatization in these tales, James is deeply involved in the contemporary debate over readers and reading.

## II. *The Struggle for Distinction*

“Greville Fane” is a reminiscence about a popular female novelist narrated by the novelist-narrator in the framed narrative form. One day the narrator receives a telegram asking him to write half a column on the dying Greville Fane with a condition attached, to “let her off easy, but not too easy.” The narrator finds it a rather difficult task, since he does not

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<sup>11</sup> Anesko, pp.167-97. Ellery Sedgwick, “Henry James and the *Atlantic Monthly*: Editorial Perspectives on James’s ‘Friction with the Market,’” *Studies in Bibliography* 45 (1992): pp.311-32.

<sup>12</sup> William Charvat, *The Profession of Authorship in America: 1800-1870* (Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 288.

<sup>13</sup> Anesko, pp.3-9.

admire her professionally, but he has known her personally and likes her enough not to qualify "that indulgence" (217). He therefore decides to forgo the qualification completely. After finishing the article with some "tact," he finds "what [he] thought" is more interesting than "what [he] said" and in order not to lose the "retrospect" altogether, he begins to narrate "a dim memory," "a document not to 'serve'." So what is offered here is the story he could not tell because of the publisher's request to be indulgent and his own personal favor toward the popular novelist, in other words, what he would or should have told as a professional novelist. The retrospect is then narrated through the professional novelist's point of view.

The reminiscence begins with a party scene in which the narrator, a young aspirant who had just written a novel, met Greville Fane, a "celebrity" who was twelve years older and had already published half-a-dozen novels, and felt "flattered" at offering his arm to the celebrated author. The relation between Greville Fane and the narrator hinted at by this opening scene almost parallels the master-disciple relation James dramatized in "The Lesson of the Master" published in 1888. In the latter story, "a student of fine prose" seeks advice from a distinguished author, whom the student has always respected in spite of his decline after "his three great successes," and is advised to renounce secular happiness in order to produce a "perfect work of art."<sup>14</sup> But in the present story the relation between the celebrity and the narrator turns out to be quite different one: the narrator soon finds that she is "only a dull, kind woman" and impudently deems her a woman who "rested" him "from literature" which is, to him, "an irritation," "a torment" (219). He positions himself and Greville Fane at opposite ends and when he narrates his reminiscences about Greville Fane, she is represented as someone he should differentiate himself from.

Even before he begins his retrospective narrative, he implicitly attempts to impress himself as being different from Greville Fane. He casually inserts a short episode about a dinner he went to before composing the promised column. At the dinner, he spoke of Greville Fane to his neighbors, but found they had "never heard of" her or "pronounced her books 'too vile'" (217). With this apparently insignificant episode the narrator implicitly indicates his social position and, indirectly, hers. Then, contrasting with the dinner guests' comments on Greville Fane's novels, he tells the reader that the article that he wrote about her "attracted some notice," and "was thought 'graceful'" (219). What we should note here is the association he is attempting to create between the difference of their novels and that of their social positions: the narrator, who writes gracefully, belongs among the people who deprecate her books as "vile." The class consciousness is again brought to the reader's attention when he reveals the fact that although Fane's "prime material of fiction" is "romance" in "the most exalted circle," "[p]assion in high life" (220), she herself has never known high society. James dealt with the same ironical situation in "The Real Thing," published a few months before "Greville Fane." In that story, which might be aptly called a companion piece to "Greville Fane," the illustrator-narrator, who boasts of his "alchemy of art," praises himself for his transformation of shaggy models into the figure of fashionable people for the illustrations accompanying cheap magazine stories.<sup>15</sup> But when he hires a real gentleman and lady as models, these people view his works critically, and through the incongruous conversation between the narrator and the gentleman, James exposes the narrator's total ignorance of high society and the conflicts of the

<sup>14</sup> James, "The Lesson of the Master," *Complete Stories*, p.550.

<sup>15</sup> James, "The Real Thing," *Complete Stories*, p.242.

cultural codes of different social groups.<sup>16</sup> In “Greville Fane,” James stages the confrontation with the “real” in a more ironical way; this time, the “real” is represented by her own daughter, who married into aristocracy. After being widowed by her clergyman husband, Fane, like many Victorian female writers, started writing to support her family, and lavishing money on her daughter’s education, she successfully marries her to a minor aristocrat. But her daughter, now Lady Luard, quite ungratefully disdains her books and her mother as “vulgar,” because now she is in a higher social position, she judges her mother’s books according to the criteria appropriate to her class; her books were never allowed at the “very superior school at Dresden” (226) where she received her education. What the narrator is attempting here by his association of novels and the readers’ positions in the social hierarchy is to hierarchize their novels by importing the preexisting social hierarchy; his works are superior to Fane’s because her works are never read by upper-class people and are deemed “vulgar,” while his are accepted and deemed “graceful.”

The first part of the retrospect of Fane mainly consists of the narrator’s contrast of their novels and attitudes toward novel writing. The most fundamental difference he finds between their novels is the sense of the “form” of the novel, and the narrator, as if speaking for James, complains of the lack of form in her novels. When the narrator comes to know her more closely, he finds her gift was the faculty of inventing stories and she can “invent stories by the yard” but she “never recognized ‘the torment of form’.” So she is able to produce three novels a year, “contributed volumes to the diversion of her contemporaries” and made a fortune, but, the narrator ironically adds, she has not “contributed a sentence to the language” (220). On the other hand, the narrator, “practicing a *totally different* style” (italics mine), thinks he will never make a fortune because he cannot be so productive as the popular novelist, since for him, “a *work of art* required a tremendous licking into shape” (italics mine). His insistence on the significance of form seems to Fane just “a pretension” and “a *pose*,” and she is quite clear about what the public wants and what she is supposed to provide: “she freely confessed herself a common pastrycook, dealing in such tarts and puddings as would bring customers to the shop” (221). Thus while professing that “form” is the foremost requirement for the novel to claim to be a “work of art” at all, he stresses the commodity aspect of Fane’s novels; she produces novels solely as commodities to exchange in the marketplace and her disregard for “form” results from the demands of the marketplace. The emphasis on the commodity aspect of her novels reversely distances the narrator and “works of art” from the marketplace. When any product—cultural or otherwise—is placed in the marketplace, its use value or intrinsic value is replaced by exchange value, which is determined only in relation to other products; any qualitative difference of a product is reduced to a quantitative difference, and the producer has no control over the value of his own product. As Kristin King astutely points out, Fane comprehends the difference between their novels in relative terms; on the other hand, he refuses to be measured relatively: his “failure” never had “the banality of being relative” and “was always admirably absolute” (221).<sup>17</sup> By distancing himself from market values, he tries to retrieve or create the myth of the autonomy of work or art, totally independent of control by the marketplace.

<sup>16</sup> For detailed discussion of “The Real Thing,” see Midori Machida, “Rereading ‘The Real Thing,’” [in Japanese] *Ikkyo Ronso* 129, no.3 (2003).

<sup>17</sup> Kristin King, “‘Lost Among the Gender’: Male Narrators and Female Writers in James’s Literary Tales, 1892-1896,” *Henry James Review* vol.16, 1995, p.20.



His further argument about the distinction between Greville Fane and himself concerns whether the novel has a "relation to life" or not. According to the narrator, Fane is quite superior to "observation and opportunity" in fiction writing. When the narrator ironically reflects that her "ignorance of life" itself is "a resource," he means that since she does not care whether her story has any reference to reality, she will be quite free to write anything, and the material will be inexhaustible. So when he hears she is worried that someday she "should have written herself out," the narrator assures her that such things should never happen, since she will never run out of resources but can always resort to her "fairyland" for the novel's material, insinuating that her novels can be easily produced as long as they have no need to be based on real life. Then once again underlining the difference, he declares "with me it's different; I try ... to be in some direct relation to life" (232). While pretending to be envious of her productivity and her limitless resources for production, he strongly stresses the difficulty accompanying the composition of the novel based upon "experience and observation," both of which are, according to the narrator, requirements for the novelist to maintain "direct relation to life." Insofar as "observation" depends on "opportunity," it would be him, he insists, not Fane, who would be in great difficulty when "the opportunity failed."

We can almost hear the realist credo echoed in the narrator's phraseology in the aesthetic theory. Howells, for example, when he gives advice to the young aspirant writer in writing novels, writes that if he wants to write realistic fiction, "he needs experience and observation," while suggesting realistic novels are more difficult to write than romantic novels: "a young writer may produce a brilliant and very perfect romance" but "he will hardly have assimilated the materials of a great novel" "until he is well on towards forty."<sup>18</sup> When these realists distinguish their novels from other kinds of novels in terms of "experience and observation," it is because "experience and observation" are essentially exclusive and finite, in their strong referentiality to reality, and make realistic novels the privilege of the few who have access to reality, something that is not allowed to everyone. Thus they are hinting that the realistic novel is, as it were, a rare work of artisanship, whose production is the privilege of the few who have accumulated "experience and observation," while suggesting that the romantic novel is a commodity which is mass producible, because its production needs nothing except fancy to "invent stories."

What motivated the narrator to be so intent on distinguishing himself from the female popular novelist? To answer this question, we must once again turn to the literary scene of around the 1890s. As described in the previous section, roughly between 1880-1900, the unexpectedly rapid growth in the production of books and their consumers was a striking social phenomenon in the Anglo-American world. In response to the phenomenon, men of letters in both countries started to engage in lively debates on reading, probing its overall effects on society, and at the same time attempting to shape it according to each party's ideology. According to Kelly J. Mays, in England, 1886 was the watershed year when one reviewer commented that "the subject of Books and Reading is in the air at the present time" in the *Quarterly*, and lectures, periodicals, and books were devoted to debate on "the question of how, why, and what readers were and should be reading."<sup>19</sup> In these discourses reading was

<sup>18</sup> "The Man of Letters as a Man of Business," *Scribner's*, October, 1892. Text from *Literature and Life* (Harper and Brothers: New York, 1902), p.29.

<sup>19</sup> Kelly J. Mays, *op.cit.*, p.165.

considered to be threatening “the entire social fabric” and was sometimes discussed in the same vein as “vice” or “social disease” like “drinking.”<sup>20</sup> Both in England and America, novel-reading was especially targeted as a problem. Since “there is no need of any previous training or unusual mental capacity” “in order to understand and enjoy a novel,” it “appeals to a wider circle of readers than any kind of literature.”<sup>21</sup> Howells, for example, although himself a novelist, also criticized novel-reading: “most of novel-reading, which people fancy is an intellectual pastime is the emptiest dissipation, hardly more related to thought or the wholesome exercise of the mental faculties than opium-eating.”<sup>22</sup> In the United States, novel-reading, in the puritan climate, had been deemed injurious to society for a long time, and the analogy of novel-reading to “drinking” in the entire debate suggested it might be suppressed in the same way as its counterpart was by the Temperance Movement. Actually, one critic was so pessimistic that he made a grim prediction in his comprehensive discussion of books and reading; he prophesied that if “the production and consumption of fiction” went on at that rate, an “anti-fiction Society” “with pledges of total abstinence from novel-reading” might be established in the near future.<sup>23</sup> This was an unwelcome threatening situation especially for American novelists, who had just begun to profit from professionalized authorship, and the debates on reading were more crucial to novelists than to any other men of letters. It was an urgent task for them to defend themselves by somehow distinguishing their novels from “trash” and demonstrating the superiority and wholesomeness of their novels to the readers’ mind. This urge for distinction was shared by the old middle class and the upper middle class, as well, who felt the stability of their social hierarchy to be threatened by the rising new middle class and nouveaux riches like Silas Lapham. They were eager to differentiate fiction, in order to distinguish themselves by distinguishing their reading practices from popular reading practices.<sup>24</sup> In Bourdieu’s words, they “distinguish themselves by the distinctions they made.”<sup>25</sup>

Consequently, in many discussions where “novel-reading” is deprecated as “vice” or “disease,” a “cure” or condition to be attached to reading is often suggested. According to Howells, what the reading public should be cautioned against is “an *undiscriminating* love of fiction” (italics mine), and he suggested a “cure” for the bad “fiction habit”: “if the reader will use care in choosing from this fungus-growth with which the fields of literature teem every day, he may nourish himself with the true mushroom, at no risk from the poisonous species.”<sup>26</sup> The critic who predicted an ominous future for the novel also remarked “as of the liquor-habit,” “it is not the pure and wholesome article of the finest brands that is most apt to produce the craving, but the impure and inferior stuff with which the market is flooded, and which a *discriminating* taste will reject” (italics mine).<sup>27</sup> What they are proposing is not total abstinence from novel-reading but discriminative reading; in the flood of novels of varying

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.171.

<sup>21</sup> George Clarke, “The Novel-Reading Habit,” *Arena* 19 (May 18), p.670.

<sup>22</sup> William Dean Howells, “False and Truthful Fiction,” *Harper’s Monthly* 74 (April 1887), pp.824-26. Text from Donald Pizer ed., *Documents of American Realism and Naturalism* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), pp.76-80.

<sup>23</sup> Clark, *op.cit.*, p.674.

<sup>24</sup> Sicherman, *op.cit.*, pp.145-149.

<sup>25</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Harvard University Press, 1984) p.6.

<sup>26</sup> Howells, “False and Truthful Fiction,” p.77.

<sup>27</sup> Clark, *op.cit.*, p.674.



value, only careful discriminations keep readers from drowning. Then what is “the true mushroom” or “the pure and wholesome article of the finest brands” and “the poisonous species” or “the impure and inferior stuff”? How can readers distinguish them? Howells suggested several tests and one of them is whether “a novel flatters the passions, and exalts them above the principles.” If the answer is “yes,” it is “poisonous,” and “so-called romances, which imagined a world where the sins of sense are unvisited by the penalties,” “the novels that merely tickle our prejudices and lull our judgment,” the novels where “Love” or “the passion or fancy” is “the chief interest of a life” for its hero and heroines should be avoided. He further argued for more important—at least for himself—criteria for distinguishing: “We must ask ourselves before we ask anything else, Is it true?—true to the motives, the impulses, the principles that shape the life of actual men and women?”<sup>28</sup> Simply put, Howells is advocating realistic novels; realistic novels are “true mushroom” which can “nourish” the reader and “poisonous species” are “romance,” which is one of the most favored novels with new readers. In the United States, the realism campaign started by Howells in the late 1880s almost overlapped the period of anti-reading. Howells was compelled by, and at the same time was willing to take advantage of the social movement against the “fiction addict” and attempted to marginalize “romance” or “romantic novels” as “poisonous,” thereby legitimating realistic novels. The negation of or resistance to what the romantic novels stand for, and the efforts to differentiate served to shape and define realism. In “Greville Fane,” the narrator, who sounds almost as if he is reiterating Howells, is also attempting to define and locate his novels in authentic literature by his negation of Greville Fane. James portrays in the narrator the novelists of “serious literature” —including himself—struggling for legitimacy for their literature.

In addition to literary rivalry, the narrator’s criticism of Fane’s romantic novel partly reflects upper-class people’s anxiety about representation of their society by people without any “direct relation” to it, which James already depicted in “The Real Thing.” Fane is not satisfied with what Lady Luard tells her about high society: “the best was not good enough for her — she must make it still better”; so Lady Luard is irritated by “such views about the best society” (224) as Fane has. In transferring the world the novelist directly knows into fiction, he has his imagination inevitably regulated to some extent by the rules or norms which structure the world, because the transference presupposes transferring of these implicit laws, as well. But total ignorance of the subject the novelist is going to write about gives him freedom of imagination unrestrained by any regulation. Representation by this unrestrained imagination could be quite subversive, since representation has the potential to define and control reality in so far as people understand and relate to the world through its representations. If new readers who have no direct knowledge of upper-class society have access to it through its representation in such romantic novels as Fane writes, their attitude and conduct toward upper-class society are determined by their understanding through representations. Therefore the hegemony the dominant social group has hitherto enjoyed might be undermined by these representations produced by unrestricted imagination. James problematized the real and the representation by popular imagination in “The Real Thing” and “Greville Fane,” both of which were published in magazines for the masses, that is, the precise discourse space where such popular representations circulated. This fact implies James’s desire to regulate and shape popular

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<sup>28</sup> Howells, “False and Truthful Fiction,” pp.78-79.

imagination in a form more familiar to people who would never attempt to read criticism.

Finally it must be added that in the narrator's gesture toward differentiation, something more immediately relevant to James seems to be at stake, for Fane's novels and writing milieu show striking similarities with James's. Fane, "perpetually going abroad," wrote novels set in "the most exalted circles," and "her types, her illustrations, her tone" were "cosmopolitan" (220). Like James she "squeezed" into her novels some French and Italian phrases, though hers were incorrect, unlike James's. If Fane writes predominantly "beautiful love-stories" (226), many of his novels, especially *Daisy Miller*, the one that brought fame to him, were love-stories, too. Why does James situate Fane so close to himself and his novels?

In post-civil war America, one of the forms of fiction most favored by the reading public was novels with "a cosmopolitan setting and a story of life among the aristocracy." Especially during the 1880s, the romantic fiction of "the manners of European nobility" grew more popular and fascinated Americans "who, having dollars, felt they should buy continental culture and station."<sup>29</sup> Among the writers who wrote these romantic novels in cosmopolitan setting, Francis Marion Crawford and Archibald Clavering Gunter stand out for their popularity and prolificness. About Crawford, James had unusually severe criticism and even went so far as to call him a "sixpenny humbug" in his letter to Howells:

It seems to me (the book) [sic] was so contemptibly bad and ignoble that the idea of people reading it in such numbers makes one return upon one's self and ask what is the use of trying to write anything decent or serious for a public so absolutely idiotic.... I would rather have produced the basest experiment in the "naturalistic" that is being practiced here than such a piece of sixpenny humbug. Work so shamelessly bad seems to me to dishonour the novelist's art to a degree that is absolutely not to be forgiven; just as its success dishonours the people for whom one supposes one's self to write.<sup>30</sup>

It was quite unusual for James to criticize other novelists so vehemently and he seemed rather ashamed of it, and while apologizing for his "ferocity" asked Howells not to mention it to anyone, for "it will be set down to green-eyed jealousy."<sup>31</sup> James's mortified sense, if not jealousy, is quite understandable, for Crawford was a cosmopolitan author like James. Crawford's entire career almost parallels James's: he grew up in Europe and spent several years in his youth in New England and began his authorial career in Boston; afterwards while mostly living in Rome he went back and forth to the United States; he traveled widely and also was polyglot like James, perhaps even surpassing James in that he wrote several novels in French. Crawford wrote with abundant experience and knowledge of Europe and the book which James severely criticized in the letter was *To Leeward*, an international novel of an English wife who deceives her Italian husband and is murdered for it. Although there are so

<sup>29</sup> James D. Hart, *The Popular Book: A History of America's Literary Taste* (University of California Press, 1950), pp.185, 186. James himself complained of American novelists who crossed the Atlantic Ocean "for inspiration." In the essay reviewing Mrs. Atherton's "international fiction," he criticized her almost in the same vein as the narrator's; in reading her international novel, James confessed, he foresaw "the drama of the confrontation" between the Californian girl and the Englishman, but the author "fails to see" "the opposition," "the relation" and "the essence of the drama," peculiarly happening in the international situation.

<sup>30</sup> "To William Dean Howells," 21 Feb. 1884. Leon Edel ed. *Henry James Letters*, Vol.III, p.27.

<sup>31</sup> *Loc. cit.*

many similarities between them, there are some great differences: the biggest is that Crawford's novels were a "success" with people, while James's were not. Also, Crawford was quite the opposite of James in his attitude toward novel writing; like Greville Fane in the story, he was never hesitant to profess that he was writing for money and for the readers' amusement. The narrator's deprecation of Fane signifies not only a negation of popular novelists but also James's more immediate need to distinguish himself from rival novelists like Crawford and Gunter, whose works are "so shamelessly bad" that they unforgivably "dishonour the novelist's art."

### III. *Marginalization of the Female Novelist*

After expatiating upon the difference between their novels and creative principles, the narrator gradually shifts his focus from Greville Fane herself to her children and traces how they grew up to have contempt for their mother, while exploiting her for money. He is inordinately interested in watching how her son, Leolin, an anagrammatic name implying "a lion," that is, "a literary celebrity," grows up, since Fane determined to "train up her boy" to be a novelist. So whenever he visits Fane in a European sojourn, he never forgets to "ask how Leolin was getting on" (222). In training her son, she adopted the narrator's own creative principle which values "experience" and "opportunity" above anything and encouraged him to "feel the whole flood of life" and receive "impressions," in order to collect "material" (229) for fiction. This is a kind of literary experiment partly to test the validity of his theory, and its success implies the emergence of a powerful literary rival. The more he is interested in her son as a possible literary rival, the more Fane is reduced to the status of the mother of a future novelist who "gazed at" her son "with extraordinary envy" (224) and is presented to the reader as a fond mother who spoils her son through her blindness.

This shift of narrative focus marginalizes Fane as a professional novelist, reducing her to the domestic figure of a pathetic mother. The narrative pattern of his reminiscence is shaped so as to diminish her literary figure as a celebrity; her authorial figure is always followed by or closely linked with a description of her as a domestic figure, especially a maternal one: she was visited by the devotees of her novels as an author who "wrote about the affections and the impossibility of controlling them," but she was disappointing to them because she "talked of the price of *pension* and the convenience of an English chemist": "It would have been droll if it had not been so exemplary to see her tracing the loves of the duchesses beside the innocent cribs of her children" (225). The entire reminiscence is also structured to proceed from delineation of her public figure to a maternal one; the reminiscence begins with the party scene in which she was presented as a "celebrity" author and ends with his final encounter with her at the Academy soiree. In the final scene, she is talking to him about how she and Leolin are collaborating in fiction; then, irritated by her blindness, the narrator exclaims to her, as she is "looking hard at the picture of the year, 'Baby's Tub,'" "I myself will write a little story about it, and then you'll see" (233). The parting figure of Fane presented to the readers here is a maternal figure looking at 'Baby's Tub,' and the narrator is the one who claims the authorship. This narrative strategy is summarized in the last sentence before he begins his retrospect: "the dear woman had written a hundred stories, but none so curious as her own." In the first part of the sentence, Fane is presented as the writing subject, but then she is turned into the subject

of a story narrated by him, and his story about her surpasses her “hundred stories.” Moreover, the entire story itself is structured to marginalize the female author. Instead of having the narrator directly begin his reminiscence as he did in “The Real Thing,” James frames the retrospect and suggests the existence of two versions of Greville Fane’s life, namely, the column on the female novelist and his retrospect. Then the story is constructed to go “behind” the column, to reveal what the narrator “thought,” which is much more “interesting” than what he “said” in the column. The reader is never allowed to know what he said in the column except for readers’ comments complimenting him on his “graceful” style; instead, we are offered his “dim little memory,” and the public “document” on her figure as an author of a hundred stories is replaced by his “*document not to serve*” (219; italics mine).

The narrator’s deed is in essence a desecrating disclosure of the privacy of the dead author, but the way the story is constructed suggests that it is largely, if not entirely, endorsed by James himself. When we consider James’s treatment of the violation of others’ privacy in other novels and stories, we must say this is quite unusual. Especially in his stories in the middle period, the privacy or private life of the people—whether dead or alive—is a central issue, and in “The Aspern Papers” published in 1888, “The Private Life,” and “Jersey Villas” published in the same year as “Greville Fane,” exposure of others’ privacy is always forbidden or is finally renounced by the protagonist after great hesitation and emotional conflicts. But in “Greville Fane” the narrator, somehow, never shows any hesitation or compunction in revealing the dead author’s private life. Fane is the only character who is victimized with the author’s sanction, while all the other male figures are mercifully spared such exposure. It cannot be denied that James is complicit in the narrator’s marginalization of Greville Fane.

In essays surveying the contemporary cultural scene in England and America, James named two things “that make it most completely different from yesterday”: one is “the immensely greater conspicuity of the novel” and the other is the “conspicuity” of women as readers and as writers.<sup>32</sup> Especially in an essay on a contemporary popular novelist, Mrs. Humphry Ward, published a year before “Greville Fane,” he respectfully acknowledged that “the sex formerly overshadowed” “after prevailing for so many ages in our private history have begun to be unchallenged contributors to our public” and applauded women’s long history of struggle for the achievement of authorship.<sup>33</sup> Also he befriended numerous female writers like Edith Wharton and Constance Fenimore Woolson, and often wrote novels based on anecdotes these female writers offered to him. But in spite of the “conspicuity” of women as writers which he acknowledged in these essays, James rarely adopted female writers as characters in his fiction except as minor figures, and Jamesian heroines were seldom portrayed as active agents in the public sphere. Female characters ambitious enough to write novels are usually suppressed and finally reduced to readers. Miss Fancourt in “The Lesson of the Master,” for example, is such a figure; in spite of her love of literature and ambition to write a novel, male writers in the story focus on her receptive ability and position her as a reader of their books while positioning themselves as writers. St. George, the master novelist, admires her ability as a reader: “Her interest in literature is touching ... she takes it all so seriously. She feels the arts and she wants to feel them more. To those who practice them it’s almost humiliating—her curiosity, her sympathy, her good faith.”<sup>34</sup> Finally two writers’ attention is focused on her

<sup>32</sup> “Mrs. Humphry Ward,” pp.1371-1374, “The Question of the Opportunities,” pp.197-204.

<sup>33</sup> “Mrs. Humphry Ward,” p.1371.

<sup>34</sup> “The Lesson of the Master,” p.569.

beauty and their conversation ends by positioning her as an inspiration to the novelist, "a fine subject" of a story.<sup>35</sup> Female novelists, if adopted as characters at all, are never treated as serious novelists but only as popular ones and are always treated with ridicule and satire. Greville Fane was the only female novelist who was given a central position in a novel, but as we have already seen, she also was marginalized, and being deprived of her professional authority, was reduced into a fond pathetic mother exploited by her children.

Cultural sociologist Gaye Tuchman explores how the growing number of male novelists in the latter half of nineteenth-century England invaded the field of novel-writing, which had been occupied mostly by women until then. Drawing on wide-ranging data she reveals how these male novelists established themselves as legitimate authors while "edging out" female writers into popular novelists. As one of the strategies adopted to marginalize female authors, Tuchman calls our attention to the formula of registering biographical information in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, issued between 1885 and 1911, period, according to Tuchman, of the redefining of literature by male writers. In registering female authors' biographical information, the biographers of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, all but one of whom were men, chronologically integrated information about their marriage and children; on the other hand, in the case of male authors, they rarely included this kind of information. Furthermore, biographies of female authors integrated "personal and private lives" and stressed "sociability," "charm" and "graciousness," "particularly as a hostess for men."<sup>36</sup> This underlining of female authors' personal aspects was an attempt, whether conscious or unconscious, to return them to the private sphere where women were legitimately allowed to be active agents in the Victorian cult of domesticity, and James adopted the same strategy as these biographers in "Greville Fane." One critic pointed out that it was unusual for James, for whom female popular writers were usually an irritation, to portray the narrator's "good-humoured fondness for her," "his special sympathy for her as a parent" "despite her intellectual shortcomings."<sup>37</sup> But it is exactly James's portrayal of the narrator's interest in her private life and sympathy for her as a mother, that "edges out" the professional author into the private or domestic sphere and effaces her being from the public scene.

Thus, James involves himself in marginalization of the female novelist, but he seems to have some scruples about this victimization, for he shows some ambivalence toward the narrator and hints at his criminality in a highly subtle way. Apparently the narrator does not seem to be such an "unreliable narrator" as Booth explicated; in comparison with the third-person narrator, with the first-person narrative, it is much more difficult for readers to detect the self-deception of the narrator, because objective description of the narrator is almost impossible in a world totally unified by the first-person narrator's subjectivity.<sup>38</sup> Especially in tales of writers in James's middle years, the writer-narrators often voice Jamesian aesthetic theory and critics are likely to conceive them as extensions of James and never doubt their reliability. Nevertheless, even with the first-person narrative, James subtly reveals the narrator's self-deception, bias, and limitation with narrative details such as symbolical gestures and

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.570.

<sup>36</sup> Gaye Tuchman, *Edging Women Out: Victorian Novelists, Publishers, and Social Change* (Routledge, 1989), pp. 93-99.

<sup>37</sup> Sara S. Chapman, *Henry James's Portrait of the Writer as Hero* (Macmillan, 1990), p.48.

<sup>38</sup> Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (The University of Chicago Press, 1961), p.339-74.

the other people's responses to the narrator.<sup>39</sup> In "Greville Fane" the narrator's limited understanding and complacency are hinted at by his failure to comprehend Fane's "irritation" over the problem of form and to recognize himself in the "young poet" (221) she satirically introduced into one of her books. If Fane never recognizes "the torment of form," the narrator never knows the torment of friction with the market. James also hints at the narrator's complicity in Fane's ruin by exploitation by her son; he suggests that the narrator took advantage of observing her experiment of training her son to be a novelist. When he talks with Fane about the resources of fiction, he complains that he might have some difficulty in writing stories based on "observation" "when opportunity failed," since "observation depended on opportunity." Right after this speech, the narrator tells the reader about her plan for her son. The experiment was exactly an "opportunity" for the realist novelist and that explains his inordinate interest in her son. Then almost at the end of the retrospect, he declares to Fane, "I myself will write a little story about it" and the retrospective narrative the reader is reading is this story. James also suggests Leolin is his mirror figure by having the narrator assume exactly the same stance when he came home after he met Leolin. Finally both figures are united in Leolin's final remark to the narrator at the end of the story: "Don't you think *we* can go a little further still—just a little?" (233; italics mine). One critic called "Greville Fane" "an acute moral tale" of "human cannibalism and exploitation ... of the parent by the children."<sup>40</sup> But if Leolin is his mother's "murderer," the narrator is also an accomplice in the murder by observing her process of ruin for his material, or, more appropriately, he might be called a posthumous murderer, because he deprives her of her posthumous fame as a professional novelist by his exposure of her private life and marginalization. James indicates in the frame part that there are two versions of the story about Greville Fane, the column—what he said, and "a document not to 'serve'" —what he "thought" but did not say. If the column is paired with "a document not to 'serve'" her, then his reminiscence, that is, what he told the reader, should have its counterpart, namely, what he "thought" but did not tell the reader, "a document not to 'serve'" —him, this time—and James's accusation of the narrator lies in this unnarrated narrative. But it is extremely difficult to detect another unnarrated story behind the narrated one, because the narrator's story is offered as a story of "backstage," as if there were no further "backstage." Also, the clues James gives to the reader are so subtle that even today's critics, like Richard A. Hock, read the story just as a moral tale of a mother exploited by her children. James knew he was writing the story for the *Illustrated London News* and should have been aware of its readership well enough to know that the detection of another story would be beyond their reading comprehension. He must have been sure that this story would be read as a tale of a pathetic mother victimized by her children. Thus in spite of his ambivalent attitude toward the narrator, James is still in complicity with the narrator in his marginalization of the female popular writer.

#### IV. Conclusion

The eighties and nineties saw the social phenomena of rapid growth of readers and a flood

<sup>39</sup> For a discussion of the first-person narrator's self-deception, see "Rereading 'The Real Thing,'" pp.49-70.

<sup>40</sup> Richard A. Hocks, *Henry James: A Study of the Short Fiction* (Oklahoma State University Press, 1990), p.46.



of fiction, which threatened to change the significance of reading and shake the cultural hierarchy. In their attempt to maintain their cultural hegemony, dominant social groups were actively engaged in debates on books and reading, trying to shape and redefine readers and reading practices. Although James's "Greville Fane" is often read as a moral tale of an exploited mother, if we place the story in its cultural context, it can be read as a part of the debates over books and reading. In the story, while narrating his reminiscence of the dead female popular novelist, the novelist-narrator distinguishes his novels from her popular novels; he defines her novels as commodities to be consumed for mere diversion, and with the emphasis on the difference from hers, he tries to exalt his realistic novels to "work[s] of art," totally independent of the pressures from the marketplace. At the same time, the narrator, in his portrayal of the female novelist as a fond mother victimized by her children, tries to reduce her figure as a professional novelist to a domestic maternal figure. Thus what James dramatized in the story was a male author's struggle for distinction and dominance over female novelists. If we remember that the story was published in the *Illustrated London News*, the intended readers were exactly those who would enjoy Greville Fane's novels, and thus, under the pretense of revealing the backstage of popular fiction production, James was criticizing through the narrator the novels these readers most probably would enjoy. So the story is, as it were, a fictionalized criticism for a wider audience who would never dream of reading literary columns or criticism. This is a much more direct and far-reaching interference with current reading practices than the ongoing debates on readers and reading, and what we witness here is the author's own endeavor for the consecration of literature just before the desire for differentiation took shape into the institutionalization of reading as a discipline and a profession.

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