REPRESENTATIONS OF JOURNALISTIC PROFESSIONALISM: 1865-1900

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DEDICATION

*I did this for me.*
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Representations of Journalistic Professionalism: 1865-1900

Abstract

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This dissertation examines the development of journalism as a writing profession in late nineteenth-century America, paying particular attention to the reporters and correspondents who composed the bulk of the newspaper's news content. Journalism was becoming a viable profession in this period and writing, the journalist’s primary occupational duty, became an important and contested component in articulations of journalists’ professional identities. Such articulations form a discourse of professionalism that shaped both the identity of the journalist as well as the value of his writing. I examine this discourse through nonfiction and literary texts including journalism textbooks, speeches by prominent editors and publishers, trade journals published by and for journalists, and fiction by former journalists.

In this corpus, I identify three representations of journalistic professionalism circulating in this period: representations of the journalist as a literary apprentice, as an entrepreneur, and as a knowledge worker. Each manifests a different way of conceptualizing authorship, the nature of writing, and the writer’s relation to the text. For example, dual conceptions of writing as both a learnable craft and an expressive art shape the representation of journalism as a form of literary apprenticeship. Aspiring literary writers were encouraged to apprentice in journalism in order to develop their technical skills, yet cautioned against
staying too long lest their expressive faculties become too blunted to create art. The entrepreneurial model conceptualized the journalist as a businessperson profiting from his highly marketable writing skills. While the representation of journalism as a form of knowledge work also positioned journalists as purveyors of a valuable commodity, writing in this model was viewed as a transparent vehicle for the transmission of information, separating form and content and subordinating writing skill to information gathering ability.

Representations of journalistic professionalism are shaped by multiple, sometimes competing, conceptions of writing, which, in turn, are subject to the shaping influence of social and cultural forces like emerging technologies and educational regimes. All of the representations I identify existed simultaneously; collectively, they represent the raw materials from which journalists forged their professional identities in this period and which continue to influence conceptions of journalistic professionalism today.
Introduction: Locating the History of Journalistic Professionalism

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, the typical newspaper was a four-page weekly produced by a single editor who likely also served as the printer and publisher. By the end of the century, New York’s urban dailies were sprawling enterprises bringing readers the “daily history of the world” in multiple editions employing hundreds of editors and writers, not to mention the legions of employees in the production and business departments. The extraordinary growth and reach of daily newspapers was enabled in part by communication technologies like the telegraph and typewriter, as well as by innovative print technologies like the steam-driven rotary press, the linotype typesetting machine, and the stereotype plate, all of which helped make printing exponentially faster and more economical than it had been only decades before. At the same time, cooperative news agencies like the Associated Press were making it easier for newspapers to gather news. Addressing students at Union College in 1893, The (New York) Sun editor and publisher Charles Dana extolled these developments in the methods and means of newspaper production. He predicted that they would revolutionize the practice of journalism, “raising it to a higher dignity than it has ever occupied” (64). He projected a bright future for the journalist, a figure whose occupational outlook and professional standing was dramatically transformed in the late nineteenth century. For the first time, daily news journalism offered a career option attractive to large numbers of middle-class persons such as the college students Dana addressed.

This dissertation examines the development of the daily news journalist as a writing professional in late nineteenth-century America, paying particular attention to newswriters, the reporters and correspondents who wrote the paper’s news content. There have been numerous studies of genres of journalistic writing in this period, as well as of specific groups
of newswriters, such as war or foreign correspondents. My aim is not to contest this historical record. Rather, by examining the discourse through which the journalist’s professional role was articulated my analysis aims to uncover the ideological underpinnings of the multiple, competing conceptions of journalism that emerged in the last decades of the nineteenth century. I have chosen to analyze a variety of nonfiction and literary texts from the period spanning roughly the decades between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of the nineteenth century because this is the period in which the journalist’s professional role was beginning to crystallize. The distinct, hierarchically organized occupational roles that today constitute the taken-for-granted structure of the modern newsroom are actually a historically recent invention, developing in the last half of the nineteenth century. Moreover, the hierarchical roles developed rapidly as emerging communication, printing, and transportation technologies radically remade the practices of journalism. New technologies ushered in new methods of gathering and writing news, creating new hierarchies of workers organized under newly developed systems of management.

Several competing representations of the work of newswriting emerged that attempted to reconcile the conditions of newswork with contemporary conceptions of authorship and the work of writing. This dissertation identifies and describes three important representations of journalistic professionalism that emerged in this period: the representation of journalism as an apprenticeship to literary writing, the representation of journalism as a form of entrepreneurship, and the representation of journalism as knowledge work. Each representation emerges from a different concept of writing and accounts for different aspects of the journalist’s occupational milieu. The many confused notions we have of the nature of journalists, such as the assumption that they should be committed public servants, or that
they are all budding creative writers, are traceable in part back to the notions of writing that inform competing conceptions of journalistic work. These representations existed simultaneously, sometimes contradicting one another, and collectively they represent the raw materials from which journalists forged their professional identities in this period.\(^1\)

The late nineteenth century is a rich site in newspaper history for textual analysis because of the proliferation of newswriting occupations, as well as the newspaper’s extensive size and reach. A flurry of newspaper and magazine articles dissected how the press operated and critiqued the professional conduct of its employees (Dicken-Garcia 126). Many feared the newspaper’s influence even as they celebrated the variety of news content on offer. Speeches by prominent editors and publishers like Dana were well publicized and discussed in both trade and general interest publications. In fact, Dana’s speech at Union College was one of three of his speeches collected and published as *The Art of Newspapermaking* by D. Appleton and Company in 1895. In her history of standards of journalistic conduct in the nineteenth century, Hazel Dicken-Garcia argues that a nascent theory of press function began to emerge late in the century. This press theory attempted to “explain how the press operated and to justify and defend journalistic conduct” based on sometimes competing ideas about what function the press served (156). In the 1880s, Melville Stone, the founder of the *Chicago Daily News* and eventually managing editor of the Associated Press, described the

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\(^1\) I use the masculine pronoun almost exclusively throughout because my study focuses on an occupational space that was largely conceptualized as a masculine sphere. In his 1910 textbook *Practical Journalism*, Edwin Shuman effectively dismisses women in journalism, writing “American journalism offers good positions to a limited number of women of special ability in certain lines, but on the whole it is rather grudging of its favors to the gentler sex” (147). The “certain lines” Shuman references often meant that women were often relegated to the women’s pages or found fame as “sob sisters” or “stunt girls.” The latter exemplified by Elizabeth Cochran, better known as Nellie Bly, whose exploits included feigning madness in order to research an exposé of sordid living conditions in the Women’s Lunatic Asylum at Blackwell’s Island. While I regret contributing to the historical marginalization of women in journalism, I am primarily interested in the dominant means of representing journalism as a profession and have, of necessity, taken as the “norm” discussion around the experience of men, who comprised the vast majority of newswriting staffs.
newspaper’s primary functions as printing the news, guiding public opinion through editorial content, and providing entertainment (Dicken-Garcia 164). While journalists typically agreed on these three general functions, they and other press critics disagreed on which was the newspapers’ primary function. As one writer described it, the editorial function was only to argue an opinion while the reporting function was the “great device by which modern civilization transmitted to posterity a plain, unvarnished, and veracious account of itself” (qtd. in Dicken-Garcia). William Allen White, the Emporia Gazette editor made famous by his editorial “What’s the Matter with Kansas?” agreed to an extent, describing the newspaper’s primary function as being “to inform, to enlighten, to place within the knowledge of men the facts which concern their most important interest, ignorance of which may expose them to loss.” The public service value of news is clear here, not only providing vital information, but also enlightenment to readers. And yet, White placed stronger emphasis on the newspaper’s editorial function. While the news guided the individual, the editorial function served as a guide and more to statesman. In its editorial function, White argued, the newspaper served as a “guide in public affairs, as a counselor, prophet, and judge to whom even statesmen must listen” (qtd. in Dicken-Garcia 163-164). In both its news and editorial functions, the newspaper was seen as serving a vital social purpose. The notion that the newspaper might be not only a guide, but a “prophet,” “counselor,” and “judge” placed tremendous power in the hands of the newspaper. Criticism of the 1890s focused on how well it fulfilled that role and, just as importantly, how fit its staff was to support the institution’s public service mandate.

In the late nineteenth century, argues Dicken-Garcia, critics began to “dissect the ‘profession,’ explicating and distinguishing among the press’s various functions and tasks
and explaining the differing roles of reporters and editors, and how the press in general—and
its different departments in particular—went about its work” (Dickens-Garcia 156).\(^2\) In
magazine articles, textbooks, and speeches both journalists and those public undertook a
taxonomic investigation of the variety of personnel charged with creating the newspaper’s
variety of editorial, news, and entertainment stories. My study examines one area of
particular concern among late nineteenth-century press critics: the professional role of the
journalist. In attempting to tease out how—and how well—the press was fulfilling its
functions, critics were also debating the occupational role and social function of the
professional journalist, attempting to fashion a professional identity from multiple
representations of who the journalist was and what the nature of journalistic writing entailed.

**Corpus**

In order to explore the discursive scene in which these struggles for professional identity
played out, I have examined a variety of texts including newspapers from the period, as well
as trade, educational, and literary accounts of journalism. My preliminary research included
examination of a variety of newspapers, including samples drawn from the years 1810-1874
of *The National Aegis*, a weekly published in Worcester, Massachusetts, as well as early
issues of *The (New York) Sun*, a Penny Press paper that began publishing in 1883. In 2008, I
participated in a summer seminar on the history of the book at the American Antiquarian
Society. Led by journalism historian’s David Paul Nord and John Nerone, the seminar’s
theme was "The Newspaper and the Culture of Print in the Early American Republic." In
addition to discussing the print production, business, and readership aspects of newspapers in

\(^2\) In fact, the 1890s alone saw a huge outpouring of such analysis, so much so that Dickens Garcia’s detailed
study of press criticism of the nineteenth century stops at 1890, overwhelmed by the sheer volume of criticism
published in that period.
early America, we were also invited to examine newspapers from the Society’s unrivaled collection of American newspapers.

However, because my primary interest was in how the work of journalism was described, I chose not to include newspapers in my final analysis, focusing instead on discourse *about* the practice of journalism rather than examples of it. Instead, I analyzed early journalism textbooks, speeches about journalism by prominent editors and publishers, and trade journals published by and for journalists and other writers. My purpose in examining this diverse collection of texts was to gain insight into how the work of journalistic writing was understood by both the public and by journalism practitioners. I was particularly concerned with including a multitude of perspectives or vantage points for viewing the journalist, attempting to include the voices of those both within the profession as well as those who observed or aspired to join it.

**Textbooks:**

My corpus includes a several textbooks published between 1867 and around the turn of the century: *Haney’s Guide to Authorship* (1867), one of the first guides to journalism published in America; *The Ladder of Journalism and How to Climb It* (1889), a popular textbook based on a series of articles on journalistic methods first published in *The Journalist*; and Edwin Shuman’s *Steps Into Journalism* (1894) and its follow-up, *Practical Journalism* (1908). Joseph Mirando notes that journalism’s earliest textbooks are important historical artifacts because they “serve as both manuals of instruction and as standard reference sources for a branch of study, and contained in [them] are the lessons that formed the basis of the body of knowledge during the discipline’s infancy” (“Journalism’s First” 1). I included these texts in order to identify instances in which the assumptions about writing that
informed emerging professional roles were articulated. I selected from among the earliest and most popular textbooks in order to identify instances of the instantiation of professional discourse that would have been accessible to a wide swatch of readers. Primary among them is Edwin Shuman’s *Steps Into Journalism*, which has been described as the first “practical” textbook because it was used in early college journalism classes. Previous textbooks like *Haney’s Guide to a Authorship* (1867) were not written for use in a college classroom. Rather, they addressed an audience of prospective freelancers: amateur writers who might produce a poem, an essay, or a novel as easily as a newspaper article. Many early journalism textbooks were penned by former journalists at a time when occupational roles were just beginning to crystallize, or in some cases before they even emerged. Thus, these texts offer some insight into what the writer hoped the profession might become.

An interesting feature of early journalism textbooks is their emphasis on the fact that they cannot actually teach the techniques of journalism, as that knowledge must come through practice. “Journalism is a profession which cannot be learned from books,” states Thomas Campbell-Copeland in the preface to his journalism textbook *The Ladder of Journalism and How to Climb It*. Rather, “years of patient and conscientious work is the only ladder by which a man may hope to attain a solid eminence in newspaperdom” (x). Instead, Cambell-Copeland’s book promises a distillation of the knowledge gained through “many years observation, labor and experience” as a practical newspaper man. These claims to have distilled hard experience underscore the professionalizing imperative as they signal an attempt to gather and cloister the embodied knowledge of the trade. Moreover, by eschewing descriptions of technical detail or prescriptive how-to instruction in favor of narrative descriptions of newswriting, textbooks like Shuman’s and Campbell-Copeland’s offer the
initiate a model of professional behaviors they might emulate rather than a set of actions to perform. The textbooks thus demonstrate how to be a journalist, even while declining to teach how to do the actual writing work required of the journalist by, for example, providing models or descriptions of formal elements of news texts.

In contrast, early creative writing textbooks claimed to teach the techniques of writing, but were unable to transmit the art of writing because artists were “born, not made” (Adams 67-77). They offered formats to follow, examples of professionally produced writing, as well as strategies for invention. As one creative writing textbook introduction stated: “Literature is art, and art is not communicable. Theories of its methods and success can be inferred and explained; its practical technique can frequently be explained and acquired. But neither the theory nor technique makes art; the living spirit is not in them” (Robert Neal's Short Stories in the Making, 1914, qtd. in Adams 77). Creative writing textbooks attempted to teach the craft of writing rather than attempt to professionalize the creative writer. In contrast, journalism textbooks aimed to professionalize the journalist rather than teach the craft of writing. The descriptions of newswriting in early journalism textbooks thus offer idealized glimpses of writing as a professional activity and as such are particularly fruitful resources for gleaning insight into how writing figured in developing conceptions of journalistic professionalism.

Trade Publications

A number of trade journals emerged in this period to help writers negotiate the thriving marketplace. Among the most influential and enduring of these was The Writer, founded in 1887 by William Henry Hills and still in publication today. Formerly the editor of a weekly newspaper, Hills also ran a literary syndicate and directed The Writer’s school for
Journalism and Literary Training, a correspondence course (Mott *History* 142). A typical issue of *The Writer* might include an instructional article such as a how-to on writing correspondence for daily newspapers, an article describing the office or workspace of a successful writer, a profile of a famous writer, news about or comment on events of interest to writers, and several columns featuring advice or questions from readers. *The Writer* served as a guidebook to the market for print, instructing novice writers in every detail of publication from selecting the correct writing instrument, to properly packaging a manuscript for the mail. It also provided a forum for writers from around the country to comment on the state of their emerging profession and to exchange information about the market for professional writing. *The Writer* addressed to “literary workers” broadly conceived, including both literary and journalistic writers and those who sought part-time or freelance work as well as salaried journalists.

*The Journalist*, a highly regarded trade journal started in New York in 1883, was clubby and very much concerned with the goings on of the New York daily newspapers. It targeted daily news workers, but it served a communicative function similar to that of *The Writer*, creating a forum in which daily news journalists from around the country could exchange information and ideas. For example, in addition to news and information feature articles, almost every issue of *The Journalist* published a collection of short accounts of the state of journalism in cities outside New York. It also tracked the movement of journalists as they changed jobs and, in some cases, changed careers through short notices on its editorial page or in columns devoted to thumbnail profiles of journalists around the country. It also printed readers’ responses to discussions about journalism in other publications, giving journalists a space to dialogue with critics of the emerging profession. I reviewed three years
of The Writer, reading every monthly issue in its entirety beginning with the magazine’s founding issue in 1888. And I reviewed three years of The Journalist, beginning with 1884, the year of its founding, and resuming in 1888 in order to read in parallel with my readings in The Writer. Both published by and featuring work by journalists, I regard these publications as a window on how newsworkers represented their own work, particularly as they worked collectively to forge a professional identity.

Speeches and essays by prominent editors

Speeches by prominent editors and publishers were not only often written up and discussed in the popular media, but might also be reprinted in book form, reflecting a widespread and enduring public interest in the structure of news organizations and the occupational roles of journalist. In addition to Dana’s speeches, collected in The Art of Newspapermaking, I also consulted an April 4, 1872 speech delivered at New York University by New York Tribune editor, Whitelaw Reid. Titled “Journalism as a Career and Educational Preparation for It,” the speech was widely discussed and printed in Scribner’s Magazine in June and reprinted as a chapbook that same year. I also consulted essays Reid wrote on the pragmatics of running a newspaper. Eugene Camp’s “Journalist: Born or Made?” delivered in 1888 at Pennsylvania University’s Wharton School of Business, included a survey of prominent editors’ beliefs about the proper education of the journalist.

All three speeches attempt to define the role of journalism in America, and Reid and Dana provide capsule histories of the profession as well as descriptions of newsroom structure and discourses on the feasibility of programs of higher education for journalists. Camp’s speech was an unmitigated plea for schools of higher education, as was a 1904 essay by Joseph Pulitzer in which he outlined his plan for a school of journalism at Columbia University.
These texts, and responses to them, offered insights into the workings of the newsroom as well as conceptions of the newswriter’s role within the newsroom hierarchy. Discussions about the proper education of the journalist were particularly helpful because they articulated fundamental notions about the social value of the newswriter. Moreover, their extensive reprinting suggests popular interest of which editors were likely well aware. Therefore, I read these texts as as an attempt by speakers to represent journalism to the public.

**Fictional and autobiographical accounts of journalism by literary writers**

In addition to nonfiction, trade, and educational accounts of journalism, I also analyzed representations of journalistic writing in the fiction and life writing of journalists turned literary authors. These sources provide a dramatic representation of the activities of journalistic writing. Often rich with metaphoric language and exaggerated conflict between characters, these descriptions offer a meaty stew of metaphors and other linguistic markers of systems of discourse. I selected fictional texts written by former journalists in order to examine how these writers framed accounts of journalistic professionalism that may have been influenced by their own experience both as journalists and successful literary writers.

The representations of journalism in short fiction by two former journalists, Richard Harding Davis and Jesse Lynch Williams, were particularly important because those texts were initially published in mass circulation, general interest publications, making them accessible to a wide readership. Like the speeches, these stories appealed to mass audiences and I read them as the writers’ attempts to position journalism in relation to other forms of writing. While Davis was more widely recognized for his journalism and nonfiction, he was a popular and widely read literary writer as well. Jesse Lynch Williams eventually earned fame and critical recognition as a playwright, winning the first Pulitzer Prize awarded for Drama in
1918. But his short stories about journalism were one of the first things to earn him recognition outside the pages of the daily newspaper. William Dean Howells’s accounts of journalism in his fiction have been widely discussed (see for example Kaplan, Hartsock, and Ziff). Rather than retread their more detailed analysis of his fictional representations of journalism, I looked instead to his autobiographical descriptions of his journalistic experience in order to examine how Howells strategically deployed representations of journalism as a form of literary apprenticeship in order to position journalism in a subordinate position to literary Realism.

Collectively, the texts I have examined represent sites of discursive intervention into the identity of the journalist as a professional. When I examined how the work of writing was described in these texts, I found multiple ways of representing the journalist as a professional, which reflected the many competing notions of writing circulating in the period. I am most interested in the representations of journalism as a form of professional writing that emerge when the discourse of professionalism is either refracted through these conceptions of writing or gives rise to new ways of conceptualizing the work of writing. I describe these instantiations as “representations,” re-presentations of a system of discourse that both reflects underlying material conditions and shapes further responses to those conditions. There was no single way of being a journalistic professional; rather, journalists selected professional identities, or identities were imposed upon them, from among multiple competing representations that drew from the circulating discourse of professionalism as well as from predominant and emerging conceptions of writing. Representations organize understanding of existing phenomena.
Thus, for example, the representation of journalism as a form of literary apprenticeship encouraged aspiring litterateurs to consider earning a living in an emerging profession while practicing their craft. At the same time, competing conceptions of the nature of writing as both a learnable craft and an inspired art complicated the journalist’s professional role, conferring status based on the notion that journalism provided an opportunity to improve the craft of writing, but also denigrating journalism by assuming that the journalist was merely an acolyte to a higher, more creative calling. So, while this representation encouraged college educated young men to enter the profession, it ultimately denigrated the profession by subordinating the work of journalistic writing to the inspired self expression of literature. In the case of the literary apprentice, the discourse of professionalism is refracted through conceptions of writing as an inspired art that predate the professionalizing impulse of the late nineteenth century.

In contrast, the entrepreneurialism of the late nineteenth-century business professional provided some journalists with a new way of conceptualizing the work of writing. These conceptualizations of writing as a skilled activity that should be exploited for profit challenged the prevailing model of journalistic writing as a rhetorical act, as a persuasive form of communication guided by an ideal of public service. In Chapter Three, I examine how an entrepreneurial ideal, exemplified by journalists writing for trade periodicals, may have empowered salaried newswriters as well. After identifying and describing representations of journalism circulating in the late nineteenth century I also explore the material effects of those representations as they influenced journalist’s professional roles and factored into important questions such as the appropriate education for the journalist. Again, this study does not attempt to expand the already sizable historical record of the period, but
rather to apply a form of textual analysis intended to draw out the ideological formation of journalists as professional writers.

**Historical treatment of the journalist as a writer**

Histories of journalism can be roughly divided into two broad categories: institutional and occupational histories. Institutional histories treat the American newspaper press’s development as a democratic institution. Many of the professional practices that define contemporary journalism developed during the later half of the nineteenth century. In fact, news reporting became such a recognized occupation that by mid-century reporters appeared frequently as characters in popular magazine and book fiction, as did editors and correspondents. Yet contemporary institutional histories tend to subsume the history of journalism as a profession into the history of the American newspaper press. In these histories, the mid-century explosion of writing and editorial occupations at major metropolitan newspapers is regarded as an inevitable result of the growth of the penny press, i.e., large-circulation, inexpensive, nonpartisan newspapers. For example, Michael and Edwin Emery define journalism as an evolutionary process in human history: “Journalism history is the story of humanity’s long struggle to communicate: to discover and interpret news and to offer intelligent opinion and entertaining thoughts in the marketplace of ideas (xi). The authors de-contextualize the historically and culturally situated concept of “news” and the Western metaphor of the marketplace of ideas, neatly tying both to an objective, ahistorical notion of “journalism” which is epitomized by the “modern press.” The introduction states, “The modern press system is the gift of no nation. It is only the current stage in the evolution of communications efforts, spanning all continents, and at least 10,000 years” (1). Within this configuration, modern journalists are simply the men “performing the
functions” of the press, men whose antecedents include Herodotus, Confucius, Julius Caesar (in the *Commentaries*), Saint Paul (in the epistles), and the writers of the *Qur’an* (Emery, Emery and Roberts 698). In his *History of News: from the Drum to the Satelite*, Mitchell Stephens likewise describes “news” as a category of information endemic to human nature and sensationalism as a “technique or style that is somehow rooted in the nature of news itself,” citing examples of sensationalism from First Century Rome (2).

In 1975, responding to what he described as Progressivist or Whig histories like Emery and Emery’s that narrated the history of journalism as the ongoing evolution of a fundamentally democratic institution, James Carey called the study of journalism history “something of an embarrassment.” Journalism historians, he argues, “have defined our craft both too narrowly and too modestly and, therefore, constricted the range of problems we study and the claims we make for our knowledge” (89). The alternative Carey proposes is not a new interpretive paradigm, but rather a new historical consciousness that would interrogate the cultural history of the report and the reporter rather than presenting grand narratives of the press’s development as a democratic institution (89). While there have been notable examples of attempts to “operationalize Carey” such as Michael Schudson’s sociological study of the concept of objective reporting, historians have failed to adequately historicize journalists, and have ignored journalism as a situated writing activity almost completely. While journalism historians have largely abandoned what Carey identified as the Whig paradigm of progress toward a more perfect democracy, the field continues to struggle against a rather narrow conception of its subject and method. In the words of one media

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3 As David Paul Nord notes in a remembrance of him, Carey himself never substantiated his theoretical provocations by producing an example of the kind of history he called for. Other’s efforts to do so, including an issue of *Journalism History* dedicated to “operationalizing Carey” are described in Nord’s 2006 essay.
historian, much of today’s journalism history scholarship can be described as evaluations of how well the press covered individual news events (Van Tuyll 5).

In the late 1970s, more histories of journalism as an occupation did begin to appear, including histories of occupational norms and values such as the professional standards guiding newsgathering and reporting. However, this work focuses too narrowly on only one type of newswriter, typically focusing on either the reporter or correspondent, or even conflating the two. According to Mott, penny press newspapers began hiring staff reporters to cover local news as early as the 1840s (312). However, in his 1975 study of objectivity as a professional norm, *Discovering the News*, Michael Schudson claims that reporting emerged as a distinct occupation only in the 1880s and 90s, a period dubbed “the age of the reporter” (Schudson 65). Schudson too narrowly defines the reporter as a recorder of “objective” facts. It is unclear whether this definition includes all paid contributors or is limited to salaried reporters, reporters paid “on space” (i.e. by the word or line), or correspondents. For example, when discussing the creative autonomy and social cachet enjoyed by reporters at the turn of the century, he cites well known *correspondents* like Stephen Crane and Richard Harding Davis. However, correspondents have contributed to newspapers since the colonial period, and by the 1890s often enjoyed more freedom and prestige than most staff news reporters. At the same time, histories of correspondents have typically been tightly focused on famous individuals or on types of correspondents, such as war or foreign correspondents. For example, Louis Starr’s *Reporting the Civil War* (1962) offered a comprehensive history of Civil War correspondents and was followed by John M. Perry’s *A Bohemian Brigade: The Civil War Correspondents* (2000). However, accounts like these are too narrowly focused to provide insight into the dynamic spectrum of writing occupations, including special
reporters, correspondents, and editors who played an equally vital role in the press of the period.

If historians of journalism have overlooked the complexity of the professional roles of journalistic writers, literary historians have ignored journalistic writing almost completely. The growing body of scholarship on writing as a profession concentrates almost exclusively on literary or creative writing. Professional writing in America, particularly in the antebellum period, has garnered much critical attention, focused almost exclusively on professional literary writers. In his groundbreaking history of literary professionalism in antebellum America, William Charvat defines professional authorship as writing that “provides a living for the author, like any other job.” Charvat defines professional writing as “a main and prolonged, rather than intermittent or sporadic, resource for the writer;… is produced with the hope of extended sale in the open market, like any article of commerce; and… is written with reference to buyer’s tastes and reading habits” (3). This definition would seem to fit the late nineteenth-century writers who are the subject of this dissertation. However, Charvat limits his study to “literary artists,” those for whom “both art and income” were a concern, examining how the emergence of a national book trade enabled now canonical authors to make a living from the pen (7, emphasis added). Charvat’s limited focus on creative literary authorship both reflects and perpetuates the limited conception of authorship that defined antebellum letters.

In a study of how antebellum authors “figured” authorship in terms of other forms of labor, Michael Newbury contrasts the “professional author,” a writer who made his or her sole living through writing, with the “genteel author,” one who wrote as a pastime or who could afford to write due to financial independence or patronage support. The “genteel”
notion of authorship was declining in the antebellum period. Yet, professional authors continued to adopt the posture of the disinterested amateur even as they scrambled to make a living with their pens. For these writers, the potential economic advantages of professionalism were tainted by the writer’s dependence on the tastes of the reading public (Newbury 5). In the Antebellum period, a “professional author” was often not simply one who lived by the pen, but rather, “one who professed a certain, discriminating commitment to polite literature” (Jackson 9). Thus, many Antebellum authors sought, but publicly rejected, financial success, crafting ways to distance themselves from hacks like Hawthorne’s “d—d mob of scribbling women” or the scribblers in the “fiction factories” that mass produced dime literature for working class readers in the 1850s (Newbury 24 and 36; Denning *Mechanic*). While this latter class of writers has received some critical attention, the preponderance of scholarship on American literary history is much more concerned with the genius than with the hack and is not at all concerned with the ink-stained wretches that inhabited American newsrooms.

Studies of late nineteenth-century professional authorship share many of the same limitations that define histories of antebellum authorship. Amy Kaplan examines how Realist literature attempts to reconcile shifting social relations, even attending to the overlap in coverage between Realist literature and the daily newspaper. However, Kaplan’s focus ultimately is on literary authorship. The significant cultural shifts that enabled the emergence of a large class of professional writers has gone largely unnoticed due to critics’ focus on *literary* or creative fictional writing. For example, Ronald Weber’s study of full-time professional writers in the nineteenth century includes newspaper correspondents but specifically omits “writers who toiled as salaried employees on newspapers and magazines,”
despite the fact that salaried newspaper occupations were born of the same print explosion that nourished the class of professional writers Weber profiles (2). Accounts of journalistic writing in trade publications like The Writer and The Journalist describe scores of writers like the ones Weber profiles, including writers who moved between literature and journalistic writing, as well as those who worked exclusively in salaried daily news journalism. In fact, The Writer billed itself as “a monthly magazine to interest and help all literary workers,” suggesting a broadly conceived notion of the “literary” that embraced the poet as well as the reporter and penny-a-line scribbler (emphasis added). In excluding salaried journalists from his study of professional writing, Weber excludes a significant number of writers whose professional role was informed by the same competing conceptions of composition and authorship from which the writers he studied forged their own professional identities. In fact, Weber examines competing conceptions of the relationship between journalism and literature, quoting a variety of opinions on the subject, without interrogating the assumptions about writing underlying those assessments. For example, echoing David Graham Philips’ assertion that journalism could be either a “school or a cemetery” for literary talent, Weber simply concludes that a journalistic apprenticeship helped some writers, like Hemingway, and hindered others (113-115).

As I discuss in Chapter Two, assumptions about the relationship between literary and journalistic writing were rooted in conflicting beliefs about the nature of writing as either a learnable craft or an expressive art. The privileging of expressive forms of writing relegated the journalistic writer to a subordinate, apprenticeship status. However, an alternative representation of journalism, and of professional writing, as a form of entrepreneurship encouraged writers of all stripes to conceptualize themselves as skilled professionals
marketing their wares. Rather than an expressive art, writing in this representation is reduced to a marketable skill and success is measured in profit rather than artistic achievement. Both representations were available to the writers Weber profiles and help explain the variety of contradictory views surrounding journalism and literature that he uncovers.

Journalism as a writing profession has been overlooked in journalism and literary histories. However, it has also been excluded from histories of professional writing, which attend primarily to writing in the technical professions. For example Janet Longo’s *Spurious Coin* examines the history of technical communication, paying particular attention to Engineering as does Connor’s article-length history of technical writing education. Katherine Adams’s *A History of Professional Writing Instruction in America: Years of Acceptance, Growth, and Doubt* (1995) provides an invaluable resource by examining the emergence of professional writing programs in American colleges. Her study is singular in its expansive definition of “professional writing”: she describes the emergence of programs in creative writing, journalism, and technical communication. However, this expansiveness is also the book’s weakness in that Adams is able to treat each of these subjects only superficially, giving an historical overview and gesturing at concerns about the teachability of writing that vexed these programs without providing deep analysis of the assumptions about writing underpinning those conflicts.

It is in the area of critical language study that the writing practices of journalists receive the most sustained attention. Anthony Trew’s 1979 essay “What the Papers Say” examines how systems of belief are subtly expressed in the language of news reports, systematically discrediting the notion that the news text could provide a transparent and objective vehicle for the transmission of ideas. Roger Fowler builds on the theoretical
framework sketched out in this work and other essays from the same collection in his 1991 book *Language in the News: Discourse and Ideology in the Press*, which applies critical linguistic methodologies to the study of ideology in news language. Fowler draws on previous work in Sociology and Media studies, which argues that news is a discursive, practice that, rather than impartially reflecting a neutral or objectively observable social reality, intervenes directly in the social construction of reality. As Fowler writes in the introduction to his 1991 book, “language is not neutral, but a highly constructed mediator” (1). Critical language studies like Fowler’s complicated prevailing conceptions of newswork by lifting the veil of objectivity and emphasizing the journalist’s role as a writer engaged in the construction of social reality rather than a reflection of it. Their work problematizes a conception of writing widely held since the nineteenth century, which I discuss in chapter four, the notion that language, or text, can be a vehicle for the transmission of unclouded reality. Schudson has described journalists of the late nineteenth century as “naïve empiricists” confident in their ability to neutrally record objective reality and transmit it through the transparent vehicle of language (6). Contemporary studies of ideology in language highlight the complicated dynamics of textual production, demonstrating on the one hand the linguistic construction of social phenomenon and on the other hand the complex role of the writer in shaping that construction. Critical language studies that analyze the ideology of newswriting inform my study in two ways: first by providing a critical model and an imperative for examining the discursive construction of the journalist’s professional role in texts about journalism.

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4 A similar notion informs analysis of news texts by critical discourse analysts, who study how texts enact, reproduce, and resist the forces of social power, dominance, and inequality (see for example Fairclough and Van Dijk).
My study casts a retrospective eye on how writing was understood in the late nineteenth century. My work deepens the historiography of journalism by examining journalists as writers and the work of journalism as a set of situated writing practices. Rather than dismiss the studies of literary professionalism described above, my aim is to draw on the methodologies they have established while drawing in attention to the discursive construction of professional roles in order to get at the journalist in a new way. In describing journalism as a situated writing activity, my aim is to emphasize the activity of writing is situated in layers of context, shaped by writers goals as well as audience’s perceived expectations. My aim in this study is to examine the ideological component shaping how the writer’s role is conceptualized. I am particularly interested in how different representations of journalistic professionalism manifested underlying conceptions of the nature of writing.

**The discourse of professionalism**

Sociologists generally agree that a profession is organized around a set of techniques or a body of theoretical knowledge that is hidden from the general public and that is transmitted through a sanctioned set of educational practices and often certified through a standardized set of procedures. Society confers self-regulatory power upon a profession, which the profession justifies by enforcing a set of ethical standards among its members (Larson x, Bledstein 87). For example, the American Medical Association was founded in 1847 and soon established a set of ethical standards and began establishing standards for educational programs in medicine. By 1906, the association was accrediting college programs and schools. Attorneys started becoming certified through state-run bar exams in 1880, starting with New Hampshire (Melli 4). Many sociological definitions of professions also include an emphasis on an ideal of public service, which not only helps justify the power
granted the profession, but also helps ensure the ethical application of professional knowledge.

Journalists, as an occupational group, failed to achieve the standards for education and credentialing that certified other more recognized professions; it remained effectively a club anyone could join. There were some efforts to establish college programs for journalistic writing in the late nineteenth century. For example, Joseph French Johnson, formerly of the Chicago Tribune began offering the first recognized journalism course at University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business in 1893 (Mott 604). And in 1904, the University of Illinois, offered a course in journalism that was eventually organized into a 4-year curriculum (Sloan 9, Mott 604). Graduate programs did not become available until the turn of the twentieth century. And even then, these programs served as preparation, but not certification for entering the profession. Even today, there is no single ethical code organizing professional behaviors, nor is there a formal board certification process to regulate entry into the profession. And, lacking a single body of professional knowledge all journalists are expected to master, it is still possible, though not the common practice, for an aspiring journalist to secure a position in the newsroom without having completed a college program in journalism.

And yet, much of the literature in journalism history has been concerned with journalists’ attempts to achieve the cohesion of a profession. Much fruitful research has discussed how journalists have attempted to professionalize by pursuing one or more of the characteristics typically associated with a recognized profession. For example, some have cited the efforts by press associations to establish codes of ethics and programs of study for journalism in the 1850s as evidence that journalists attempted to professionalize at the turn of
the century (see for example Banning’s study of the Missouri Press Association’s use of the term “professional” to describe members and efforts to promote higher education for journalists). Still others have pointed to the establishment of professional schools of journalism at the University of Missouri in 1908 and Columbia University in 1912 as definitive proof that journalists’ efforts at professionalization began early in the 20th century (Winfield 1-14). Thus, journalists established press associations, trade journals, and programs of higher education in journalism, even if these institutions held no regulatory powers or authority to certify the professional status of members. Studies of professional development that attempt to locate journalism according to a fixed standard of professional development overlook the degree to which journalists sought the status and recognition attendant with professionalism, regardless of their success in establishing the institutional markers that would signify the same status as more recognized professions like medicine and law.

A more productive strain of historical research is concerned with the development of professionalism. Professionalization, described above, is the process through which occupational groups secure professional status by establishing the social institutions that certify and disseminate the body of knowledge around which a profession is organized, such as professional schools and trade organizations. In contrast, professionalism describes the standards and behaviors adopted by members of an occupational group that is attempting to define itself as a profession. What journalism historians have described as the “professional attitude” was already apparent among journalists by mid-century (Mott 312, Banning).

Through trade journals like The Journalist established in 1883 and The Writer, established in 1888 these workers sought to establish a sense of professionalism, generally accepted if not widely enforceable standards of ethics and behaviors that would merit social recognition of
their professional status. Professionalism has also been described as a “collective mobility project,” an effort to secure social status.

This effort was particularly important to occupational groups in the late nineteenth century, an era shaped by what has been described as a “culture of professionalism” in which the development of modern higher education dovetailed with the solidification of a middle-class identity based on what Burton Bledstein describes as a “vertical vision” of the potential for infinite personal and social progress (105). The word career took on its modern sense in this period, describing “a pre-established total pattern of organized professional activity with upward movement through recognized preparatory stages, and advancement based on merit and bearing honor” (Bledstein 172). Thus, the concept of a professional career situated vertical vision, the organizing feature of middle-class self-identity, within the workplace and installed the university as its gatekeeper. Higher education was one means of securing professional status, of achieving the “collective mobility” Larson describes (ch. 6). It is clear from both trade and literary accounts that journalists adopted this attitude in a bid to secure the stature and respect accorded others in more recognized professions.

College educated men were entering journalism as salaried reporters, editors, and, in increasing numbers, as contributors, a sign to many that the news trade was professionalizing. In an 1875 interview, Whitelaw Reid claimed that journalists on the whole were much better educated than their predecessors of twenty or thirty years ago. Indeed, Reid claimed that at his own paper, the Tribune, “there is scarcely a writer who is not a college graduate” and at least two-thirds of the reporters at his own paper are “men of liberal education” (qtd. in Wingate 30). By 1900, nearly 60% of the editors at daily newspapers were college educated (Hart 14). And yet, journalists occupied an uncertain social space,
caught between the lower classes, who were often the subject of news coverage, and their college educated peers engaged in more established professional callings.

For example, a May 14, 1887 editorial in *The Journalist* rings “the ‘Chestnut’ bell” by complaining about the ill treatment of reporters by people they were sent to write about. In this instance, the paper railed against a slight committed against journalists by Mr. Clark Bell, a prominent New York City lawyer who had made his fortune negotiating contracts for the Union Pacific Railroad (“Clark Bell”). Bell had given a lavish dinner to which he invited distinguished guests and, in an effort to get publicity, members of the press. However, according to *The Journalist*, the reporters were seated in the corner of the room behind a screen, served an inferior meal, and given only a single bottle of wine to share. While the reporters did not report the incident in the pages of their papers, *The Journalist* was stung on their behalf. “The reporters were his guests and should have been accorded the same courtesy as the others… They were in this instance, every one peers of Mr. Bell; in every respect except in pocket-book, his superiors, in fact, for they were gentlemen enough to laugh at his caddishness and take no revenge” (“Again” 8). Linton, the fictional reporter in a short story by Jesse Lynch Williams likewise suffers slights from those in more recognized professions. For example, he bristles when a young lawyer he has been sent to interview condescends to him. As the defining feature of middle-class social life, the professional career offered workers not only a way of representing their individual identity, but also a means of playing a public role in a society dominated by an ideal of expert knowledge in service to the public good (Bledstein *Culture* 172). While the market for print provided the means for both journalistic and literary writers to earn a living, wage earning alone was not enough to secure journalists a place among more recognized professionals. Rather, outlets like trade
periodicals attempted to confer social prestige on journalists by emphasizing their professional qualities. However, notions of journalistic professionalism were not uncomplicated, in fact, journalist’s identities were forged from multiple competing representations of journalistic professionalism.

**Chapter summary**

After a contextualizing chapter describing major events in the formation of newswriting as an occupation, each of the next three chapters describe a way of representing the work of journalism and of conceptualizing the professional role of the journalist. Each of these representations manifests a different way of conceptualizing authorship, the nature of writing, and the writer’s relation to the text. These representations existed simultaneously, reflecting the multiple ways of conceptualizing the work of writing that were available to journalists in the period. Their simultaneity has yielded a confusing picture of journalism in the period so that the dominant representation in historical accounts has been that of the journalist as a public servant, while literary historical accounts have emphasized the representation of journalism as a literary apprenticeship and neither have accounted for the representation of journalism as primarily an information gathering profession, which assumes an entirely different way of thinking about writing. Previous accounts of journalistic professionalism in this period overlook the representations made available to journalists and more importantly, how these representations instantiated conceptualizations of the nature of writing. In drawing out what each of these representations means for the work of writing as well as for conceptions of the writer, I will also attend to the larger implications of each representation, such as how that representation positions the journalistic writer in relation to writers of literary or creative texts, the amount of professional agency a representation might
confer upon a journalist, and how these representations influenced emerging educational regimes.

Chapter One: Editorial Brains and Reportorial Brawn

This chapter provides a foundation for understanding what was at stake in the representations of journalistic professionalism that I describe in the chapters that follow. First, it provides a brief overview of the events that contributed to the formation of newswriting occupations. It then examines the structural division of newsroom occupations. This chapter sets the scene for the ones that follow by applying the same type of close reading employed throughout to examine how the newsriter’s role was conceptualized within the newsroom. The mechanized, corporate newspaper of the late nineteenth century offered more opportunities for writers to earn a living, but it also diminished their status. As the work of writing and editing the news became increasingly separate occupations, news writing came to be seen as a mechanical rendering of observed reality in contrast to the refined intellectual activity of editing. I argue that the resulting newsroom hierarchy was discursively constructed in both classroom and professional genres in corporeal terms, with editorial “brains” described as directing the activities of reporters’ laboring “bodies.” Stripped of power within the newsroom, journalistic writers struggled to secure the public recognition and social standing of more recognized professional groups such as physicians and attorneys. The chapters that follow elaborate three different forms those efforts took: the representation of journalism as a form of literary apprenticeship, as a form of entrepreneurship, and as a form of knowledge work.

Chapter Two: Journalism as a Form of Literary Apprenticeship
The representation of journalism as a form of literary apprenticeship is based on competing conceptions of writing as both a learnable craft and an expressive art. On the one hand, aspiring literary writers were encouraged to apprentice in journalism in order to earn a living while developing their technical skills. At the same time, they were cautioned against staying too long lest the emotional demands of the job degrade the sensitivity that would allow one to elevate one’s writing to art. This representation of journalistic professionalism relegates journalism to an inferior position to literature and dismisses the journalistic professional as a mere apprentice to a higher calling.

Chapter Three: Journalism as a Form of Entrepreneurship

Chapter Three describes a representation of journalism based on a different conception of writing. The writer in this representation is conceptualized as a business professional, an entrepreneur marketing his writing skill. Whereas the literary apprentice aspired to a more expressive form of writing, the journalistic entrepreneur aspires only to profit from his work and, in fact, actively crafted his or her writing to the demands of the marketplace. More importantly, the entrepreneurial model of journalism offered an alternative to what has come to be the prevailing model of professionalism in the historical and contemporary accounts of American journalism: the notion that journalism is a vital servant to democracy, making journalists essentially public servants. Whereas the entrepreneurial model empowered the journalist to advocate for his rights in the newsroom, the public service model disempowered the journalist, making self-sacrifice a defining aspect of the profession. The entrepreneurial model, which was promoted in trade journals for profit-minded professional writers, conceptualized the journalist as a businessperson.
attempting to create and sell a product for which there was a ready market. Writing in this model is reduced to a marketable skill that can be learned and improved through practice.

Chapter Four: Journalism as a Form of Knowledge Work

In this chapter, I draw on a modern sociological term, “knowledge worker,” to describe the activity of journalists in the late nineteenth century. The knowledge worker is one whose primary occupational duty is the collection and distribution of information. Though they would not have described themselves using this contemporary term, journalists in the period did recognize themselves as purveyors of a valuable commodity in the emerging information economy. Whereas entrepreneurial professionalism emphasized the journalist’s writing skill, the representation of journalism as knowledge work emphasized special knowledge and information gathering over writing skills. In fact, writing in this representation is viewed as a transparent vehicle for the transmission of information, less important than the ability to secure that information. This view was perfectly suited to the inverted pyramid news story form, a form that was beginning to be widely adopted at the end of the century. The inverted pyramid form invites writers to treat a story as so much raw information, a collection of facts to be prioritized and arranged in a highly formulaic style.

The crowded discursive scene of the late nineteenth century yielded no clear winners; none of the representations I examine prevailed over the others. Rather, each of the representations continues to affect how the work of journalism is regarded in some domain or other. For example, the assumption that journalism is an apprenticeship to literature still spurs some aspiring novelists to pursue education in journalism. And many of the college programs that now train journalists are now attempting to equip journalists to adopt the stance of the entrepreneur selling their still-valuable writing skills in the new media.
economy. In the conclusion, I consider such contemporary concerns about the fate of the journalistic profession in light of the rapid changes wrought by digital technologies.

Nineteenth-century journalist’s efforts to negotiate the multiple competing representations of journalistic professionalism seem particularly poignant today given the struggle to re-conceptualize the journalist’s professional role in today’s rapidly de-stabilizing print environment. Digital technologies have created unprecedented opportunities for users to both access information and to create their own content. In an environment in which websites like the Daily Kos compete with the New York Times for breaking news, the definitions of what constitutes news and who is a legitimate journalist are in question. Given the grim predictions for the survival of print newspapers, it is easy to overlook that late nineteenth journalists struggled with similar questions of professional standards and legitimacy.

Mine is not an effort to locate the roots of twenty-first century problems in the nineteenth century. Rather, by examining the discursive formation of journalistic professionalism, I highlight the contingency of the journalist as a public figure, it’s instability in the face of rapid change and the shifting of myriad forces shaping conceptions of the work that journalists do. Many of the professional identities that are now being adapted, abandoned, and reworked emerged from a nineteenth-century mass media environment that was also shaped by rapid advances in communication technology and an explosion in outlets for writers to disseminate their work. Journalists worked to craft a professional identity, to assert their status as valuable professionals in an expanding information economy and to situate themselves as writers among a burgeoning class of writing professionals. Technological developments in printing and communication accelerated the production process, which in turn pressured nineteenth-century journalists to gather and report news.
faster and more efficiently, often forcing them adapt quickly to new communication
technologies. Twenty-first century digital technologies have virtually erased the time
between a news story’s composition and its publication, and many older journalists trained in
print-based methodologies must struggle to retrofit their technical skills to meet the new
production processes.

Nineteenth-Century journalists also struggled to locate their place in hierarchically
organized newsrooms where specialization meant that workers were asked to perform an
increasingly narrow range of tasks. Digital journalism has flattened these hierarchies,
allowing journalists to play a greater role in both writing and production. In fact, job loss in
traditional media has led some journalists to start their own hyper-local web-based
newspapers, reporting on events in small communities that had not always been served well
by traditional print-based media. These web-based newspapers undo the separation of
printing and editorial duties that helped give rise to the modern newsroom, returning
journalists to the role of printer/editor/publisher formerly occupied by journalists in the
Colonial era.

Finally, given the proliferation of newswriters and the power they held as
representatives of influential news organizations, press reformers and journalists in the late
nineteenth century struggled to define the ideal training regimen for newswriters. Debate
centered first on the necessity of college journalism programs. When schools began to
introduce programs, debate centered over whether the schools should teach the fundamentals
of newsgathering and writing or inculcate students with a sense of professional ethics and
responsibility to the public good. Colleges introduced courses, and eventually programs in
journalism, with the first journalism school opening in 1908. Today, many of those same
school wrestle with the challenges of new media journalism, struggling to identify the best way to train journalists for a publishing environment that seems to change daily. Many schools have introduced training in the technical tools of new media, while some continue to insist that the fundamentals of newsgathering and editing are transferable across media, and still others describe the best training as a dose of professional ethics and sense of the role of the press in a democratic society.

In the following I demonstrate that the profession of journalism is always a discursive construction, instantiating multiple, sometimes competing conceptions of writing.
Chapter One: Editorial Brains and Reportorial Brawn

in the Corporatized Newsroom

Even now there are some old men left who can tell you how they used to print their papers on a Washington hand press, one page at a time; how the flat type-form was laboriously inked each time by hand; how the dampened sheet of paper was carefully laid upon the type, and then how, with a back-breaking pull on the lever, they took the impression; and how, finally, with the perspiration trickling down their editorial brows, they pulled out the printed sheet—cautiously, so as not to tear it—rolled their shirt sleeves a little higher, and went to work on the next copy.

--Edwin Shuman, *Steps Into Journalism* (1894)

Introduction

In the passage quoted above, textbook writer Edwin Shuman describes a newspaper printer/editor, a single figure who controlled the writing, editing, and production of a newspaper. When Shuman’s textbook was published in 1894, the printer/editor was a relic of another time, at least in urban areas. While Shuman dwells on the printer/editors sweating brow, the *New York Herald* was churning out papers on its Hoe “sextuple” perfecting press, introduced in 1889. Capable of producing 48,000 twelve-page papers in an hour, the machine printed onto rolls of newsprint that, thanks to improved wood pulping and papermaking technologies, cost only pennies apiece (Mott 498). In the decades leading up to the unveiling of this modern marvel, newspaper production shifted from a craft to an industry. More importantly, around the middle of the nineteenth century, the printer/editor described above fragmented, and his writing, editing, and printing duties were dispersed among legions of workers in separate departments. Daily newspapers in large cities like New York had become enormous operations employing thousands, including an elaborate hierarchy of writers and editors who produced the newspaper’s written content. The printer/editor described in works
like Shuman’s textbook was transformed in the late nineteenth century into a corporate entity comprised of a thinking editorial “brain” and a laboring, mindless body composed of newswriters, the reporters and correspondents who produced the paper’s news content. Even though the printer/editor was a relic of a different era of journalism, he appears in descriptions of late nineteenth-century journalism as both a foil to show, by comparison, how far newsgathering and production methods had advanced, and as a romantic figure embodying a lost unity of intellectual and bodily labor. On the one hand, the printer/editor’s bodily labor was emphasized to celebrate the modern machinery that liberated the editorial intellect from the duties of printing. However, as both an intellectual worker who gathered and edited the news and a physical laborer who laboriously printed the newspaper, the printer/editor symbolized a fusion of brain and body that was missing from the modern newsroom hierarchy. Moreover, in the industrialized paper of the late nineteenth century, the actual laboring bodies of the printers and other workers who produced the newspaper were elided entirely.

Michael Schudson has famously described the reporter, as an “invention” of the late nineteenth century (88). Schudson rightly points out that the reporter became a publicly recognized figure in the 1880s and 1890s, one whose professional role was energetically debated in the popular media. However, reporting as an occupation emerged much earlier, in the 1830s, a product of the separation of the work of gathering, writing, and producing the news into distinct occupational roles. This chapter traces the events that led to the establishment of paid newswriting occupations in American newspapers. As I will demonstrate, when the duties of writing and producing the news divided, editors assumed the role of the corporate news body’s thinking brain, while reporting and corresponding came to
be associated with the bodily work of printing, relegating the newswriter to a subordinate role within the newsroom’s occupational hierarchy.

This chapter provides a foundation for the ones that follow by examining the organizational constraints that dictated the journalist’s occupational role. Essentially disempowered in the workplace, newswriters, particularly the reporters who wrote the majority of the newspaper’s news content, were reduced to parts of a larger body, the feet and fingers for the newspaper’s thinking brain. Outside the newsroom, however, they attempted to locate themselves among sometimes competing models of their professional role, selecting from among representations of their profession as a literary apprenticeship, a form of entrepreneurism, and a form of knowledge work.

**Antebellum newspaper production**

In the Colonial era and up until the cost and scale of news production swelled staff sizes, editing and producing a newspaper was an “intensely personal matter” (Schudson 16). Michael Schudson describes early newspaper proprietors as “one-man bands,” who not only edited and printed the paper, but also managed the business end. The news reporter, a worker tasked solely with gathering information and reporting a story for the newspaper, was non-existent.

However, print and editorial work began to separate between the 1820s and 1850s. Often described as the Partisan press era, this period is noted for the rise of mass politics and the ascendance of the political party as the predominant feature of the American political landscape. At the same time, the emergence of a market economy enabled some newspapers to begin supporting themselves with ad sales. Party funded newspapers were generally mouthpieces of a single political party and relied heavily on party patronage (Baldasty 112).
Throughout the century, a confluence of factors pushed papers to a commercial model driven by mass-market advertising. One of the more significant of these factors was the emergence of a market economy in the 1830s, with newspapers increasingly coming to rely on mass market advertising revenue (Nerone 175-176). As newspapers moved toward a market model financed by paid advertising, which in turn demanded higher circulations to lure reader/consumers, newspapers began emphasizing news over editorial content, attracting wider readerships through more coverage of local events and “human interest” stories about both working people and social elites.

A group of inexpensive urban dailies, known as Penny Press papers like The (New York) Sun, accelerated a trend already beginning in newspapers in general toward offering more local news in their pages (Nerone “Myth”172). News from the police courts became a regular feature in many newspapers, with some employing a full-time reporter to gather and write the reports (Stephens 239). While many of these “court reporters” were printers moonlighting in the police courts at night, they were professional writers in the sense not only that they were paid for writing, but also that writing eventually became their primary occupational activity. While the party paper of the 1830s had spoken with the voice of the party that controlled it, newspapers began emphasizing a variety of news over party-driven editorial content, the paper began to reflect the personal voice of the prominent editor who ran it, expressed both through editorials and the individuality of newsgathering and business practices (Schudson 16).

The diversification of news staffs, particularly at large urban dailies, continued into the 1840s, when newspapers began hiring reporters and correspondents in larger numbers, as well as advertising and business managers (Nerone and Barnhurst 438). By the 1850s, this
division of labor was likely reflected in the creation of distinct spaces dedicated to news and editorial writing that were physically separate from printing and business activities. These would be what we today call “newsrooms” (Nerone and Barnhurst 438). Writing in Forum in 1895, one former journalist recalls that between the 1830s and 40s, the staffs of most larger papers increased “from an editor who wrote the leaders, corrected the communications and read the proofs, with an assistant who did the local work, to two editors and two reporters” (King 588). By the 1850s, the staff of the New York Tribune comprised 12 editors and reporters in addition to business managers and a separate printing staff (Solomon 119). News staffs continued to grow and diversify, advertising pressures demanded increased readership, and increased production required larger manufacturing plants. Eventually, as the news organization’s complexity required broader oversight and management, the publisher supplanted the editor as the prime mover of the newspaper.

Content continued to diversify and the newspaper, embracing modern production methods and catering to higher numbers of readers, continued to grow. The aggregate circulation of all American dailies rose 222 percent between 1870 and 1890, an even more impressive leap when you consider that the population of the country increased by only 63 percent in the same period (Mott 507). Industrialized production processes and content diversity had transformed the daily newspaper into a “department store,” with different subject matter organized into distinct sections within the paper (Nerone and Barnhurst 438). By the end of the century, urban dailies typically offered a mix of local, regional, national, and international news. Moreover, the focus had expanded beyond politics to embrace topics like business, crime, labor, education, religion, sports, science and technology, theater, literature, home economics, and social scandal. The sheer volume of information being
published required larger staffs of writers and editors to product it. According to the 1880 census, there were 10,000 people employed as full-time editors, subeditors and reporters on American newspapers. This figure does not include writers who worked part-time or occasionally produced items “on space” (678). *The Journalist*, a trade publication for journalists, reported that New York dailies kept rolls of thousands of correspondents in cities and towns throughout the country, with the *The (New York) Sun* reportedly retaining a thousand and the *New York Herald* alone retaining three thousand (“By the Bye” 9).

At the same time that the content and tone of newspaper was changing, technological changes were reshaping ownership structures. Between 1850 and 1900, the urban daily newspaper grew exponentially, increasing in terms of both circulation and in number of pages per issue. Whereas the printer-editor described by Shuman may have begun the business with a few hundred dollars and a few helpers, by the end of the century, daily newspapers were prohibitively expensive to start up and required a large, diverse staff of intellectual and manual labor to run. In 1835, James Gordon Bennett reportedly began the *New York Herald* in a basement office furnished with packing cases, drawing on a mere $500 in capital (Baldasty 5). By the 1840s, Charles Dana, editor of *The (New York) Sun*, estimated the cost of starting a daily newspaper at between $5,000 and $10,000, reflecting increased costs in both printing technology and personnel (Alfred Lee 166). A group of New York state businessmen put up the $100,000 needed to start the *New York Times* in 1854. And a group of 29 investors backed Charles Dana’s partial purchase of *The Sun* in 1868 (Solomon 117). By the end of the century, Pulitzer’s *New York World* was worth an estimated $10,000,000
(Mott 547). The cost of high speed, steam driven printing equipment as well as the personnel costs of gathering news made starting or even buying an existing paper too expensive for the typical printer, and by mid-century the era when a motivated printer could start up a paper was over; the paper had become a corporate interest (Baron “Women” 26).

As urban newspapers were transformed into large-scale profitable enterprises, publishers of newspapers were no longer trained printers: they were businesspersons, and printers became permanent employees. This shift in status relations was underscored by the establishment of the National Typographical Union in 1852, a trade union that advocated for printers’ rights within the news bureaucracy. In 1887, publishers formed their own organization, the American Newspaper Publisher Association. The ANPA’s mandate included helping members keep up with advances in printing technologies such as typesetting machines, and members early on emphasized the need for employers to band together to countermand the power that unionized printers held over the production process (Solomon 117). At the organizational level, the processes of gathering and writing the news were decisively split from the processes of printing and managing it. By the 1850s, this division of labor was reflected in the creation of distinct spaces dedicated to news and editorial writing that were physically separate from printing and business activities. These developed into what we today call “newsrooms” (Nerone and Barnhurst 438).

The separation of news writing and editing from production was the first step towards a conceptual split between the intellectual and bodily activities of news production.

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5 I should note, however, that these figures reflect the extraordinary growth of New York City dailies. Start-up costs were lower in smaller cities. For example, E.W. Scripps, founder of the Scripps newspaper chain claimed to have established all of his papers for less than $30,000 each (Mott 548-549).

6 Unless otherwise indicated, the dollar figures quoted here and throughout have not been adjusted and reflect late nineteenth century dollar values.
Concomitant with the change in production methods was a change in the way the newspaper’s relationship with its readers was conceptualized so that the paper moved from being the personal vehicle of an individual editor to the less personal “voice” of a corporate institution. At the moment when the Editor-in-Chief began to fade from the role of “prime mover” at the paper, ceding the most visible control to the publisher, contemporary commentators began to romanticize manual production methods, describing in loving detail as Shuman does the sweat dripping from the editorial brow as the editor prints the paper. These descriptions of craft printing emphasize the bodily nature of hand printing in order to contrast the printer/editor’s brawny arms and sweaty brows against the pure intellect of the modern editor. In these descriptions, Hoe’s invention of the revolving cylinder press emancipates the editor’s intellect by disembodying him from the act of printing. Shuman’s description of the printer/editor is typical of late nineteenth-century accounts of the press’s evolution. In these triumphal accounts of the marvels of modern journalism, the disembodiment of the editor is narrated as a technological advance in that it allows the editor to commune directly with readers. For example, Whitelaw Reid, editor of the New York Tribune, writes that Hoe’s “lightening” press gave editors “the possibility of addressing millions, at the instant of their readiest attention, from a single desk, within a single hour, on the events of the hour” (Reid “Practical Issues” 232). In reality, the editor’s address was made possible by the labor of legions of skilled press operators and their assistants, not to mention the copy runners, copyeditors, typesetters, and lowly newsboys that carried his words to the streets. However, more than the simple elision of the printer’s laboring body, Reid’s conceptualization of the editor’s ideas being broadcast directly to the waiting public speaks not only to the privileging of mind over body, but also to the privileging of a
particular kind of writing over another. Editorial writing came to be seen as the expression of
the editor’s mind, which in turn represented the corporate brain of the newspaper. In contrast,
news reporting came to be seen as an almost mechanical rendering of observable reality,
which was reduced to an extension of the printer’s mindless labor.

As newspapers hired increasing numbers of writers and editors to gather, report, and
comment on the news, newsroom occupations became more stratified and specialized.
Editorial newsworkers, those workers who wrote and edited the content of the newspaper,
were arranged in a hierarchy based not only the perceived level of autonomy and creativity
they were able to employ, but also in their perceived association with the bodily act of
printing. Thus, editors came to be regarded as the head or brains of the news organization
while reporters and correspondents came to be seen as the corporation’s laboring bodies, or,
more accurately, body parts. The discursive organization of the modern industrialized
newspaper as a corporate body not only reflected changes in the material conditions of
newspaper ownership and production, but also served to organize workers in a very specific
way within a body of work.

The “Corporate” Voice

In an 1875 interview, Reid describes the modern metro daily newspaper as the end
product of an evolution from a personal to a corporate “voice”:

Every great newspaper represents an intellectual, a moral, and a material
growth; the accretion of successful efforts from year to year until it has
become an institution and a power. It is not, then, Gen. Butler’s poor
Bohemian in a back garret who speaks; it is the voice of the power that ten,
twenty, or thirty years of honest dealing with the public and just discussion of
current question have given. That this power is for the time in the hands of this man or that only shows that its conductors have reason to trust him. If they commit in this a mistake, they are soon made to learn it. (qtd. in Wingate 31)

Reid’s optimism not only speaks to the growth of the modern newspaper in terms of production, circulation, and editorial reach, but also hints at changes to the writer’s role within an increasingly corporatized work environment. The shift from a personal voice is particularly important, signaling the adoption of a corporate form of organization in which the corporation was more than the sum of its human parts, but rather an entity that existed independently of its individual employees.

Equipment and labor expenses continued to spiral upward throughout the century. After the Civil War, the start-up costs of a daily in New York City could be as high as $1 million (Baldasty 5). Major newspapers were recognized as corporate enterprises, large, multi-faceted organizations comparable in scale to those in other major industries such as steel, textiles, and railroads (Hart 14-20). When Whitelaw Reid arrived at the New York Tribune as an editorial assistant in 1865, the paper was already a behemoth “million-dollar-a-year business” that printed daily, weekly, and semi-weekly editions for more than three-hundred-thousand subscribers (Duncan 37). The paper took in nearly a hundred thousand dollars per month in advertising, but “paid out that much to paper makers, type founder, printers, press services, reporters, special writers, [and] to a host of other contributing persons and companies, and to stockholders” (Duncan 37). This list represents the various functions of newsgathering and production distributed among a slew of workers spread throughout the enormous Tribune building. This stratification and organization of workers
resembled the modern corporation, or what Alfred Chandler describes as a “modern business enterprise” (i). The modern business enterprise is defined by its size and management structure: a hierarchy of salaried executives manages the various operating units that together form the enterprise (Chandler 1). In contrast, the traditional American business firm “was a singe-unit business enterprise” within which “an individual or a small number of owners operated” the business out of a “single office” (Chandler 3). The industrialized urban newspaper increasingly resembled the corporation while replacing the single unit business operated by the printer/editor.

Whereas the small firm might disband upon the death of one of the business partners, the modern business enterprise was composed of structured work roles that could be filled by any qualified employee. Thus, when one manager left office, another was prepared to take his place, “the Institution and its offices remained” (Chandler 8). Reid expressed this notion in terms of newspapers with the conditional language in which he describes the management structure of the modern newspaper: “That this power is for the time in the hands of this man or that only shows that its conductors have reason to trust him” (qtd.in Wingate 31). For the daily newspaper, the corporate business structure ushered in a new relationship between the paper and its readers as the personal voice of autocratic editors like Horace Greeley declined. In fact, Tribune readers had for so long associated the paper so closely with Greeley, that when he died in 1872, the paper’s circulation plummeted. The nation followed the struggle for editorial control of the paper, which Whitelaw Reid eventually secured by gaining option on a majority of the company’s stock, and many assumed it would simply cease to publish (Mott 423).
Reid, a longtime critic of the personal journalism that marked newspapers as the mouthpiece of their editors, was among a vanguard of editors who championed impersonality, favoring instead a depersonalized “corporate” voice distinct from any individual within the newspaper. Samuel Bowles III, publisher of the Springfield (Mass.) Republican described the shift from a personal to a corporate voice as a necessary adjunct to the modernization of the newspaper itself. The editor, rather than speaking directly on the pages of the paper, shifted roles to become instead the thinking brain that controlled the great newspaper body. Declaring that the “the days in which a great paper is simply a great man, or an odd man, or an audacious man, are over,” Bowles said the individual “must be subordinated” to the newspaper. Instead, the paper must be an individual in its own right, “fed by” the people who run it:

The true paper should have a character and conscience of its own. It must be fed, of course—led even—by the energy, the wisdom, and the culture of individuals, the savor of whose head and heart will necessarily be imparted to its pages; but it must, to be the journal of the future, rise comparatively above their weaknesses, their prejudices, and their merely personal ambitions.

(Wingate 42-43)

In this description the newspaper is “fed” before it is “led” by its employees. In fact, it is questionable whether the employees are feeding or being fed to the newspaper—particularly as the “savor” of their heads and hearts are imparted to its pages. The feeding metaphors in this passage are evocative of one journalist’s complaint that the daily news employee’s “individuality is lost in the capacious maw of the paper” (Tuttle 297). The move from the personal to the corporate “voice” reflected the corporatization of the daily newspaper, which
consumed the individual worker, subsuming his identity into the paper’s. It also underscored the impersonal nature of the writer’s task within the newspaper’s occupational hierarchy. Bowles’s description of the “journal of the future” explicitly called on its workers to “subordinate themselves to the great instruments they assist in making” (Wingate 43-44). Bowels here is echoing Reid’s statement, quoted at the beginning of the section, in which he states that the newspaper is no longer a back garret bohemian who speaks, but rather is a voice of power. The shift from the speech of the back-garret Bohemian to the impersonal voice of the corporate “power” on the one hand marks a change in the “voice” of the paper from the personal engines of powerful editors to corporate entities whose editorial policies reflected stock prices. At the same time, it also marked a re-conceptualization of the occupational roles of those asked to subordinate their own interests to the paper. While it is unclear in Bowle’s description which workers’ “head and heart” would be imparted in the newspaper’s pages, other descriptions of the newsroom hierarchy more explicitly note that it is the editor who provides the head and heart while the reporter provides the corporate body’s brawn. This configuration is reflected in changing descriptions of the archetypical reporter. In many descriptions, the Bohemian reporter is used as a foil to describe the professionalism of the modern reporter in the corporatized newsroom. A typical example describes the Bohemian reporter as “loud-mouthed and redolent with beer and the tobacco pipe, who picks up his meals at apple-stands and depot restaurants, much as he does his items” (Blake 134). In numerous accounts of modern journalism in printed speeches, trade journals, and textbooks, the Bohemian reporter is invoked as a foil to the professionalized modern reporter, a reliable worker and selfless servant to the newspaper.
The Bohemians were a group of artists and writers who, before the Civil War, had congregated in a New York beer cellar. They emulated the raffish existence of French artists and intellectuals immortalized in Henri Murger’s *Scènes de la vie de bohème* (Tucher 133). Members of the Bohemian scene defined themselves by their “insouciance about money” unconventionality, “very public devotion to arts and letters” and sense of themselves as a class set apart from the rest of society by talent and outlook (Tucher 137-38). During the war, journalists from this New York scene distinguished themselves through their bravery, dash, and sensitive depictions of camp and battlefield scenes. By the end of the war, correspondents for papers all over the country were using the moniker “Bohemian” or some derivation as a pen name, indicating the widespread emulation of the Bohemian identity. However, the Bohemian aesthetic defined writing as the creative act of an autonomous artist who rejects the demands of the marketplace in favor of individual self-expression. While negative references to Bohemian writers emphasize their drunkenness and unreliability, it is also clear that the Bohemian aesthetic, rooted in self-expression, was anathema to the emerging conception of the journalist’s proper role. Reid railed against what he described as “literary adventurers” like the Bohemians, even calling for college training for journalists as a means to bar the “undistinguished and detestable mob of aspirants” from the newsroom (*Schools* 13). Thus, on the one hand, the vilification of the Bohemian for drunkenness and debauchery can be read as an effort to encourage more workmanlike habits among journalists. On the other hand, the Bohemian’s bravura, the insistence of his *personality*, contrasts sharply with the reporter’s anonymity and obscurity within the corporate newsroom, a condition I will describe in more detail below.
The newsroom, a space dedicated to writing and editing news content distinct from spaces for business and production, most likely emerged in the 1840s when noisy, steam-driven presses necessitated the separation of printing from production activities (Nerone and Barnhurst 438). However, the culture of the newsroom was influenced not only by the material conditions of news production, but also by evolving relationships among newsroom and production personnel. John Nerone and Kevin Barnhurst argue that newsroom culture “has accumulated over time as layers of practices and ideals [...] have sedimented on top of each other” (438) They argue that the newsroom as such reflects an aggregation of practices that emerged as newspaper styles, machinery, business arrangements, and conceptions of the role of the newspaper in society changed over time. However, histories of the American newspaper press have tended to be top-down, examining the structure of the press as an institution and the dominant figures of press ownership, paying scant attention to the work of writing and editing the news or to the workers themselves (Hardt and Brennan ix).

Historical accounts of journalistic writing professions have largely emphasized the drive toward professionalization and the journalist’s growing social status in the mid-nineteenth century and beyond. Many of these claims, however, are compromised by a failure to differentiate between reporters and correspondents, two very distinct occupational groups. For example, Andi Tucher’s history of the “Bohemian Brigades” of the Civil War argues that the War catapulted the reporter to the public consciousness as the preeminent representative of the newspaper. Frank Luther Mott likewise emphasizes the social prestige of the “special,” or war correspondent. However, while some war correspondents were drawn from the reportorial ranks, their designation as “specials” underscores the fact that their reporting of the war constituted special correspondence rather than the hum-drum of daily
news reporting. Instead, Mott pins the ascendance of the more typical rank-and-file reporter to the popularity of the nonpartisan (non politically affiliated) press of the 1870s. In this period, Mott claims, “the reporter had come into his own. He was key man in the New Journalism” (488). Others, pointing to higher pay, increased professional recognition, and the increased number of college educated middle-class men entering the profession, dub the 1890s the “age of the reporter” (Schudson 65). In fact, Michael Schudson claims that in the 1890s, “reporters were, for the first time, actors in the drama of the newspaper world” (64). Schudson’s claim, however, is based on the example of Richard Harding Davis, a celebrity correspondent, again, a special class of correspondent whose experiences cannot be taken as representative for the vast majority of reporters or correspondents in the period, a fact that Schudson acknowledges, but ultimately ignores. The danger in conflating the correspondent, especially the celebrity correspondent, and reporter is that it depicts the reporter as enjoying much more autonomy and prestige than was typically accorded in the period.

Unfortunately, the reality for reporters was not as rosy as that presented in the historical accounts that celebrate the “reporter coming into his own,” or the “Age of the Reporter.” Ted Curtis Smythe catalogs a litany of injustices suffered by late-nineteenth-century reporters, including long hours, low pay, and mistreatment by managers. Nerone and Barnhurst likewise emphasize the low status of reporters through the nineteenth century. They describe reporters in the nineteenth century as “pieceworkers, voiceless writers assigned to record proceedings at public events, speeches in the legislatures, facts from police courts and hospitals, and other matters that could be more or less automatically compiled” (439). While this assessment is a shade too bleak, Nerone and Barnhurst are correct in highlighting the conception of reporter’s writing as “automatic.” As I will show
below, the conception of the reporter’s labor as “automatic” is one reason why reporters
themselves were relegated to brainless positions within the editorial hierarchy. Moreover,
this position may have some precedent in the genesis of reportorial work as an offshoot of
printing.

While correspondents had contributed to newspapers from Colonial times onward, the
reporter was a relatively recent invention of the early nineteenth century and grew from the
increasing need for timely local news. For example, a popular feature of The Sun, which
began publishing in 1835, was the police court reports. The Sun’s first police court reports
were written by George W. Wisner, a printer with writing talent who, in addition to covering
the 4 a.m. police court beat, set type during the day (Mott 222-223). The New York
Transcript, founded in 1834, likewise hired a printer to cover the police courts, the
Englishman William H. Atree (Mott 228). When Wisener retired in 1834, he was replaced
by Richard Adams Locke, a veteran of the New York Courier as well as of London
periodicals. Locke earned $12 a week, the same wages paid to printers (Mott 225). Locke’s
salary was almost three times that of his predecessor, Wisener, suggesting the growing
importance of writing to the Penny Press paper’s success.

The editor of the party and mercantile papers of the 1830s had been an autocrat,
exercising complete control over the paper’s personnel and production process (Solomon 18-
19). As urban dailies added a larger volume and variety of local and original news content,
however, larger staffs of writers were required to produce that content and increasing staffs
meant increased need for management oversight. Isabelle Lehuu describes the daily
newspaper in the antebellum era as “the epitome of both a carnivalesque ritual and a market
fair, when boundaries are crossed and the private made public.” The New York Herald in
particular “succeeded in weaving a course canvas of sensational murders, railroad accidents, and steamboat explosions along with unlimited promotion of merchandise” (Lehuu 38). This course canvas was woven from material gathered by reporters and correspondents, a class of workers that, by the 1840s, urban dailies were hiring routinely. These were not former printers, but rather personnel hired specifically to report the news. Accounts of late nineteenth-century journalism in speeches, textbooks, and trade journals suggests that staffs grew and newsroom occupations diversified dramatically. In the 1840s, the staffs of larger urban dailies typically doubled. From an editor who wrote the leading articles and edited the papers with the help of an assistant who covered what little local news was printed the papers expanded to two editors and two reporters (Solomon 119). The New York Herald illustrates how rapid and pronounced the growth and stratification of news workers continued to be. An 1848 account book listed an editorial news staff that included several assistant editors, a money reporter, a court reporter, a police reporter, and a shipping news and imports reporter, in addition to two Washington correspondents (Reid “Practical” 246). Within the next ten years, the staff swelled to 12 editors and reporters, including a Managing Editor and a City Editor (Reid “Practical” 247, Solomon 119). This is notable not only because it reflects increased numbers, but also because of the variety of topics it demonstrates the newspaper covering. Later, papers would add editors to cover a staggering array of topics including society news, sports and women’s interests, to name a few.

These burgeoning staffs required new forms of oversight and control, leading to the adoption of systematic management practices emerging in other larger industries. The addition of Managing and City editors described above is one example of the oversight positions emerging in modern newsrooms. While the editor’s visibility had diminished as the
paper shifted from personal to a corporate voice, editorial power was “transformed, not lost” as editorial power dispersed over a hierarchical network of control to which the newswriter was subordinated (Wilson 20). In fact, within the period between 1840 and 1920, the same period in which the newsroom emerged as a recognizable site of occupational activity, adherents of a management philosophy that came to be known as systematic management began organizing workers into functionally organized departments (Wilson, Chap. 1; Yates 1). The managerial hierarchy is a defining feature of the modern business enterprise, with middle managers coordinating and controlling the work of underlings and reporting to senior executives “who themselves were salaried managers” (Chandler 3). This hierarchy mapped neatly onto emerging newsroom hierarchies so that newswriters not only lost autonomy, but also came to occupy a more tightly circumscribed and specialized role (Wilson 20).

The increase in editorial personnel reflects a disbursement of the editor’s power and authority, with City Editors supervising reporters and in turn, reporting to Managing Editors who acted as a link between the Editor and Chief and the various subeditors. The number and variety of editors increased as newspapers continued to grow and diversify in content. As one commentator noted in 1886:

Each department of a newspaper is under the direction of a qualified mind. The great labor of its daily publication is divided and subdivided, each laborer being responsible to the head of the department, and all the heads being responsible to the manager, and he in turn to the chief. The organization is thorough, the system complete, the co-ordination admirable (Browne 76).

Browne’s choice of words is particularly instructive here. He describes the editor as a “qualified mind,” controlling department heads who in turn supervise the newswriting
“laborers” in each department. This figuring of newsroom relationships is typical of the late nineteenth century and plays into a larger conception of the corporate body as a unified organism with a thinking editorial brain and laboring, reportorial body. Moreover, the bodily organization of workers, with management at the top or “head” of the structure, underlines the degree to which power was distributed from the top down. At the bottom of this hierarchical structure, newsroom “laborers” are directed by a qualified mind, a mind not their own, but rather located above at the top of the management structure.

The transformation into a corporate body

The division of newsroom workers into brains and brawn was based on an earlier separation of printing and editing. As noted above, early newspaper editors were often printers who performed both the editorial and production duties required to produce the newspaper. However, as printing technology became more elaborate, newspapers increased in size and diversity of content, and as the costs of starting a daily newspaper grew beyond the reach of the average printer, the editorial and production functions were divided and distributed among a slew of workers. In 1875, fifteen percent of the editors at the largest urban dailies had been printers. By 1900, only 2% had (Hart 18). Before the Civil War, an editor might boast of having worked his way up from a printer’s devil, having learned to compose stories and hand-set them into type. By the end of the century, the linotype machine had automated typesetting, replacing the human printer with a technician who operated a typesetting machine. Moreover, that machine was a good distance from the newsroom, and the person who had written the story being put into type might never lay eyes on a printing press. In their wide-ranging study of nineteenth-century accounts of journalism, newsworkers’ obituaries, and memoirs by journalists, Nerone and Barnhurst failed to find a
single reference to a journalist having learned to compose at the linotype machine, suggesting that by the time typesetting machines were introduced in the 1890s, print and newsroom occupations had become completely distinct.

The larger implications of this division between editorial and production workers is highlighted in an imaginary tour textbook writer Edwin Shuman takes his readers on: “Let us get an idea how a newspaper office is organized and what it is for” he writes before launching into a description of the various departments that comprise the typical news operation (18). According to Shuman, the newspaper office is peopled by two broad classes of workers: those associated with the “counting room” or business office, and those associated with the editorial room. However, beneath these two classes, is a third group of workers, “servants of one or both of the chief divisions before mentioned” (18-19 emphasis added). This group is comprised of the newspaper’s print production staffs: the “compositors, the pressmen, the stereotypers, the mailing room force and other subsidiary departments” (18-19). The reduction of these skills laborers to “servants” reflects a radical change in the nature of news production as well as a privileging of intellectual over bodily labor.

Until large urban dailies began using typesetting machines in the late 1890s, the printer’s role was not only physically and technically demanding, but required a range of literacy skills as well. The printer read the manuscript in order to typeset it, often correcting errors on the way. The type had to be justified by hand, test printed, and corrected before being set into the forms for the press (Baron “Technology” 72). Unionized since the 1850s, typographers considered themselves “skilled craftsmen” (Baron “Technology” 72). The absence of the printer from the newspaper office in Shuman’s description reflects the physical separation of different aspects of newspaper production both as staffs grew larger.
and as the process of creating the newspaper grew more elaborate. However, the dismissal of these vital craftsmen as mere “servants” of the editorial and businesses offices also reflects the privileging of office work over forms of labor that were considered less intellectual. The distinction drawn between middle and “working” class workers did not hinge on a distinction between intellectual work that left one’s hands clean as opposed to manual labor. Rather, the difference lay in the amount of the worker’s intellect that was invested in the performance of the work, the difference “between drudgery or mindless hard labor and mindful work directed by an intelligence” (Bledstein “Introduction” 6). Thus, Shuman may have demoted the skilled, and literate, printers to mere “servants” of the editorial room because their work was physically demanding. But in doing so, he also downplayed the literate nature of their work, and denied that print work might also be a form of intellectual labor. Shuman thus designates newsroom work as the only form of intellectual work performed at the newspaper. However, this privileging of newsroom over print shop labor has significant effects for the newswriter because it set the stage for the privileging of particular kinds of newsroom labor as more intellectual than others.

Accounts of the history of journalism that were written in the late nineteenth century dwell on the division of production and editorial duties ushered in by the adoption of steam printing presses. These accounts describe in detail the onerous process of hand printing before steam presses were introduced. In these descriptions, there is an intimate joining of the editorial mind and body as the editor who gathered the news labors to render it in type. Shuman melds the body of the editor into the printing machine in his description of the manual printing press. He graphically renders the number of printed pages produced in terms of the “back-breaking pull on the lever” of the hand press and the “perspiration trickling
down the editorial brows” (11). Because costly steam-driven presses were financially out of reach these manual production processes persisted at smaller papers, particularly those in the rural South and West, for several more decades after urban dailies had adopted industrial production methods (Nerone and Barnhurst 438). The (New York) Sun editor Charles Dana describes the printing process at the first rural weekly he edited in the early nineteenth century. It took two men to run the hand press and Dana situates himself in the process, describing putting down the paper, inking the press, and pulling the lever: “with great industry and care, we were able to print in a day, and one side at a time, five hundred copies” (2).

Dana’s purpose in describing his early experience as a printer/editor is to underscore the great gains made in newspaper production during his long career, particularly the speed and efficiency of steam printing. However, in his description of the modern printing apparatus, the machine itself becomes the active agent. When the editor is removed from the process, it becomes automatic. The human printer who operates the machine is elided. Instead, the modern printing machine is a work of modern ingenuity “put at the service of” the newsroom’s “intellectual army” (3). Shuman likewise describes the brain of the editor controlling the modern steam-powered printing press, a mechanized body, a modern marvel: “There are giants in these days—giants greater than Hercules or Goliath of Gath. Strongest among the strong are two modern Titans—Confined Steam and Free Thought. Steam power is mighty. Brain power alone is mightier” (218, emphasis added). The brain power here is the editor’s, which controls the steam engine. “We may well be astonished at the change” from the hand- to the steam driven press, writes Dana, describing “printing presses that run literally at the rate of a mile a minute—that is the actual speed at which these machines
revolve and pursue their beautiful, industrious, and never-failing toil” (218). Unlike the sweating human body, the machine never toils, it works tirelessly in service to the editorial intellect. Whitelaw Reid, editor of the New York Tribune likewise compares the production of the industrialized paper against a bodily description of the old printing methods, when circulation was “limited by the number of pulls one pair of arms could give a Washington press” (“Practical Issues” 232). In Reid’s description, the invention of the revolving cylinder press completely mechanizes the printing process, extricating the editorial body from the printing press and placing it behind a desk. In these descriptions of the printer/editor, news production is both a bodily and intellectual activity, requiring an intimate joining of the editorial body to the print machine. The adoption of steam printing dramatically disrupts this melding of mental and bodily labor, elevating the editor to a purely intellectual position. With the editor removed from the process, printing is conceptualized as a purely mechanical process and the print workers who operate the press are subsumed into the machine.

In reality, the steam press required dozens of skilled operators and their assistants. Yet, in nineteenth-century descriptions of the writing activities of editorial news workers, print workers, along with the machines they operated, disappeared. The elision of the printer’s body from descriptions of the modern steam printing press further distances the activities of editorial writing and production because printing is presented as a purely mechanical process whereby the products of the writer’s intellect are made tangible without human intervention. Thus, the development of the steam press not only separates the writing and production processes but narrows the editor’s role to intellectual rather than mechanical production. Moreover, removing the printer’s body from the production process removes his subjectivity so that the only active subject is the editor who speaks with the voice of the
paper. The editor becomes the thinking brain and speaking voice of the newspaper’s corporate body.

**The Corporate Body’s Thinking Brain**

Modern steam driven presses removed the sweat of the editorial brow from the production process, freeing the editorial intellect to craft the paper’s editorial voice. This separation of intellectual and physical labor was further applied in the newsroom, where newswriting was conceptualized as a form of labor and therefore subordinated to the intellectual work of editing the paper. A newsroom hierarchy emerged that elevated the intellectual work of editing over the mindless, or mechanical, rendering of reality in newswriting. This hierarchy is reflected in Shuman’s description of the newsroom, which positions workers within the managerial hierarchy by describing their position both within the newsroom and as part of the newspaper’s figurative corporate body: “At the head stands the editor-in-chief, who shapes the editorial policy of the paper, writes some of the leading editorials and directs the work of the editorial writers […] Next in authority is the managing editor[...] under his control we find the city editor....” (19). In the description that follows, workers are described as occupying a physical space that reflects their relative stature within the newsroom hierarchy. As with the city editor under the control of the managing editor, subordinate members of the writing staff are likewise described as occupying subordinate positions in space relative to their superiors. This special relationship parallels the position of the thinking brain above the physical body.

Along with the City Editor, the editorial staff arrayed under the Managing Editor was divided into a variety of departments including “Finance, markets, real estate, railroads, theaters, sports, book reviews and the women’s departments” (Shuman 19). Each editor is
conceptualized as the thinking head of his division, while the workers beneath him are mindless laborers. One newspaper editor wrote that it is the editor’s business “to think for everybody. Each subordinate must be so drilled and fitted to his place as to become in a sense the replica of his chief” (qtd in Salcetti 59). In other descriptions, the subordinate worker is described less as a “replica” of his chief than as an extension of him. In both cases the reporter lacks the will—or the intellect, it is unclear—to think for himself. Nowhere is the symbiotic relationship between editor and underling more pronounced than in the relationship between the reporter and City Editor.

As the Editor in Chief is the “head” of the newspaper, the City Editor is the figurative and literary head of the newsroom. The City Editor figured prominently in descriptions of the activities of newsgathering and writing because the City Editor became the neophyte’s direct supervisor and main source of professional guidance. Shuman calls the City Editor, “the most important person in the office,” because of his nearly autocratic control over the content of the local news columns (Shuman 20-21). He “is usually given almost complete control of his department, and is in many respects one of the most important persons in a newspaper office,” according to Shuman (20). Shuman further describes the City Editor as the “czar of the local room” with the reporters as “his minions, subject to his orders at every hour of the day; they may not even go out to lunch without his knowledge and consent.” The reporter’s lack of autonomy is clear here; The City Editor exerts complete control over the reporter. And just as the steam press lifted the burden of printing from the back (and arms) of the editor, so too does the reporter remove the burden of gathering news from the City Editor. Both the reporter and the steam press in this sense are machines that make the work of the editor easier, freeing him to be the newspaper’s intellectual center.
In fact the City Editor’s autocratic control over the reporter even extends to the reporter’s bodily needs so that the reporter “may not even go out to lunch without [the City Editor’s] knowledge and consent” (Shuman 20-21). The City Editor’s dominance of the reporter reaches a level in which the reporter’s agency disappears: like the mechanized printing press earlier described as “serving” the editorial intellect, the reporter becomes a mere machine in service to the needs and desires of the City Editor. Thus, for example, a chapter in Shuman’s textbook titled “Day with a Reporter” begins with a lengthy description of the City Editor’s responsibilities, suggesting that the Reporter has no individual responsibilities, but rather exists only as a proxy to fulfill the editor’s professional obligations. The chapter ends with a description of the reporter seeking the City Editor’s approval for a story, reinforcing the notion that the reporter lacks individual professional concerns outside the service he performs on the City Editor’s behalf.

However, in this description, the reporter remains an individual entity, even though one reduced to slavish service to his editor. In other descriptions, the reporter is reduced to a mere bodily extension of the City Editor. For example Shuman writes that “At his desk [the City Editor] sits all day, with the telephone in front of him… reporters close at hand, ready to be feet and fingers for the ideas in his head” (44, emphasis added). Here, the reporter is stripped of even his individual humanity and becomes a mere part of a larger body, controlled by an editorial brain. Shuman’s take on the reporter/editor relationship was by no means isolated. Charles Chapin, a notorious New York City Editor reportedly ordered one of his reporters to secure an interview with an uncooperative source. When the reporter returned to the newsroom beaten bloody, Chapin ordered the reporter to confront the source again, yelling, “You tell that sonofabitch he can’t intimidate me” (Tebbel 324). While likely
apocryphal, the story does illustrate the extent to which the reporter was viewed as a bodily extension of the City Editor.

Shuman’s description of the reporter’s place in the editorial hierarchy is somewhat surprising, given that his textbook was aimed at aspiring journalists who were likely to enter the very scene Shuman describes as reporters, the lowest status workers in the editorial hierarchy before the office copy boy (Shuman 21). He notes this fact explicitly when inviting readers to join him in observing the organization of the newsroom: “Let us now take a peep into the sanctum of the city editor—the local room—the barracks of the reportorial corps, the place where the beginner is likely to have his first introduction into the journalistic world” (49). Shuman’s use of the first person plural throughout the textbook invites readers to join him in observing the organization of the newsroom and the methods of newsgathering from the position of passive observers of an established scene. Shuman’s description thus serves to position the aspiring reporter in a subordinate position within an established body of work, reinforcing the emerging newsroom hierarchy by preparing a new set of workers to enter a pre-established, subordinate position within it.

However, the notion of the career ladder built into the hierarchized structure of the newsroom encouraged reporters to have faith that they might advance up the editorial ladder to a more lucrative and less onerous position. In fact, the reporter’s ability to advance up the corporate hierarchy is one important distinction between that occupational group and the workers in the print room. Indeed, my intention has not been to argue that reporters belonged to the same laboring class as printers, but rather to illuminate some of the gradations among intellectual workers. I am drawing a continuum between the “mindless” labor of the printer and the intellectual work of the editor in order to demonstrate how newsroom occupations
were ordered in a hierarchy based on the perceived intellectual engagement of each occupation. In fact, though unsalaried reporters likely earned less money and enjoyed less job security than unionized print room workers, reporters identified with intellectual workers so strongly that an attempt to draw newsroom workers into the powerful International Typographers Union in 1891 failed (Solomon 128). The separation of print and newsroom work into manual and intellectual realms dictated that newwork by its very nature carried a more “intellectual aura” than the more physical typographical work and this intellectual aura remained the occupation’s defining characteristic despite the deterioration of its material—and pecuniary—circumstances (Solomon 129).

And yet, the mechanization that was described as splitting print from editorial work was also a significant motif in descriptions of newsroom labor in two ways: the process of writing was often configured as a mechanized process so that reporters and correspondents were described as writing (or transcription) machines. In addition, the intervention of print and communication technologies in the composing process created a “mechanized division of labor” in which the reporter’s work was itself continually mediated by machines (Salcetti 52). As the number of technological interventions increased, reporters came to occupy an increasingly insignificant place in the long chain of workers between the story’s inception and its publication, a point I will return to in Chapter Four.

In addition to the telegraph and typewriter, newspapers were early users of the telephone, which enabled the further mechanization of news gathering and reporting. Reporters on the street, known as “leg men” gathered information that they phoned in to “rewrite men” stationed in the office (Wilson 24). Photos suggest that by the 1890s, these offices had begun to resemble sweatshops, with rows of typewriters lined up on desks
(Nerone and Barnhurst 438). Descriptions of the reporting process reduce the activities of gathering and writing the news to transcription and arrangement. They thus render reporting as an impartial recording of “reality,” a job that required little intelligence or skill. By de-emphasizing reportorial agency in the process of newsgathering, such descriptions also described it as mindless work, aligning it more closely with printing than with the intellectual work of editing. As one reporter described it, “This work makes merely well-developed machines of us” (Burton 82). Given the cachet accorded intellectual labor, the notion that reporting was a mindless, mechanical process underscores the reporter’s subordinate status within the newsroom. Eugene V. Camp, an editor and proponent of higher education for journalists described reporters as “admirable machines—routine chroniclers of other men’s thoughts and acts. Their duties bring brawn rather than brain into service—and the pay is rated accordingly. They are the practical run made” (Practical 14-15). Camp ties the notion of the reporter as machine explicitly to the reporter’s role as the “laborer” in the newsroom, entirely denying the reporter’s mental capacity. However, it should be noted that Camp’s purpose in thus describing the reporter was to advocate for higher education for journalists in order to elevate the intellectual quality of their work. However, Camp’s plan to educate rank and file newsworkers was only one approach to configuring newsroom labor. Others were content to continue treating newsroom laborers as “admirable machines.”

In fact, many editors envisioned a day when new technologies might replace human writing machines with mechanical ones. In an 1875 interview, one editor spoke rhapsodically about the decreasing need for local reporters, citing as an example London journals that pulled content from wire services rather than employing reporters to report local news (Wingate). Describing the Associated Press as “a marvellous machine,” he writes that the
daily dispatches “pour in…the raw material of the events of the day, and it is twice sifted before the selected part is presented, once by the agents of the news associations, and then by the news editors” (qtd. in Salcetti 53). The AP thus promises to replace the editor’s feet and fingers with a machine to do the work of reporters. Dana likewise celebrates the gate-keeping role of the editor, and goes even further in claiming the irrelevance of the reporter as a news gatherer. In fact, Dana claims that cooperative news organizations like the United Press, enabled by communication technologies like the telegraph, had nearly eliminated the need for newspapers to gather news entirely. Rather, Dana envisages the proper role of the newspaper as commenting upon the news. The editor was thus about to be “‘Emancipated’ from the drudgery of gathering news. Thanks to cooperative newsgathering, he writes:

The news of the entire world is brought to you, and the editor, the newspaper, is put back into the position which the thinker occupied before this supreme attention to news was regarded as indispensable. The editors and writers of the newspapers are now emancipated from all that drudgery, and have become intellectual beings again. The work of news-getting is performed by this great and wide-reaching agency of the United Press… [the editor]devotes himself to the intellectual part of his business, and is able to carry that one with a nearer approach to perfection than he has ever been able to attain before. (Dana 64)

In transposing “the editor, the newspaper” Shuman grammatically equates the editor with the newspaper itself, reinforcing the notion that the editor provided the thinking brain behind the newspaper’s corporate voice. “All that drudgery” is the work of gathering the news, work performed by reporters and correspondents under the City Editor’s direction. The total mechanization of the newsgathering process and its removal from the editor’s purview, like
the mechanization and separation of printing, “emancipates” the editor, freeing him to fully exercise his intellectual powers.

In her study of how print and communication technologies shaped newsroom roles, Marianne Salcetti describes the reporter as “but one widget” in a mechanized process, “not so different from that of a railroad worker or iron puddler—workers in other industries whose work was increasingly driven by machines and speed” (60). The thrust of her argument is that technology enabled increased speed in newspaper production, which in turn confined the reporter within a narrow occupational role bounded on all sides by printing and communication technologies. Indeed, the introduction of steam power was one of a number of innovations that changed the printing press drastically in the nineteenth century. The replacement of the flat-bed press with a rotary press and the development of a “perfecting” press that could print both sides of a page simultaneously are two innovations that accelerated the pace of print production. These were some of the most important innovations to print technology since the time of Gutenberg. And while it is arguable whether steam engines and rotary presses had the profound cultural and social impact that has been attributed to the invention of moveable type, those technologies significantly re-ordered the conditions of print production in American newspapers. These technological innovations in print production shaped the roles of both print- and newsroom personnel by radically accelerating the pace of news production. While I have relied heavily on Salcetti’s descriptions of the impacts of accelerated production schedules and the uses of technology in the newsroom, my aim is to draw attention to the ideological construction of occupational roles. I wish to draw in what Lisa Gitelman describes as “the sense that technology is enmeshed within textuality, that machines are discursively and physically constructed,” in
order to underscore the need to examine not only the impact of print technologies, but also the ways those technologies are understood by those who use them (9). This point is crucial for understanding the role of the writer was conceptualized in relationship to the printer, as well as how the activities of different classes of writers were organized. More than simply inscribed by technology, the reporter was at times conflated with the very machinery with which he did his job, described as a machine himself, or, like the printer displaced by the steam-press, elided entirely from descriptions of an entirely mechanized process.

Thus, I’ve also taken as one model Lisa Maruca’s study of eighteenth century printing manuals, which argues that the relationship between print machines and print workers is ideological rather than essential (323). Early eighteenth century print manuals describe the printed text as the product of an intimate joining of print machinery and the printer’s body, reflecting a conception of book production as a collaborative effort among a host of workers, including the author. However, Maruca argues, as the author came to be regarded as the primary originator of creative work and the printer in turn came to be regarded as a handmaid to the writer’s genius, the bodies of print workers disappeared from descriptions of the printing process (323). Her work contests techno-centric notions of print culture that regard the printing press as an instrument or “engine” of change, thus eliding human agency and the ideological conception of print workers’ roles in relation to those technologies.

Among the crucial differences between late nineteenth-century newspaper printers and the Early Modern book printers Maruca examines is the fact that Eighteenth century book printers were a class of worker distinct from those who wrote the books that they printed, regardless of the degree of their collaboration. In contrast, the early American printer/editor embodied both the writer and producer of the newspaper. I am examining the
after-effects of a separation of roles that had once been assumed by a single individual. The editor/printers I am examining appear as mythological figures in historical accounts of journalism that were written long after the editor/printer had ceased to be a feature of the urban daily newspaper. On the one hand, the printer/editor demonstrates the technological advancements of the modern paper: the separation of printing and editing duties frees the intellect of the editor from the bodily constraints of printing. At the same time, for the stratified nineteenth-century newsroom staff, the printer/editor represented a vision of a unified body, a welcome alternative to the impersonal corporate newspaper. Rather than envisioning this unity as a re-unification of the printing body with the editorial intellect, these accounts betray a longing for the unity of the editorial intellect with the laboring newswriting body. Horace Greeley reportedly believed in “universalizing” his employees, making young and inexperienced workers “run up the whole newspaper gamut… from reporting police court proceedings to writing editorials” so that any person on the staff would be able to trade places with any other (Vanderpoole 48). Yet, as the century progressed, specialization of news writing and editing activities meant that individual workers performed an increasingly narrow as well as increasingly mechanized range of activities.

The trade journal The Writer, “a monthly magazine to interest and help all literary workers,” often printed descriptions of the many writing occupations available at newspapers, including salaried reporting positions and freelance occupations like corresponding. In their emphasis on the variety and complexity of tasks writers might enjoy, these articles often suggest a desire for the kind of well-roundedness that Greeley insisted his writers attain. For example, an 1887 article describes Telegraph corresponding, writing stories for multiple out-of-town newspapers as either a freelancer or while employed at a
local paper, as a means to a “complete journalistic education” (Chamberlain 192). The successful correspondent embodies both the “news instinct” of the managing editor and the “energy and ingenuity” of the first-class reporter (191). “No other training develops all a man’s newspaper faculties so symmetrically. His news instinct is in constant action; his literary powers are trained and tested daily” (Chamberlain 192). By conceptualizing the duties of the managing editor and reporter as emerging from “faculties,” Chamberlain naturalizes the functions of different newsroom workers, describing them as qualities or characteristics that a single individual would typically possess. Their “symmetrical” development through telegraph corresponding implies an “asymmetrical” or unbalanced working conditions in the metropolitan daily newspaper where an individual would have opportunity to develop only one faculty at the expense of the others. The “complete journalistic education” achieved by the telegraph correspondent would be impossible for a staff reporter to attain given the degree of specialization in the newsroom, where “when a reporter’s strong point is discovered… he is assigned almost exclusively to” that kind of work (192). The result is an “abnormal” development of some faculties at the expense of others.

However, nostalgia for the union of the printer and editor’s duties is expressed most forcefully in a series of articles about the rural press. As noted above, rural newspapers were slow to adopt the high-capacity, steam driven presses that revolutionized urban daily journalism. Many continued in the model of the printer/editor, with an entrepreneurial printer serving as both editor and laborer, as well as business manager. A series of articles on the rural press published in *The Writer* in 1888 emphasizes not only the variety of work that the rural editor was able to do, but also the prestige and autonomy he enjoyed as an important
figure in the local community. Not only did rural editors own their operations, but they also exercised complete control over the news and editorial content. “Here [the editor] can find scope for just as much literary finish and just as much business ability as he cares, or is able, to exercise. For his good work he gets the credit. The financial reward is his also” (Tuttle 297). This description of rural news editing emphasizes the autonomy the rural editor attains by embracing the multiple roles his position affords. And like the telegraph editor whose faculties are developed “symmetrically,” the rural editor likewise experiences his occupation as an opportunity to exercise is various faculties. More importantly, he is able to express his writing faculties at will, a privilege explicitly denied the salaried newsworker. In contrast, “a literary man in the employ of a large newspaper has to sacrifice himself for the good of the paper for which he works. His individuality is lost in the capacious maw of the paper” (Tuttle 297). Fear of the paper’s “capacious maw” here echoes daily news workers’ fears about being consumed within the impersonality of the corporate structure. Where the rural and telegraph editors are free and autonomous individuals, the salaried newsworker is subsumed within the news machine.

While technology emancipated the editorial mind from the bodily work of printing, the mind/body split came to characterize not the conception of writing as distinguished from printing occupations, but rather a division between the types of newsworkers who comprised the newspaper’s corporate body. The discursive organization of the modern industrialized newspaper as a corporate body not only reflected changes in the material conditions of newspaper ownership and production, but also served to organize workers in a very specific way within a body of work.
There’s a palpable sense of despair in one editorial writer’s description of the surrender of the writer’s individuality to the paper’s corporate voice:

The editorial ‘we’ is not somebody with convictions, purposes, principles, ardor, ceaseless energies, writing the lessons of experience with resolution and devotion, with some sense of manly responsibility to mankind… the ‘we’ is an association that invests a machine that grinds jobs. (qtd. in Salcetti 53)

There’s a stark contrast between the “manly responsibility” embodied in an editorial “we” comprised of responsible and autonomous individuals and the impersonal, dehumanized “association.” The “we” comprised of individuals is endowed with positive human traits and motives and is able to write from his experience. In contrast, the real editorial “we” is not active, not motivated by human ideals. Rather the real active agent in the second part of the sentence quoted above is the newspaper that “grinds.” Rather than men serving humanity, the corporatized and mechanized newspaper reduces men to servants of a machine that serves no one.

The rural editor in contrast,

can control circumstances in a way that would never be possible to him if he were the victim of the whims of some arbitrary city editor, who may treat his men as mere pieces of machinery, that must be sacrificed, if need be, for the good of the central machine. (Tuttle 297)

In such descriptions, the rural paper offers an escape from the industrialized news machine, re-humanizing the newsworker by extracting him from the corporate machine, and more importantly, re-investing him with autonomy and purpose.
Given the scale of the news organization and the specialization of newswriter’s duties, newswriters increasingly found themselves occupying a more tightly circumscribed occupational space. The longing for a unity of editorial mind and newswriting body demonstrates not only the complexity of the modern newsroom hierarchy, but also a nostalgia for an imagined past in which the journalist was able to exercise the full range of his expressive and intellectual powers. The separation of printing and writing was understood as a severing of bodily and intellectual labor. This severing in turn was mapped on to emerging newsroom hierarchies so that the editor emerged as the corporate body’s thinking brain and the reporter was relegated to a subordinate position as a laboring body part. This subordination of newswriting labor to editorial intellect was tied to a conceptualization of newswriting as mindless or mechanical work so that the reporter increasingly came to be seen as an expendable piece of machinery.
Chapter Two: The Representation of Journalism

as an Apprenticeship to Literature

Starting in the 1880s, William Dean Howells and Henry James depicted the newspaper as the enemy of the novel... However, the example of Stephen Crane and the reporter-novelists who followed him established a competing myth of the artist nurtured by journalism, a narrative that has taken a much stronger hold on the national imagination.
-- Michael Robertson (1997)

If you are to escape unhurt out of your present business you must be very careful, and you must find in your heart much constancy. The swiftly done work of the journalist and the cheap finish and ready made methods to which it leads, you must try to counteract in private by writing with the most considerate slowness and on the most ambitious models.
-- letter from Robert Louis Stevenson to Richard Harding Davis (1888)

The literary apprenticeship paradigm Robertson describes in the passage above has shaped historical accounts of post Civil War American literature for decades. Many studies of the journalistic work of now canonical journalists-turned-literary artists like Ernest Hemingway are framed in an apprenticeship model, with journalism cast as a shaping influence on the artist’s later work. Robertson revises that paradigm slightly by locating Crane at a crucial historical juncture. Robertson places Howells and James, opponents of the sensationalism and exhibitionism of the modern newspaper and would-be protectors of the novel’s elite status on one side of the divide. On the other side lie subsequent generations of American writers whose journalism experience profoundly shaped the course of American letters. Crane bridges that divide: in Robertson’s telling, Crane’s experiments in the ambiguous fact/fiction terrain of 1890s newspapers yielded prose that eventually took

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7 See for example Charles Fenton’s *The Apprenticeship of Ernest Hemingway: The Early Years* and J.F. Kobler’s *Ernest Hemingway: Journalist and Artist*, which examine the influence of journalism on Hemingway’s fiction.
Howells’ and James’ realism out of the parlor and into the streets (quite literally with his 1893 Naturalist novel *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*).

While Robertson offers a persuasive account of Crane’s experiments in the “fruitfully ambiguous” generic terrain of late nineteenth-century newspapers—which were often a hodge-podge of fiction and nonfiction genres—he errs in casting Crane as a rarity (7). In Robertson’s account, Crane is both representative of a large class of writers and singular in his accomplishments. Acknowledging early on that Crane was one among a large number of writers born after the Civil War who regarded newspapers as both a training ground and a source of material for a literary writing career, Robertson then goes on to compare Crane to the few “writers of genius” in the eighteenth century who invented the novel from the fact-fiction discourse of their day (3). Of the legions of writers encouraged to apprentice in the daily newspaper in the 1890s, Robertson claims Crane alone was able to exploit the artistic potential the medium provided. In claiming for Crane a unique genius, Robertson gives voice to one of the contradictory assumptions about writing that underpinned the representation of journalism as an apprenticeship to literature in the late nineteenth century. On the one hand, writing was viewed as a learnable craft, drawing would-be novelists to journalism where they might expect to hone their writing craft. At the same time, literary or creative writing was an art, expressing a unique individuality. Because it was not seen as an expressive form, journalistic writing was relegated to a position subordinate to literature. These enduring notions of writing as both a learnable craft and an expressive art denigrated the journalist as simply an aspiring or failed litterateur.

In this chapter, I examine the assumptions about writing underpinning the representation of journalism as an apprenticeship to literary writing and their effects on how
the journalist and journalistic writing were regarded. The occupation of journalism was becoming a profession in this period, gaining currency as another of the respectable careers at which an educated, upwardly mobile middle-class person might earn a living. For aspiring literary writers, newspapers offered a quasi-literary solution to the pernicious problem of feeding the body while cultivating one’s craft. In the early nineteenth century, an aspiring litterateur might have earned his daily bread at the pulpit or the bar. For example, in 1829 a young Henry Wadsworth Longfellow grudgingly took up college teaching in order to support himself until his poetry began to sell, making him a very early entrant into what is now a typical career progression for creative writers (Myers 1). At the end of the century, however, aspiring literary or creative writers were being encouraged to channel their energies into journalism in order to develop their craft and see something of the world as they prepared for a literary career. Journalism and literature were described as sharing similarities in style and substance. Thus literary aspirants found encouragement from several quarters to consider apprenticing in journalism. And yet, the suggestion that aspiring novelists apprentice in journalism was typically accompanied by dire warnings about the negative consequences of too much exposure to journalism’s degrading influence. Implicit in these warnings was the idea that writing was an inspired art emerging from the writer’s unique sensibility, a sensibility that could be deformed by journalism’s corrupting influence. Accounts of the literary apprenticeship paradigm like Robertson’s smooth over the complicated notions about writing that shaped conceptions of journalism in the late nineteenth century. In fact, it is in this discourse of professionalism with its twinned expressions of encouragement and caution, that these conflicting conceptions of writing can be most clearly seen. These conceptions are particularly important because they expose the roots of the persistent subordination of
journalistic to literary writing and highlight the pernicious myth of journalism as a form of literary failure that continues to inform literary historical accounts of the period.

In the following, I draw out the competing conceptions of writing informing the representation of journalism as an apprenticeship to literature. Through a close reading of Edwin Shuman’s 1894 journalism textbook *Steps Into Journalism*. I elaborate how these assumptions about the nature of writing in general shaped descriptions of journalistic writing in particular. While the story and substance of the newspaper and novel appeared to be drawing closer together in the period I examine, deeply held beliefs about the nature of literary writing as a creative act ensured that journalistic writing was perpetually devalued. In describing the literary apprenticeship as a *representation* of journalism, my aim is to emphasize that this way of representing the work of journalistic writing was only one way of understanding the journalist’s professional role in light of widely held assumptions about the nature of writing as well as of the conditions shaping the journalist’s occupational role. In the following, I argue that the representation of journalism as a literary apprenticeship allows Shuman to frame the drudgeries of daily newsreporting within a redemptive narrative of artistic apprenticeship. I then examine how the literary writer and critic, Howells, draws on the same instantiation of the discourse of journalistic professionalism in order to position Realist literature in a superior position to journalism. By contrasting these two perspectives, one journalistic and the other literary, my aim is to highlight both the utility and flexibility of representations of journalistic professionalism. They provide a model of the profession that not only accounts for the material conditions shaping journalism as an occupation, but also give weight and shape to widely held conceptions of writing. Thus, Shuman can draw on aspects of representations of journalism as a literary apprenticeship in order to position his
textbook among an audience of literary minded readers while Howells can draw on popular notions of journalistic writing in order to elevate the status of his own literary project.

Advice to young writers

In an 1887 address at Yale University, book publisher Henry Holt advised those who desired a literary career to consider becoming daily news reporters. Journalism is not literature, but, Holt argues, news reporting is the only profession “at all akin to literature” that not only pays a living wage, but also helps the aspiring writer develop the “habits and powers” necessary to achieve literary success (42). While Holt does not elaborate what those habits and powers might include, Edwin Shuman’s 1894 textbook, *Steps Into Journalism* offers some insight when it describes what the aspiring novelist might hope to learn while reporting for the daily newspaper. Shuman claims newspapers and novels share similar notions of “story” as well as similar styles. Holt argues that a young man “with literary aspirations” must earn his bread and should do so “just as near literature as he can,” without elaborating exactly how near journalism is to literature (42). Yet, his multiple references to the proximity of literature and journalism suggest that he is assuming some relationship between them, perhaps some overlap in either style or substance that would make it worthwhile for the aspiring novelist to apprentice in journalism.

C.F. Case, a contributor to the trade journal *The Writer*, similarly urges aspiring literary writers to consider apprenticing in journalism, in this case, in the rural press. Unlike Holt, Case elaborates on the “regular habits” journalism might help the writer develop.

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8 One habit Holt may be referring to is the fundamental habit of writing daily necessitated by the fast pace of daily news reporting. Christopher Wilson describes the prodigious output of journalist David Graham Philips whose disciplined work habits were legendary. Philips wrote every night of the week, standing up at his desk, after a full day of newspaper work. Thus, within 11 years, he managed to publish more than 26 books, a play, and hundreds of articles and stories (Wilson 54).
Specifically, journalism offers the opportunity to develop solid work habits: “the straight and narrow way to pleasurable literary writing is continued practice; it might also be said that eternal practice is the price of literary excellence,” writes Case (86). For those lacking the independent income to engage in that practice full-time, local journalism offers not only the requisite practice, but the “inspirational nerve to hold [one] to the stone while being sharpened” (86). Case’s choice of images doesn’t suggest the apprenticeship, or sharpening, will be a pleasant or a gentle experience. However, he urges aspiring writers to consider editorial work at a local weekly paper because it offers more diverse writing opportunities. He frames the opportunity as a chance for those who lacked “genius,” and the attendant confidence in one’s abilities, to practice the literary craft more directly:

It may not strike the fancy of ambition’s first-borns whose faith in the genius trickling through their veins is unclouded, but for the unknown writer who loves the art for the pleasure of its creation and is willing to labor and to wait, it offers an occupation that is worth considering. (86)

The unknown writer Case describes loves the literary art enough to “labor” in the lesser art of journalism, in contrast to the “pleasure” of creating literary art, a contrast reinforced by the image of the news apprenticeship as a “grind.” Holt and Case provide two representative examples of the advice being given to aspiring litterateurs to consider apprenticing for a literary career by working in daily news journalism. The assumption in both examples is that journalistic writing provides the budding artist with an opportunity to hone his craft while also earning a living.

Indeed, the cannon of American literature contains numerous works by writers who first labored as journalists. Edgar Allen Poe is an obvious example from the antebellum
period. However, Poe’s constant financial troubles highlight the difference between the financial opportunities available in the antebellum period and those in the Post Civil War mass marketplace. Journalism in the late nineteenth century was gaining a level of both profitability and respectability that it made it a viable career option for an unprecedented number of socially mobile middle-class people. As I described in the previous chapter, after a long period of development, journalism finally offered a full-time, paid occupation for large numbers of writers. News reporting, an occupation that had previously been associated with the drunkenness and debauchery of the Bohemian, was also growing into a respectable middle-class occupation, with reporters enjoying better pay and more social prestige, despite their poor treatment and relative lack of status within the daily newsroom. Newspapers were hiring more college graduates and creating more salaried positions, rather than only paying “on space,” or per line. In an 1890 editorial in The Nation, E.L Godkin described reporting as a “new and important calling” (qtd. in Schudson 70). Journalism was becoming more appealing across the board, but given the close association of journalism and literature in the period, it was becoming especially appealing to aspiring novelists and receiving endorsements from a variety of prominent sources.

**Competing conceptions of writing in the period: the persistence of genius**

That aspiring litterateurs would consider journalism good preparation for literary writing speaks not only to changes in the subject matter and style considered appropriate for fiction, but also to the privileging of craft or technique in conceptions of creative composition. This privileging was historically fairly recent and, moreover, not entirely fixed. In fact, the flip side to all of the positive talk about journalism as a literary apprenticeship were strong warnings against remaining in it too long. These warnings were predicated first
on the assumption that journalistic writing was technically inferior to literary writing, so that while one could hone basic skills, too much practice in its “quick style” might dwarf the development of further skills, and second on the notion that the profession’s degrading influence could warp one’s creative faculties. These warnings stem from a submerged notion of literature as a work of art, invested with the unique genius of its creator.

Through the nineteenth century, theories about the genesis or creation of the creative work of art were dominated by an aesthetic of inspiration, most often described with images of growth or organic life. These images were particularly important in Romantic conceptions of creative composition, as for example, when Edward Young in his *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759) describes the mind of the genius as “a fertile and pleasant field” and the “original” work of art as being “of a vegetable nature [rising] spontaneously from the vital root of genius.” The work of art, Young concludes “grows, it is not made” (Young par. 12, Fehrman 5). Thus originality, or the unique flowering of an inspired mind, was the defining characteristic of a work of art. In contrast, the unoriginal is denigrated as “a sort of manufacture wrought up by those mechanics, art and labor, out of pre-existent thought, materials not their own” (par. 12). The unoriginal is thus reduced to a sort of ready made good, mechanically produced. Young is referring to the unoriginal, or inferior work of art. However, as I will elaborate below, this distinction between the product of the creative mind and the manufactured good was used to distinguish between literary and journalistic writing in the late nineteenth century even as these works came to resemble one another more closely in the styles of writing and the subjects written about. Eventually, the dominance of the aesthetic of inspiration was usurped by an aesthetic of work that described the creative act in terms of effort rather than inspiration. While not a creation of the late nineteenth century, the
aesthetic of work did gain prominence in that period in America, particularly as the literary movement shifted toward realistic depictions of observable life. The creative act in this period was often described using images of craftsmanship and mechanical work, emphasizing both effort and improvable technique over inspiration (divine or otherwise) (Fehrman 6-7).

These mechanical images were particularly potent given the commercialization of publishing in the late nineteenth century. Fueled by advertising dollars, mass-market publications required a steady stream of new content to keep readers coming back. They encouraged—many would say pressured—their regular contributors to take a workmanlike approach to their writing, writing against the clock rather than waiting for the muse and tailoring those works to meet publisher demands (Myers 56-57, Wilson 5). The aesthetic of work informed discussion about the activity of writing in The Writer, a trade journal that described itself as “a monthly magazine to interest and help all literary workers.” Catering to all writing professionals under a broadly conceived notion of the “literary,” the trade publication used mechanical metaphors to describe the work of writing for the market. In a typical example, Alfred Peters compares the writer to a brick maker: “His work is offered for inspection, and, if wanted, is bargained for like any other commodity. There is no economical difference between the maker of bricks and the maker of thoughts” (54). In equating the “maker of thoughts” with the “maker of bricks,” Peters is describing the writer as an intellectual laborer, a construction that emphasizes effort over the mysteries of inspired creativity. While many writers resisted the reduction of writing to a mechanically produced commodity, the metaphors of work these descriptions of writing drew on were widespread, even shaping emerging writing curricula at American colleges.
By the time colleges began teaching writing in the late nineteenth century, invention, or the creative aspect of composition, had become detached from “craft” in many descriptions of writing, with “craft” describing only the teachable, mechanical aspects of writing. Yet, while craft conceptions of writing as a teachable skill came to the fore, the notion of originality, as a product of the writer’s genius, never completely disappeared. In college writing programs, invention was cordoned off, along with originality and genius, as the inscrutable, unteachable something that separated “art” from mere production (Myers 76). Elsewhere, originality faded into the background, to reemerge when needed to reinforce the increasingly tenuous divide between literary and journalistic writing. Thus, for example, literary critic H.W. Boynton acknowledges in a 1904 essay that the partition between literature and the “higher journalism” is “extremely thin” given the overlap in the substance and style of much literary and journalistic work (850). But Boynton preserves that partition nonetheless, falling back on the trope of genius to distinguish literature from journalism. Literature, he writes, is “that expression of personality through craftsmanship which we call genius” (846). Literature is thus “the expression of a personal creative faculty” as distinguished from that of “an impersonal producing faculty” (848). So while writing of all stripes can be conceptualized as “craft” in that it relies on the same set of techniques, that craft is elevated to art when invested with the author’s unique inspiration. Journalism, lacking this creative origin, is merely mechanical reproduction. Here again is Young’s distinction between the work of originality that “grows” in the mind of the genius and the mechanical that is merely “wrought up” or produced as “a sort of manufacture.” The journalism resulting from this producing faculty is, according to Boynton, thus “essentially impersonal,” its purpose to “record or to comment, not to create or interpret” (846).
Journalism, though it might be technically proficient, is uninspired and unoriginal and, therefore, can never reach the level of a work of art. The journalist is simply “a machine or mouthpiece,” returning again to both Young’s notion of the unoriginal as well as to the mechanical conceptions of news writing discussed in the previous chapter (848). But literature, as an expression of individuality through craftsmanship, creates something original—and something uniquely expressive of the author. Boynton thus distinguishes art from mere craftsmanship by drawing on an ideal of literary authorship—an ideal rooted in the aesthetic of inspiration—as inspired self-expression. And he thus neatly excludes journalistic writing from the realm of art.

This dynamic tension between the aesthetic of inspiration and the aesthetic of work also shaped representations of journalism as a literary apprenticeship. While those who thus represented journalism argued that journalism was valuable for helping one develop the craft or techniques of writing, they also warned against laboring too long in a degraded form of writing lest one’s innate abilities and finer sentiments also become degraded. These warnings against tarrying too long in a journalistic apprenticeship bring latent notions of inspiration and genius to the fore by suggesting that the individual creative capacity could be harmed. I turn now to an analysis of Edwin Shuman’s 1894 textbook *Steps Into Journalism* in order to explicate the typical structure of the representation of journalism as a literary apprenticeship and to examine how its assumptions are manifested in the text.

*Steps Into Journalism: a case study of the journalistic apprenticeship model*

In the late nineteenth century, several factors in both journalism and literature converged to encourage the presumption that the newspaper and the novel shared similar concerns. First, the trend toward realism in literature was creating considerable overlap in the
substance and style of journalistic and literary writing. Three generally accepted qualities that define a work as Realist are: verisimilitude, or realistic presentation through description of observable detail; a preference for typical or representative rather than exceptional or fanciful plots, settings, and characters; and an objective versus a subjective or idealistic/imaginative view of human experience (Pizer 233-234). At the same time, news writers in the 1890s adopted on a wide scale techniques typically associated with fiction such as the use of dialogue, scene construction, and the revelation of character through descriptions of observable activity. While these devices could occasionally be found in newspapers before the Civil War, some have argued that the ascendance of literary realism encouraged journalists to adopt a more self-consciously literary style, making traditionally “literary” devices a more regular part of the journalist’s toolkit (Hartsock 46). The representation of journalism as a literary apprenticeship was predicated in part on the notion that an apprenticeship in journalism would provide aspiring creative writers the opportunity to practice techniques that would later be useful for fiction.

In addition to these overlapping techniques, the representation of journalism as a literary apprenticeship also assumed an overlap in the stories that concerned journalistic and literary writing. The newspaper presented social science reporting on the plight of the under classes, news about and interviews with social elites, and “human interest” stories about people from all walks of life. Realist novels, preoccupied with class difference and attempting to present a realistic vision of lived experience in many ways mirrored the exploration of class differences in the daily newspaper (Kaplan 13). (In fact, turn-of-the-century naturalists like Theodore Dreiser and Frank Norris would later take inspiration directly from the pages of the daily newspaper). This overlap was not overlooked in the
critical literature. In fact, a review of William Dean Howells’s *A Modern Romance* in the *Century* repeatedly referred to Howells as a “reporter” and Howells’s work was critiqued as an example of the “newspaperism” of literature (Robertson 19; Pallen 474). Critics have posited that one reason former journalists like William Dean Howells and Mark Twain skewered journalists with unflattering fictional portrayals of the profession was that the exploration of class hierarchies crystallized in the daily newspaper was uncomfortably close to the appropriation of class differences in Realist writing. Through such portrayals, these authors resisted the association between their own work and journalism (Kaplan 26, 34).

However, despite the reservations of literary writers like Howells, the notion that literary and journalistic writing could share common techniques and story subjects was not uncommon. In fact, in elaborating the knowledge and skills the aspiring litterateur could acquire at the daily newspaper, Shuman’s textbook takes as a given that the two modes of writing share a common notion of “story” as well as a common body of techniques. In the Preface to *Steps Into Journalism*, Shuman describes news reporting as “probably the best apprenticeship that will ever be found for teaching readiness with the pen” and promises readers that “this work of local chronicler [or reporter] is excellent training for certain other kinds of writing” (6 - 7). He later addresses the aspiring novelists among his readers directly, elaborating the knowledge and skills the aspiring litterateur can acquire at the daily newspaper. This elaboration is delivered in an extended metaphor that equates writing with “mining”:

> A great city is to a novelist what a mountain of gold bearing quartz would be to a prospector. The miner must know how to get his ore out of the earth, and how to build a stamp mill in which to crush it; he must have great quantities of
valuable quick-silver with which to extract the gold from the dross. And so the writer must be equipped with the proper knowledge and experience before he can extract a story or a novel from the vast, seething mass of humanity around him. The best place in the world to get that knowledge and experience is on the local staff of a newspaper office. (58)

Shuman’s description is worth unpacking in some detail because it touches on the specific skills and experiences journalism was thought to offer the aspiring literary writer. Shuman’s reference to “extracting” the ore from the earth, or extracting the story out of “the seething mass of humanity” could be describing the ability to identify the elements of a story that would be most interesting to readers. It assumes that there is a recognizable and agreed upon notion of “story” applicable in both the journalistic and literary realms.

While Shuman’s text is ostensibly a primer for aspiring journalists, his greatest elaboration of what constitutes “news” can be found in a final chapter in which he dispenses advice on writing fiction. Shuman advises fiction writers to seek out stories of “human interest,” which he describes in terms of observable action: “Human nature is essentially gregarious and is always intensely curious to see or hear what the other fellow is doing or saying. You can notice it on the crowded street; how quickly a crowd gathers if a man or woman falls to the pavement, or if a pick-pocket is caught and hauled away in the patrol wagon!” (210-211) These examples emphasize dramatic or unusual action rendered in observable details like what people do or say rather than intangible elements like what they think or feel. The implication here again is that a scene compelling enough to be captured in journalism will also suit the novelist or short story writer and, in both cases, will be rendered using observable details. In his analysis of the difference between journalism and literature,
Boynton notes the use of the word “story” to denote both news and literary items, stating that “it is plain that little distinction can be made between a piece of journalism and a piece of literature on the external subject matter alone” (848). By claiming that news writing will equip the aspiring literary writer with the ability to extract the “story”—be it a news story or a novel—from the “gold bearing quartz” of the city, Shuman is implying that news and fiction are similar in substance, originating from the same “ore” of observable experience.

Moreover, he also suggests that they are similar in style, stating that “writing for a limited space teaches the journalist the art of condensation and the scarcely less valuable trick of ‘writing against space,’ or spinning out a story without making it dull” (60). In a later chapter, he quotes Walter Besant’s advice to writers: “Endeavor to be dramatic. A great element of dramatic skill is selection... Never attempt to describe any kind of life except that with which you are familiar” (qtd. in Shuman 206). Thus Shuman suggests that journalistic writing can help the fiction writer not only learn to identify the dramatic story, but also to condense or expand the story through selective use of detail—skills that would clearly be profitable both to the news writer paid on space and, one assumes, the literary writer dependent on popular appeal to sell a story. With the promise that his readers can “get [the] knowledge and experience needed” to produce literature by reporting for a daily newspaper, Shuman implies that writing craft simply comprises a set of techniques that can be acquired. Moreover, in claiming that the story need merely be “extracted” like ore, Shuman privileges a realist conception of writing as a faithful depiction of observable experience and of composition as an act of discovery and assembling of found materials rather than the invention of something completely original.
In Shuman’s description of journalism as a literary apprenticeship, the continuum between journalistic and literary writing seems to be, like the career ladder in Shuman’s title, one the writer can traverse as his skills improve. Thus, while news and literary “stories” overlap in substance, they are distinguished by the relative quality of the writer’s technique. As the writer improves, he has more colors into which he might dip his pen, allowing him to advance from newswriting to higher forms of writing, such as literature. Shuman makes a direct comparison between journalism and literature when he describes the process of conducting and writing up an interview. Readers are instructed to observe the subject’s surroundings, appearance, and outward details such as unique mannerisms and “pet phrases” (71). By observing the subject’s mannerisms and surroundings, the journalist is able to create something akin to fiction in its lively characterization and rich description, but one that is based on facts. Shuman thus describes the interview article as “the nearest relative to the novel among the motley crowd of news articles” and claims that “the best writers of interviews now put their matter in much the same shape as that used by the popular novelist” (71). By claiming that the best interviews are in “much the same shape,” as popular novels, Shuman stops short of claiming that the interview is itself literature, but suggests instead that it is one step on an implied continuum between more journalistic and more literary forms of writing.

In a 1905 opinion piece published in *The Bookman*, the journalist and author Hutchins Hapgood suggests that the newspaper interview might by combined, giving rise to a new, more vital form of literature; a form of literary biography dramatizing the experience of real people. “Instead of artificially constructing a plot, why not look for a real tale? Instead of imagining a character, why not go forth and discover one? And when an expressive
personality is discovered, why should not the writer find plenty of use for his sympathy and imagination in understanding and re-constructing this expressive personality?” he asks (424). Rather than envisioning the interview article as a practice exercise for creating work that is more literary, i.e. during a gestational stage in the process of becoming a novelist, Hapgood fuses journalistic and literary writing, creating a hybrid genre that is a journalistic form of literary art: “The skill of the interviewer would consist in obtaining the facts, and the tact and understanding of the artist would be employed in taking only what fits into the picture and in rejecting what is untypical and superfluous. So that the author must be both interviewer and literary artist [sic]” (425). Hapgood’s hybrid genre constructs news and literary writing as separate domains with distinct, but compatible sets of skills. While Shuman recognizes the value of the journalist’s information gathering skills to the aspiring literary writer, even suggesting that the well executed interview can be like literature, Hapgood goes further by suggesting that the interview can itself be literature. However, both views are based in a sense of news and factions sharing a body of techniques.

In fact, in a chapter titled “Magazines and Novels” Shuman demonstrates how to turn a news story into a creative short story by applying additional techniques of fiction writing, a process he describes as “translation.” Translation as demonstrated by Shuman consists of cloaking the factual bones of a news story in a suit of descriptive details, suggesting that the difference between journalism and literature lies in the number and complexity of the descriptive techniques employed rather than in any substantive difference in story structure. The first version of the story he provides as an example is “plain prose”: one unembellished paragraph containing the “who, what, when, where, and how” of a news story without dialogue or descriptive details. The short story is a dramatic retelling of the news story, but
with elaborated descriptions of the action and characters and with dialogue rendered in dialect. Shuman describes translation by listing its possible elements: whereas a news story is plain prose, an unadorned factual account of a story, “a novel is plain prose translated into conversation, description, historical statement, philosophical comment, dramatic situations—all the colors into which the writer can dip his pen. I believe that the novel is the prose of real life translated, just as poetry is, only into a different language” (208). And, as described in his chapter on interviewing, the conversation and description Shuman lists as basic elements of a novel are also elements that can be observed from real life while reporting for the daily newspaper.

And yet, Shuman’s textbook also warned against staying too long in journalism. Such warnings make explicit underlying beliefs about literature as a work of art invested with the author’s unique genius. These implicit beliefs subordinate journalistic writing as a degraded form of writing, i.e. as fundamentally non-literary. Thus, Shuman’s text, a textbook ostensibly aimed at aspiring journalists, in fact promotes what is ultimately a denigrating image of the journalist. And yet, its representation of journalism as a literary apprenticeship apparently resonated with readers. The book not only sold well, but was also well reviewed by fellow journalists, suggesting that Shuman’s book was based in a conceptualization of journalistic writing that resonated with readers.9 Indeed, again and again, in representations of journalism as a literary apprenticeship, not only in Shuman’s textbook, but elsewhere,

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9 The Writer described Shuman’s book as: "The best and most practical general work on newspaper-making that has yet been published...describing the routine of the newspaper office and the methods of the workers in the different departments" and recommended every news worker keep a copy of it "within his reach" According to the anonymous reviewer, the book provides trustworthy information on the "inside work of newspaper offices and of suggestions to young reporters," concluding "there is no active newspaper man who cannot get some benefit from reading it" (176). A notice in The Literary World: A Monthly Review of Current Literature said the book “treats of newspaper work as a more or less exact science, and lays down its laws in an informal way for beginners, local correspondents, and reporters” (124).
aspiring litterateurs are warned not to tarry too long lest their skills be degraded by too much “fast writing” and their artistic sensibility be deadened. Contrary to Robertson’s contention that it was Crane’s success that spawned widespread acceptance of journalism as a literary apprenticeship, my survey of late nineteenth-century sources as well as more recent historical accounts of the period suggests that well before Crane’s own literary apprenticeship, aspiring litterateurs were actively encouraged by people like Shuman and book publisher Henry Holt to consider journalism as a literary apprenticeship. Moreover, even after Crane’s literary success inspired future generations of writers to apprentice in the newsroom, the notion of journalism’s potentially degrading influence persisted, coloring historical and literary accounts of the relationship between literary and journalistic writing and undercutting the “myth of the artist nurtured by journalism” that Roberston describes (210).

The flawed apprenticeship

Warnings against remaining in journalism too long draw to the fore the contradictory assumptions about writing that complicate the notion that journalism was a preparatory step toward a literary career. These warnings distinguish the mere craft of writing from the creation of an inspired work of art. Both the writer’s craft and the writer’s innate ability were described as being vulnerable to the degrading influence of journalism in two key ways: First, too much practice in the “hard matter-of fact writing” style of the reporter threatened to permanently warp the writer’s technique. And second, too much immersion in the reporter’s “cruel realism of experience” threatened to blunt the writer’s sensitive nature. These warnings offer the inverse of arguments in favor of apprenticing in journalism: First, while reporting offered the opportunity to practice the craft of writing, newspaper writing was lacking the creative or subjective intervention of the author; too much practice in its
impersonal style might therefore might limit the writer’s technical development. Secondly, while news reporting offered the aspiring novelist access to characters and scenes upon which he might later draw when writing fiction, newspapers were also known for being sensationalistic and dwelling on the more unsavory elements of society. Too much exposure to this seediness might dampen the delicate touch of the sensitive novelist.

Implicit in these warnings is the notion that successful literary writing is a fusion of learnable craft with innate talent, the creative capacity Boynton describes as “genius.” Shuman’s text embodies the dynamic tension between the conceptions of writing as a learnable craft versus a creative or original work of art. While Shuman’s descriptions of writing are dominated by images of mechanics and labor, those images Fehrman associates with the “aesthetic of work,” Shuman also alludes to the creative or inventive conception of writing by drawing a distinction between kinds of work. For example, I earlier quoted a mining metaphor Shuman uses to describe the knowledge or experience the novice writer would develop while reporting the news: “The miner must know how to get his ore out of the earth, and how to build a stamp mill in which to crush it; he must have great quantities of valuable quick-silver with which to extract the gold from the dross” (58). I have already discussed the first two areas of knowledge or skill, both of which describe activities or techniques the writer must know or learn how to perform: extracting the ore, and building the stamp mill in which to crush it. However, the last bit of knowledge or skill in Shuman’s description is not an activity, but rather an item the writer must possess: “great quantities of valuable quick-silver with which to extract the gold from the dross” (58). Quicksilver is another name for mercury, which was used in the gold mining process to extract tiny particles of gold from dirt. An 1886 guide to mining describes the process of panning for
gold: Miners first dissolved dirt that contained gold dust into water, making a thick slurry. To this they added mercury which adhered to the gold through a chemical reaction known as amalgamation. Weighted down by the mercury, the gold then sank to the bottom of the pan while the dirt, or dross, was easily rinsed away (Lock 176). While Shuman’s other metaphors of extracting the ore from the earth suggested a cruder process of digging out the raw materials of a story, his quicksilver metaphor suggests a more subtle alchemy of the writer’s mind or sentiment combining with and thus clarifying the “gold” of the story. Thus, in this passage, Shuman moves from describing the teachable, or craft, elements of writing to describing the innate or unteachable creative element, what he elsewhere describe as the “romantic imagination,” necessary to elevate a piece of writing to a work of art.

All of these elements come together in another of Shuman’s descriptions of the value of journalism as a literary apprenticeship. In it, Shuman first reaffirms the value of the journalistic apprenticeship as a school for reality for the young writer before warning about the potential hazards posed by journalistic writing, again using mining metaphors to conceptualize the journalist’s work:

[Reporting] is hard work, but it is a splendid training for a young writer. It acquaints one with humanity as no other course of training can; and humanity, with its faults, foibles, hatreds, crimes, sorrows, loves and joys, is the great, exhaustless mine of precious ore waiting for the writer to extract the gold.

Yet, on the other hand, too much of this hard, matter-of-fact writing and cruel realism of experience is likely to crush all the tenderer sentiments out of one’s style, dwarf the romantic imagination, and mar the delicacy of touch needed in order to be a successful novelist. (Shuman 57)
Here again, Shuman draws on labor metaphors to reference the raw ore, or constitutive elements of the journalistic—and potentially literary—story. However, by referencing the “romantic imagination” and “tenderer sentiments,” Shuman lifts the work of writing literature out of the realm of learnable craft and instead invokes the writer’s innate ability as a necessary element of the composing process. In fact, the writer’s “delicacy of touch” is referenced again on the next page when Shuman again combines metaphors of labor to describe the dangers of too much journalistic writing, shifting from the image of the journalistic writer as laborer to an image of the literary writer as artist: “Only, of course, if a man aspires to be a maker of watches he must not devote too many of his years to forging steel and copper bars, or his hands will grow too horny for the more delicate work of manipulating pinions and hair springs” (58). Shuman, unlike Boynton, stops short of describing the creative faculty of the novelist as “genius.” But the distinction he draws between the work of the journalist and the work of the novelist similarly relies on a distinction between merely mechanical production and a creative act. Whereas the journalist/miner is a crude body extracting the raw “ore” of the story, the novelist/watchmaker is several steps removed from the mine, delicately manipulating and combining the products created from the ore. By suggesting that journalism might make the watchmaker’s hands “too horny” for the delicate work of watch making, Shuman is warning about the dangers of ruining ones craft or technique, which is ostensibly the “learnable” part of writing. However, in also warning of journalism’s threat to the “romantic imagination,” Shuman draws more explicitly on a conception of literary writing as creative invention.

The same warnings about warping the artistic imagination in Shuman’s textbook also inform a 1907 essay in The Bookman, a first-person cautionary tale about laboring too long in
journalism. In it, an anonymous reporter identifying himself only as a “literary journalist” describes his efforts to shift from daily news reporting to a career writing fiction for the magazines. He presents himself as a cautionary tale that validates warnings against tarrying too long in journalism. He had been what reporters call “a writing reporter,” so named because his strength was in writing the news rather than gathering it. Yet, he struggles to transition into creative writing because too much practice in journalistic writing has trained him in an “objective viewpoint” that has squelched his “subjective imagination” (“Confessions,” 376). As is typical of the representation of journalism as a literary apprenticeship, he first acknowledges the “splendid pageantry of youth and life” he witnessed during four years as a daily news reporter: “[The reporter] knows how men act in passion, in stress, in joy, in hate. He gathers the lore of every craft. He is a Decameron of those stories which never get into print, and which are far more useful for the novelist and the essayist than those which do” (376). The writer here emphasizes the “ore” of experience made available to the reporter, even surpassing what is used in the daily newspaper. And yet, the wealth of detail and experience he has gained through journalism are rendered valueless by the journalistic point of view. He claims the reporter’s “view is always objective; and in time this objectivity of thought becomes a habit” (376). This objective point of view is an emphasis on observable phenomenon. Literature, in contrast, emerges “Not from wide experience, but from much meditation and fullness of the life within,” which gives one the: subjective imagination which makes a writer understand not how the murderer acts when he pulls the trigger, but how he feels; not what the lover says when love is fulfilled, but what he thinks. That wealth of detail, then, is a
constructive force; that habit of objective observation a destructive one.

(“Confessions” 376)

The filtering of raw experience through the writer’s subjective imagination suggested in this passage parallels Shuman’s description of the creative writer as watchmaker who, through sensitive treatment of the material, crafts a delicate piece of machinery from the metals extracted from the earth. And, as in Shuman’s warnings against laboring too long in journalism, this writer claims that the work of extracting the ore develops faculties that suppress the writer’s finer sentiments, just as the work of mining makes the watchmaker’s hands “too horny” for the delicate work of watch making. The “literary journalist” describes the subjective imagination as meditation, or deep reflection upon one’s own inner experience, tying the creative, or “constructive force” of imagination to the writer’s own internal life. Thus, here too is Shuman’s quicksilver, which draws the precious ore out of experience. Regardless of the metaphor used, the emphasis is always on the individual imagination of the literary writer as a constitutive force in elevating mere observation to a piece of art. And the result is always that journalistic writing is subordinated to literature, a less creative and therefore less valuable form of writing. However, it is surprising that Shuman would thus subordinate the work of writing to literature given that his textbook was ostensibly a guide for those who wished to become journalists.

**Motives for deploying this representation**

Historical accounts of reporting in the 1890s suggest that the reporter was often an overworked, poorly paid drudge, pitifully low in the office pecking order, a state of affairs vividly described in Shuman’s text (see Smythe “The Reporter”). In Shuman’s description of the newsroom hierarchy, the reporter occupies the lowest position in the newsroom, superior
only to the copy boy. He is “the beginner, the bright young man who offers his services to the City Editor… He is the individual who actually does the hardest hustling for the least pay, and whose tenure of office is so precarious that he is supposed never to pass the waste-basket without looking in to see if his head is there” (21). The reporter’s low status was reflected in his pay. In the 1860s and 70s editors at large urban dailies earned between $25-$60 per week, while reporters made about $15-$30 (Mott 406). Some estimates place the reporter’s daily earnings at around $3.75 per day for a 10- to 14-hour workday (Smythe 215-216). Yet, journalists at all levels clung to a white collar identity, perhaps rooted in the intellectual aura associated with “mind” or office work in contradistinction to bodily labor (Solomon 129). Thus despite the drudgery and humiliations of the job, reporters considered themselves professionals, claiming for themselves a social position and status not extended to their often better paid colleagues laboring at the printing press.

Shuman’s textbook, ostensibly written for novices who would enter the newsroom as reporters, acknowledges the demoralizing and at times humiliating aspects of the job. To an extent, these privations are somewhat counterbalanced by the adventurous aspects of the job. Shuman describes the reporter’s exploits in an exaggerated, “true adventure” style, even addressing the reader in the second person and inviting him at one point in the text to imagine himself in the role of a reporter leaping onto a sinking ship in order to interview its crew. But the more compelling way Shuman ameliorates the hardships suffered by the reporter is by presenting the journalist as a literary artist in training. Doing so frames the reporter’s humiliations within a larger narrative of artistic growth.

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10 All dollar figures in this paragraph are given in late nineteenth century values.
Shuman may also have had financial motives for emphasizing an association between journalism and literature, given the audience for his textbook. Shuman frames the reporter’s experience this way only in the first edition of his textbook, published in 1894. The book was published by the Correspondence School of Journalism and based on his notes from a Chautauqua seminar on journalism—a seminar likely populated by interested amateurs (Mirando “Journalism’s First” 8). While the book was well received, widely read, and influential, it may have been directed at less of a specialist audience than previous accounts have suggested. This audience may have been aspiring litterateurs who, like the Yale undergraduates Holt addressed, saw journalism as a stepping stone to a literary career.

In contrast, his later textbook *Practical Journalism*, was published by D. Appleton and Co. in 1903, after many colleges were offering journalism courses and not long before journalism schools were established at the University of Missouri and at Columbia University. Shuman’s second, heavily revised edition may have been more targeted to a pre-professional audience, an audience of readers who saw journalism as an end in itself. *Practical Journalism* is both a revision and elaboration of *Steps Into Journalism* (Mirando “Journalism’s First” 9). Shuman notes in the Preface that *Practical Journalism* is in a sense the sequel of a more elementary treatise published eight years ago under the title, *Steps into Journalism*… In a few cases I have drawn upon the earlier work for materials, though the language and treatment are entirely changed. The former book was for beginners alone. The present volume, it is hoped, will be of value to practical newspapermen of some experience as well as to those who still stand on the threshold. (viii ix)
While still containing much of the same information about the inner workings of the news office, it frames the reporter’s journey as an end in itself, the first step in a long journalistic career. The difference in audience is clearly reflected in the way Shuman chooses to frame the materials.

In both cases, Shuman represents journalism in strategic ways in order to achieve specific ends. In the first case, he’s selling journalism to an audience at least partially composed of aspiring novelists. In the second version, he’s addressing an audience of readers for whom journalism is an end in itself. For the first group, journalism is described as offering the first step in a literary career. The former reporter turned prose writer and playwright Jesse Lynch Williams lampooned young men like these, who hoped to launch a literary career from a daily newspaper office, with the character Rufus Carrington, a comical figure in Williams’ popular newspaper stories:

Rufus intended to become a great writer some day, and he believed that [journalism] was the way to go about it. He thought a little disagreeableness for a couple of years would not hurt him; and it would be very pleasant afterward to read that ‘From the year so-and-so till the year so-and-so the author engaged in newspaper work; then, with the appearance of his first book, Rufus Carrington’—that would make a fine sonorous mouthful, “Rufus Carrington, author”… (130, ellipsis in original)

For Rufus, being a “great writer” means writing novels. Yet, even his interest in novel writing is superficial, based on his image of himself as a novelist more than any creative urge. The expressivity of novel writing is here reduced solipsistically to a fascination with the sound of his own name. Lacking the sonorous title “novelist,” Rufus must tolerate the
“disagreeableness” of reporting. Indeed, in Shuman’s earlier textbook, the disagreeableness of reporting is something to be gotten through, and gotten through quickly, while one honed his craft. In contrast, the later textbook presents this disagreeableness as something to be gotten through until one advanced to the editorial chair. In both cases, Shuman is negotiating the available models of professionalism in order to represent journalism in a manner that will appeal to his audience. He’s writing the journalist’s professional identity in specific ways to appeal to an audience of literary minded amateurs in the first edition and those expecting a fruitful career in journalism in the second. The differences between these two versions underscore that there were multiple ways of representing journalistic professionalism, the choice among which depended on a host of factors.

At the same time, individual journalists like the “literary journalist” may have seized on the flawed apprenticeship model in order to justify their inability to move into literary writing. The parallels between the “confession” of the literary journalist and Shuman’s text illustrate both the pervasiveness and the utility of representing journalism as a literary apprenticeship. For the “literary journalist,” representing journalism in this manner provides a way of understanding his inability to successfully translate the plain prose of journalism into literary form. The article concludes by again warning against staying too long in journalism: “The art of ‘breaking away,’ then, lies in choosing that moment when one is at the top of the curve; when, being full of detail and the sense of life, one has not yet lost the power of inner imagination” (“Confessions” 376, emphasis added). This reference to inner imagination suggests the innate sensitivity of the literary writer that Shuman describes as the capacity being dulled by too much labor in journalism. Jesse Lynch Williams likewise dramatizes this risk in his short story “The Old Reporter.” The story describes the decline of
a gifted journalist whose literary powers are destroyed by journalism. The title character, Billy Woods, is a highly successful journalist known for his colorful writing style but is unable to make the transition from journalistic to literary writing. He is a fictional example of what Shuman describes as the writer’s delicate hands made “horny” through hard labor, or what the literary journalist describes as a loss of “inner imagination”—Billy has also lost the sense of an independent self that would invest his fiction with his unique genius. Not only is he unable to write without someone assigning him a topic, but “he had subordinated his own personality to that of the paper’s for so long that now his own was afraid to speak” (260). In this context, Billy’s loss of voice speaks to an important condition of the model of literary apprenticeship: as Shuman seemed to suggest in the analogy of the miner and the watchmaker, the wise watchmaker knows when to extricate himself from the depraved depths of daily journalism. Lacking such wisdom, the miner remains a brute laborer and the journalist remains a hack.

In these examples, journalistic and literary writing are both seen as crafts upon which one can improve with practice. However, literary writing is distinguished by the writer’s creativity or investment of innate sensitivity into the rendering of realistic stories in observable detail. Journalism is seen as a potentially degrading influence because its demands threaten to dull that sensitivity, to degrade the writer’s “store of valuable quicksilver,” as Shuman described it. The result is that journalism is respected as a form of writing that shares a body of techniques and topical concerns with literature. But ultimately, this representation devalues or denigrates journalists as inferior writers, lacking the creativity to elevate the craft of writing to a work of art. This conception of journalistic writing informs William Dean Howells’s seemingly contradictory assessments of journalism as both a
“school for reality” and a degraded, and potentially degrading, form of writing. In the following I examine two of Howells’s autobiographical accounts of his own experiences in daily news journalism in order to examine how the representation of journalism as a literary apprenticeship subordinated the journalist to the literary writer.

In an early memoir that details his development as a writer, Howells emphasizes the similarities between journalism and literature in order to emphasize the quality of verisimilitude in Realist literature. He does this to distinguish the Realist work from the Romance and uses the comparison with journalism to substantiate Realist literature’s claims to represent reality. In his later memoir, Howells undermines this positive association between literature and journalism by emphasizing literature’s privileged status as the product of a creative mind. His purpose in the second example is to distance literature and journalism by subordinating the latter as a lesser form, a merely mechanical rendering rather than a creative one. The representation of journalism as literary apprenticeship instantiated conceptions of literary writing as an inspired art form, which Howells drew on in order to position his own literary work in relation to journalism. Thus his writing on journalism provides a useful case study for examining the role of such representations in ordering professional identities.

**Howells: a case study in the strategic use of this rep**

Howells recounts his short employment as a City Editor and local reporter at the Cincinnati *Gazette* twice in his memoirs—first in *My Literary Passions* (1891) and again in *Years of My Youth* (1916). He also wrote often of journalists in fiction, including Bartley Hubbard, the protagonist of the 1882 novel *A Modern Instance*. In the earlier autobiographical account, Howells expresses some regret about the lost chance to study in
journalism’s “school of reality.” Yet, he ultimately undermines journalism’s value as an apprenticeship in the later account by first disputing the value of its supposed lessons and then by emphasizing the distancing effect of journalism’s objective authorial stance. In both instances, Howells represents his journalistic work in a manner intended to emphasize his realist project in ways that distinguish it from other, lesser forms of writing.

Howells first describes his own experience with daily news reporting in his 1891 literary memoir *My Literary Passions*. He contextualizes the experience within a larger narrative about his literary awakening or conversion to realism from the sentimentality of romantic literary ideals. In order to do so, he downplays the wretchedness of his journalistic experience. An 1886 screed against journalism published in *Lippincott’s Monthly* describes the typical news section of the daily newspaper as “the common sewer for public and private immorality… the record of the murders, rapes, hangings, poisonings, incendiariasms, suicides, divorces, thefts, burglaries, incests, lusts, and all other abominations perpetrated by perverted humanity” (Pallen 473-474). While Howells’s reporting experience may not have been as harrowing, during his tenure as a local reporter and City Editor with the *Cincinnati Gazette*, the paper reported on domestic violence, an attempted suicide, murder, robberies, fraud, and prostitution (Olsen 105). Howells lasted less than one month in the job. In describing the experience in his earlier memoir, he provides little detail, simply stating that he was offered a position as a City Editor at a Cincinnati paper. He writes only that he went to that city to learn more about the job and to try his hand at reporting. “One night’s round of the police stations with the other reporters satisfied me that I was not meant for that work, and I attempted it no farther,” he concludes (124). If he was exposed to the more degrading scenes of urban life described in *Lippincott’s* he does not describe them in his earlier memoir.
Instead, he frames the story’s larger meaning as a missed opportunity, a lost chance to apprentice in the “school of life”:

I have often been sorry since, for it would have made known to me many phases of life that I have always remained ignorant of, but I did not know then that life was supremely interesting and important. I fancied that literature, that poetry was so; and it was humiliation and anguish indescribable to think of myself torn from my high ideals by labors like those of the reporter. (My Literary 124)

In this context, the missed opportunity is framed within Howells youthful literary ambitions, which he gently mocks as “fancy.” The youthful Howells is described here as mistaken in separating literature from life, so that his reluctance to labor as a reporter is less a reflection on the degradation of that occupation than an example of Howells youthful ignorance. In fact, Howells claims that he refused not only to re-visit the police courts but to do any work for the local news department, including office work, thinking it beneath him (a claim contradicted by his later account of his experience) (“My,” 166).

Steeped in vaunted notions of literature as a transcendent art removed from the workaday experiences of daily life, the young Howells cannot help but see the stark realities of underclass life presented in the daily newspaper as being far removed from literature. Later in the same chapter, he describes his first exposure to the German Realist poet Heinrich Heine in terms of a quasi-religious conversion. Howells writes that the “singular beauty and grace” of Heine’s poems “at once possessed my soul” (My Literary 167). He then recounts how he obsessed over the poet’s work, spending every available moment studying German grammar and translating the work word-for-word with the help of a dictionary until he
dropped to sleep at night with the words in his head and dreamt about the poems at night. However, Howells claims his virtual enslavement to the poet’s work freed him from the influence of romanticism. “If [Heine] chained me to himself he freed me from all other bondage” encouraging Howells to abandon his earlier attempts to “literarify” himself by aping the styles of other authors (My Literary 171). The key insight he claims to have gathered from Heine, Howells writes, is “that the life of literature was from the springs of the best common speech, and that the nearer it could be made to conform, in voice, look and gait, to graceful, easy, picturesque and humorous or impassioned talk, the better it was” (172).

Through the story of his own literary conversion, Howells dramatizes a point he makes to critics in Criticism and Literature: that the work of art’s value must be measured according to how well it reflects life rather than in comparison with the work of past masters, stating “I can judge but poorly of anything while I measure it by no other standard than itself” (7).

Within this context, then, journalism’s “school for reality” is an extension of “real life,” the legitimate stuff of literature that Howells, in his youthful naiveté had dismissed in favor of the stylized “literariness” of the canonical works he vainly tried to emulate. The implied conclusion of this rendering of his experience is that, had Howells been enslaved by Heine before becoming a reporter, he might have appreciated the unfettered access to lived experience, the graceful and picturesque and impassioned experience that journalism offered the aspiring artist. As it was, his misguided concept of literature as an imaginative escape from reality prevented him from taking advantage of the chance offered by journalism’s “school of reality.” In this instance, Howells strategically deploys one of the main assumptions that inform representations of journalism as a literary apprenticeship: that journalism and literature share a sense of “story” grounded in life experience.
However, Howells’s later memoir disputes this notion. It emphasizes another, more negative aspect of the representation of journalism as a literary apprenticeship, the notion that literature was distinct in being a creative work of art in contrast to journalism’s merely mechanical rendering of experience. This view emerges when Howells recounts his daily news reporting experience again in his 1916 memoir *Years of My Youth*. In the earlier version, Howells had framed his departure from journalism as a lost opportunity to study in the “school of reality,” making the incident part of a larger narrative about his “conversion” to literary realism. Thus he describes his mistake in rejecting journalism as dichotomizing literature and life—placing literature in a rarified realm removed from real life, which from the journalist’s perspective includes the city streets and jails. Howells thus capitalizes on the received notion that journalism offered aspiring literary writers an opportunity to observe “real life” up close in order to validate his own literary ideals. In contrast, his 1916 version of his reporting experience directly confronts and rejects the representation of journalism as an apprenticeship to literature. Howells denigrates the experiences journalism has to offer the aspiring novelist and claims that journalism and literature are completely distinct in their differing approaches to representing reality. Howells’s turnabout may have been motivated in part by his discomfort with the increasing overlap of literature and journalism.

The realist aesthetic, of which Howells was the most vocal American champion, seems to invite the writer to immerse him or herself in experience in order to convey it realistically on the page. In the 1880s and 1890s Howells used his “The Editor’s Study” essays in *Harper’s Monthly* to elaborate a theory of realist literature. The language Howells uses to describe the composition of this literature is strikingly similar to that used by Shuman to describe the more literary forms of journalism. “Realism is nothing more and nothing less
than the truthful treatment of material,” Howells pronounced in one of his “Editor’s Study” columns, reprinted in the 1892 book Criticism and Fiction (73). This “truthful treatment of material” required an objective or dramatic point of view in order to convincingly depict the lived experience of ordinary people. Howells describes this as a nearly photographic rendering of the scenes of everyday life and a fidelity to language as it was actually spoken. Howells particularly praised the use of dialect or idiosyncrasies of speech, which could reveal not only a character’s origins, but also social class, habits of mind, and personality. In a statement on the standards by which critics should judge literature, Howells praises “the young writer who attempts to report the phrase and carriage of every-day life, who tries to tell just how he has heard men talk and seen them look” (Criticism 10). This passage almost suggests that Howells is advocating a literal reporting of observed details.

At the same time, Shuman’s textbook advocates a rendering of the facts and details observed in the interview that eschews literal translation of recorded observations, instead advocating a verisimilitude that conveys a “lifelike” impression of the interview subject. In Shuman’s description of the interview story, the news form he describes as being closest to literature, he advises reporters to “watch closely the spirit of what is said, the manner in which it is uttered, the pet phrases and notions of the speaker, and his personal appearance, jotting down his exact words only on vital or technical points” (71). The aim of this mental recording is only the appearance of factual reporting. As Shuman later explains, if the writer is able to accurately capture the speaker’s characteristic mannerisms, such as pet phrases or turns of speech, “If you should get everything else crooked and yet makes this sound natural, everybody who knows the man, and even the man himself, will feel a lurking suspicion that you must have taken the whole thing down in shorthand (Shuman 75-76). Shuman is not
advocating a verbatim recording of speech, but rather a capturing of the personality behind the speech that would make its depiction seem real. Shuman’s description of the attempt to make the interview subject’s speech “sound natural” parallels Howells admonition that the artist capture and “report” the phrases of everyday life. In fact, a reviewer of *A Modern Instance* referred to Howells throughout as “a reporter” and described the novel as a representative example of the trend toward objective reporting of reality in literature (Robertson 19). However, Howells chafed at these comparisons, resisting the perceived association between realist literature and journalism. This is demonstrated in his later memoir by first dismissing journalism’s “school of reality” as one unworthy of the novelist and then by distinguishing between the reporter’s and the novelist’s stance toward their subjects.

In an oft-quoted passage, Howells describes journalism’s “school of reality as” a “university of the streets and police stations, with its faculty of patrolmen and saloon keepers” wherein the aspiring novelist might learn “many lessons of human nature” (*Years* 140-143). However, that this school of reality teaches lessons in “cruel realism” as Shuman’s textbook describes it, is substantiated by Howells’ choice of teachers: patrolmen and saloonkeepers. In both his autobiographical and fictional depictions of journalism, Howells affirms the premise that reporting exposes the aspiring fiction writer to lived experience, but then rejects the bulk of those experiences as unfit for literature. For example, in his later memoir, *Years of My Youth*, Howells describes a disturbing incident in which a man committing adultery with a married woman came to the newspaper office to beg Howells and his colleagues not to print the story. They didn’t. But Howells was distressed to find the story featured prominently in a rival paper the next day. In *A Modern Instance*, the nefarious Bartley Hubbard makes a living printing people’s private affairs in the newspaper
and is eventually murdered by a man whose adulterous affair he had exposed in his newspaper. Howells thus dramatizes the disconnect between his own sense of propriety and the lack of it at the typical newspaper.

Howells’s distaste for the subject matter of the daily newspaper is further exemplified in the later memoir by an incident he experiences at the police courts. However, the framing of this defining event in his life again suggests that Howells is using the experience to position his own aesthetic in relation to journalism. He renders it as an indictment not only of the degraded school of reality the newspaper offered, but also of the journalistic writer’s treatment of his subject. In his 1916 memoir, he elaborates on the incident his earlier memoir had only hinted at. He prefaces the story by describing another incident from his youth in which he had disapproved of the shop girls and female clerks who dined alone in the restaurant where he took his meals:

I was so altogether ignorant of life that I thought shame of them to be boldly showing themselves in such a public place as a restaurant. I wonder what they would have thought, poor, blameless dears, of the misgivings in the soul of the conscious youth as he sat stealing glances of injurious conjecture at them … If I could not mercifully imagine them, how could I intelligently endure the ravings of the drunken woman which I heard one night in the police station where my abhorred duties took me for the detestable news of the place?

(Years of My Youth 142)

Howells adjectives to describe the woman and the police station are unambiguous: the drunk woman’s “ravings” and his “abhorred duties,” the “detestable news” suggest a hellish scene—made particularly acute for a homesick young man unused to urban life. Howells thus
uses the incident to illustrate why the school of reality journalism offered was not a worthy school for the novelist. Moreover, in contrasting the “poor blameless dears” in the restaurant with the “raving” woman in the police courts, Howells also nods toward a more appropriate subject for the literary writer. In fact, Howells later depicts something akin to the experience of the shop girls—who he acknowledges were probably provincial girls in the city working to support their families. In A Modern Instance he describes Marcia Hubbard’s discomfort with taking meals at a restaurant. In contrast to his youthful disdain for the shop-girls, Howells the seasoned novelist sympathetically dramatizes a provincial girl’s first painful experience of the publicness of urban life. By contrasting the “blameless” shopgirls with the ranting drunken woman in his autobiographical writing, Howells dramatizes the differences not only between the stories the novelist and journalist cover, but also in how they cover it.

In the novel A Modern Instance Howells describes how reprehensible journalist Bartley Hubbard converts experience into sensationalistic newspaper accounts filled with “vivid and telling” description and flourished with attention grabbing multi-deck headlines emphasizing their startling and prurient details. In one telling instance, Bartley converts his and his wife’s disheartening efforts to find affordable housing in Boston into a sensationalistic expose of predatory landlords. Bartley’s story is fact-based, but misleading. Howells emphasizes the factual nature of the story by describing Bartley’s information gathering activities in some detail: “He set about getting the facts he could, and he priced a great many lodgings in different parts of the city; then he went to a number of real-estate agents, and, giving himself out as a reporter of the Chronicle-Abstract, he interviewed them as to house-rents, past and present. Upon these bottom facts, as he called them, he based a ‘spicy’ sketch, which had also largely the character of an expose” (169 first emphasis added).

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Howells’ description of Bartley’s fact-gathering illustrates the shortcomings of the journalistic method. He and Marcia are rural people overwhelmed by their first experience of the cost of living in the big city. Yet, Bartley turns their experience into an exposé about out-of-control housing prices. When Bartley does describe his own experience and observations, it is with “those strokes of crude picturesqueness and humor which he knew how to give, and was really entertaining” (169). Absent is “the poetry of their ignorance and their poverty, or the pathetic humor of their dismay at the disproportion of the prices to their means” (169).

Though based in fact, the story Bartley produces rings hollow; it isn’t true to life. Which is why Howells describes Bartley as having “the true newspaper instinct” and of writing “with a motive that was as different as possible from the literary motive” (169). In Howells’s account, the newspaper instinct records the observable facts without getting to the emotional truth beneath.

Contrast this depiction of Bartley’s composing style with Howells description of his own work as a correspondent for the Ohio State Journal:

   Journalism was not my ideal, but it was my passion, and I was passionately a journalist well after I began author [sic]. I tried to make my newspaper work literary, to give it form and distinction, and it seems to me that I did not always try in vain, but I had also the instinct of actuality, of trying to make my poetry speak for its time and place. (“Years” 178)

Howells here is claiming the best of both literary and journalistic writing for himself. On the one hand, Howells is acknowledging how his reporter’s training in observation informed his literary work. He describes himself as a journalist even after he began writing literature, endowed with the “instinct of actuality,” and perhaps having learned, as Shuman would
describe it, to extract gold from the dross of daily life. On the other hand, he’s distinguishing himself from a mere journalist by also identifying himself as a poet. In contrast to Bartley Hubbard, who works purely from the journalist’s instinct, and writes far from the “literary motive,” Howells here describes his journalism as deeply invested with the “literary motive.” Fueled by this literary motive, Howells attempts to make of his journalism a transcendent art that might, like his poetry, “speak for its time and place.” Howells thus draws on the notion of literature as a creative art to distinguish literature from journalism. He first invokes journalism’s degrading influence by contrasting the subjects deemed appropriate for the daily newspaper against those he would choose to treat as a novelist. Then he uses the latent notion of literary art as a creative, or inspired act to further distance the journalistic and literary writer. This notion is reinforced in his literary accounts of the “journalistic motive” which starkly contrasts with his own poetic motive as a budding young litterateur. Howells’ distancing project may have been motivated in part by his desire to distinguish the treatment of reality in Realistic literature from that of the daily newspaper. Thus, his critique of the debasing influence of the daily newspaper also served as a validation of literature’s elite status, and by extension his own elite status as a novelist. Howells reiterates this hierarchical relationship again in “The Man of Letters as a Man of Business” when he professes some pity for the journalist. Howells strikes what has become a well-worn note in describing the relationship between “literary men” and journalists when he writes: “I fancy… that most journalists would have been literary men if they could, at the beginning, and that the kindness they almost always show to young authors is an effect of the self-pity they feel for their own thwarted wish to be authors” (22). Howells thus reinforces the subordination of journalistic to
literary writing by dismissing journalists as failed literary writers. This assessment of the
relationship between literature journalism persists in literary historical accounts today.

Critical engagement with nineteenth-century journalism is deeply colored by the myth
of literary apprenticeship, to the point that contemporary critics in both literature and
journalism proceed from the assumption that all journalists aspired to be creative writers. For
example, Larzer Ziff’s study of literature in the 1890s described newspapermen as
“semicovert novelists” (157). Michael Schudson’s highly influential study of the rise of
objectivity in news reporting claims that the average reporter in the 1890s was “passionately
attached to his job and to the novels he felt his experiences as a reporter would prepare him
to write” (69). Both accounts perpetuate the subordination of journalistic to literary writing
by position the representation of journalism as the only valid way of conceptualizing
journalistic professionalism in the period.

Both these contemporary and nineteenth-century accounts of the relationship between
journalistic and literary writing are underpinned by contradictory assumptions about writing.
On the one hand, the notion that journalism offers aspiring novelists an opportunity to both
gain useful experience and polish their writing skills assumes that writing is a craft, a set of
improvable skills. On the other hand, the notion that an apprenticeship in journalism
endangered the writer’s abilities by warping his sensibility and quashing his creativity
assumes that writing is an inspired, creative act, the intellectual product of a singular,
inspired mind, which must be protected from negative influences. This last notion is
especially apparent in another contemporary history, Shelly Fisher-Fishkin’s 2000 account of
the influence of previous journalistic work on the writing of canonical late nineteenth and
early twentieth-century writers including Theodore Dreiser, Ernest Hemingway, and John
Dos Passos. Fishkin argues that journalism honed these writers’ powers of observation and range of experience, but that it was only when that experience was wedded to their innate imagination and stylistic flair that they achieved literary success. In fact, she claims that these writers’ unique genius allowed them not only to fuse journalistic vision with literary technique to create a uniquely American literary form, but also to transcend the limitations of journalism’s tired forms. For example, she describes Whitman as a journalist who occasionally “managed to extricate himself from the conventions of the journalism of his day and explore new modes of reporting” (22). And yet, the new modes of reporting she ascribes to Whitman were actually quite common in penny press papers of the day. Alluding to the notion that literary writing must spring from a reserve of creative quicksilver, she essentially reads into Whitman’s journalism a unique spark of creativity that must elevate his work above that of his peers.

Michael Robertson likewise ascribes to Stephen Crane a unique genius that allowed him to become a transitional figure between literary resistance to the journalistic apprenticeship and a later embrace of it. In his 1997 study of Crane’s journalism and literature, Robertson argues that 1890s newspapers indiscriminately mixed news, fiction, and features, creating content with an indeterminate truth status, which readers both recognized and disregarded. Adapting Leonard Davis’s notion of a news/novel discourse, Robertson describes this intermingling of fact and fiction as a “fact/fiction discourse” unique to papers of the period. Robertson argues that this intermingling of fact and fiction allowed Crane to experiment with irony, fragmentation of subjectivity, and shifting points of view, allowing him to create a visionary form of literature at the intersection of reportage and imaginative prose (5-6). More importantly, he argues that Crane’s literary success inspired subsequent
generations of writers to regard journalism as a literary apprenticeship, making Crane a transitional figure between the antagonism of Howells and Henry James and the embrace of journalism by writers like Dreiser, Hemingway, and Willa Cather. There are a few problems with Robertsons’ thesis, including the notion of a fact/fiction discourse unique to the period. Even a cursory examination of earlier papers will show the same profligacy of fact and fiction that Robertson identifies in later papers. But more importantly, the description of Crane’s literary heroism is deeply grounded in a Romantic notion of the work of art as the unique creation of an inspired genius. Thus, of the thousands of writers laboring at daily newspapers in the late nineteenth century, Crane alone was able to recognize and exploit the artistic possibilities presented by the fact/fiction discourse. Finally, while Crane’s success likely inspired other aspiring novelists to consider apprenticing in journalism, Crane was far from the sole example of journalists turned literary successes. In fact, Robertson pays scant attention to Richard Harding Davis, Crane’s senior and a nationally recognized figure in both journalism and literature. Davis’s short stories about newspaper writing, as well as those of his contemporary, Jessie Lynch Williams, were both popular and highly inspirational to a coming generation of young writers. Moreover, the encouragement to apprentice in journalism came at aspiring litterateurs from several quarters.

The conceptions of writing underpinning the myth of literary apprenticeship are both deeply rooted and enduring. Despite the ascendance of an aesthetic of work that regarded writing as an act of effort more than imagination, notions of literary writing as the unique creation of an inspired mind persisted, ultimately elevating the literary work over other forms of writing, including journalism. Within this context, the representation of journalism as a literary apprenticeship instantiated two conflicting assumptions about writing: that it was
both a learnable craft and in inspired art, both opening the door between literary and journalism and forever closing off the possibility that the journalist could be anything but an apprentice, or worse, a failure at a higher calling.
Chapter Three: The Representation of Journalism

as a Form of Entrepreneurship

I believe that the public journal is a public trust; that all connected with it are, to the full measure of their responsibility, trustees for the public; that acceptance of a lesser service than the public service is betrayal of this trust.

--Walter Williams (1906)

This chapter describes the representation of journalism as a form of entrepreneurship. Writing is conceptualized in this representation as a learnable craft, a skill that can be improved with practice. The journalist takes as his model the business professional. This discourse of entrepreneurial professionalism emerged from the opportunities created by the late nineteenth-century mass market for print and was described using metaphors drawn directly from business and commerce. This entrepreneurial model was articulated frequently in trade journals for writers, particularly The Writer, which describes writers as both manufacturers and salesmen, creating and distributing a product for public consumption. In this representation the written text is described as a product the writer brings to market under his brand name. Journalists were part of a larger class of writer seeking to profit from their unique skills. And while the entrepreneurial model most obviously informed the conceptualization of freelance or for-hire journalists, such correspondents, the same entrepreneurial ideal informed some salaried workers’ efforts to secure better working conditions. The sense of themselves as uniquely skilled professionals shaped how journalists conceptualized the work of writing as well as their sense of themselves as free agents in relation to the news organization. Journalists drew on an entrepreneurial ideal to validate their work and to protect their interests as workers in a competitive marketplace. In one sense, the entrepreneurial model of professionalism served as a counterbalance to the social
service ideal, which had historically been the dominant model of professionalism. Where the social service ideal emphasized self-sacrifice in service to the public good, the entrepreneurial ideal emphasized a profit-minded individualism.

While an ideal of public service was endemic to journalism well before the period under consideration, press critics of the late nineteenth century brought the ideal to the fore by criticizing the commercialized press for failing to live up to its public service mandate. Commercialization and sensationalism were corrupting the daily newspaper, which in turn was corrupting the public, critics claimed (Dicken-Garcia 170-173). The answer, according to some prominent editors was better education for journalists. They reasoned that higher education would inculcate journalists with a sense of professional ethics that would enable them to resist the pressures of the corporate newsroom. These arguments essentially thrust the journalist into the breech between the newspaper’s institutional ideals and its profit driven reality. For journalists, this public service mandate was ultimately disempowering, serving as a cover for increased corporate control of their occupational lives as well as providing justification for low pay and poor working conditions. Many histories of American journalism as well as contemporary accounts of journalism’s social function assume that journalism is a form of public service. By emphasizing the journalist’s agency and autonomy as an independent businessperson, the entrepreneurial model offered the journalist an alternative, more empowering way of conceptualizing his occupational role. This sense of empowerment was most pronounced in journalists’ arguments in favor of bylines. By thus encouraging the journalist to stake a claim based on his individual rights, the representation of journalism as a form of entrepreneurship encouraged resistance to the negative effects of the prevailing model of journalism as a form of public service.
The business of being a public institution

The longstanding notion that the institution of journalism serves a democratic function by checking government power and by educating the populace is enshrined in the first Amendment of the Constitution. America’s much vaunted “freedom of the press” is based on the belief that the press as an institution makes self-government possible by gathering and disseminating the information about government and politics that the voting populace needs to be informed. Advocates for higher education for journalism invoked this ideal when arguing that journalism required better prepared workers. For example, in an 1867 speech Whitelaw Reid, owner of the New York Tribune, compared the daily newspaper to the common schools, as both were essential elements of a democratic society (Schools 18). An 1884 commentator elaborated on this notion of the newspaper as a common school, describing it as a “great power for distributing intelligence of all kinds,” going on to describe it as a “vast popular educator, in science, the useful arts, taste for literature, music, painting, sculpture in all that belong to human existence in this world” (qtd. in Dicken-Garcia 159). On the one hand, the comparison of the newspaper with the common school implies a pragmatic function: providing basic education in a variety of subject areas. On the other hand, the comparison takes on greater import when the educational function is attached to the notion that an informed populous is a necessary adjunct to an effective democracy, typically expressed in terms of the press’s Fourth Estate function as a watchdog of government.

However, while arguably a public institution—to the extent that it fulfills its educational and

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11 The relevant portion of the Amendment states that “Congress shall make no law… abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press.” However, a Federalist-controlled congress did just that in 1798, by passing the Alien and Sedition Act, which attempted to silence Anti-Federalist critics by making it a punishable offense to print anything defaming the government. The act made truthfulness a defense, but many Anti-Federalist found the burden of proof high in Federalist controlled courts. One newspaper editor protested the Alien and Sedition Act by printing its text underneath the words of the First Amendment (Stephens 199-200).
fourth estate mandates—a newspaper is also a *private* business in the sense that its owners are driven by the desire to make a profit rather than by the desire to serve the public. This profit imperative became even more pressing in the late nineteenth century, when urban daily newspapers became large corporate institutions beholden as much to stockholders as to the public. After the Civil War, the start-up costs of a daily in New York City could be as high as $1 million (Baldasty 5). Major newspapers were recognized as corporate enterprises, large, multi-faceted organizations comparable in scale to those in major industries like steel, textiles, and railroads (Hart 15). When Whitelaw Reid arrived at the New York *Tribune* as an editorial assistant in 1865, the paper was already a behemoth “million-dollar-a-year business” that printed daily, weekly, and semi-weekly editions for more than three hundred thousand subscribers (Duncan 37). The paper took in nearly a hundred thousand dollars per month in advertising, but “paid out that much to paper makers, type founder, printers, press services, reporters, special writers, [and] to a host of other contributing persons and companies, and to stockholders” (Duncan 37). The paper’s corporate scale is illustrated not only by the number and variety of compartmentalized workers, but also by its relations with “contributing companies” and stockholders—the paper was clearly enmeshed in a complex financial network of people and institutions. Whereas the party press of the antebellum period had served a political function, advocating the agenda of its party patron, the commercial press relied on advertising dollars to support large-scale production and newsgathering efforts. Between 1850 and 1880, advertising sales at all American dailies more than doubled, rising from approximately $11 million to $27.5 million, and tripling to $95 million by 1900 (Dicken-Garcia 215).¹² The scale and complexity of their business organization meant not

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¹² These figures have not been adjusted for inflation.
only that newspapers were under huge pressures to make a profit, but also that power was widely dispersed among a network of editors and sub-editors, lessening the degree of control and one editor could exercise. Joseph Pulitzer, who withdrew from his editorship of the *New York World* in 1890, was one of the last great editor publishers to have a strong voice in the editorial page. With his departure, the last vestige of the strong editorial voice of the antebellum editor/publisher was gone. Rather, the corporatized late nineteenth-century newspaper spoke with a corporate voice.

The public feared the rhetorical power of this voice. The newspaper was perceived as an influential force in society and critics argued that, lacking a responsible individual consciousness behind the paper’s words, that rhetorical power would be emptied out of its moral component. Describing the newspaper as “A soulless conscienceless corporation,” critic Conde Pallen warned that:

> The impersonality of the newspaper is a power to daunt the bravest; for behind that cowardly bulwark can lurk slander, malice, and moral murder, showering their poisoned shafts upon the defenseless victim, who has no possible way of reaching his sheltered foe save by the employment of those means which a love of peace, honor, and decency cannot stoop to use. Like the crushing fury of the avalanche, or the cruel, thirsty waters of a slowly-rising inundation engulfing all things, does this fatal, unfeeling tide of impersonality overwhelm the individual. (474)

In Pallen’s description, the corporate institution first provides a hiding place for individuals to attack others, raining down “poisoned shafts” from a protected place within the castle walls of the newspaper. However, his description ultimately slips into metaphors that
describe the newspaper as a force of nature against whose impersonal and all encompassing force the individual is powerless. Such fears were not allayed when those who ran daily newspapers were forthright with their preoccupation with the concerns shared by other major corporate heads: production efficiency and the marketability of the commodity it produced. Prominent editors like Charles Dana and Whitelaw Reid detailed the corporate workings of their newspapers in speeches and essays, emphasizing the size and complexity of the newspapers’ business structures (Reid “Practical Issues,” Dana Art, 1-24). This overt business orientation troubled readers who feared that the profit motive would translate to advertisers exercising undue influence over editorial policy (Dicken-Garcia 184). The sensationalism and exhibitionism of the late nineteenth-century yellow press fanned fears that the daily newspaper had lost its moral compass and was failing to serve the public good. These fears were not allayed when newspaper publishers insisted that it published sensationalistic news because that is what the public demanded (Dicken-Garcia 208-210).

For example, Dana declared that newspapers should print “everything that occurs, everything which is of human interest, and which is of sufficient importance to arrest and absorb the attention of the public or of any considerable part of it” and suggested that if the public demanded better news, papers would print it (12).

The public service ideal of journalism

Rather than try to deny that the newspaper as an institution was driven by a profit motive, advocates for journalism education attempted to reconcile the news company’s profit motive with the news institution’s public service mandate, shifting the responsibility for upholding the institution’s service values onto the individual newsworker. They argued that better educated journalists would be better teachers and moral voices to the public.
Describing the daily newspaper as the “Palladium” of civic and social rights, Whitelaw Reid argued that education was essential for the professional’s ethical practice of journalism: “with the larger influence [the journalist] bears, should come ampler preparation,” he argued, outlining a detailed course of study appropriate to the aspiring journalist, including courses in government, law, and history (Schools 12). Thus, the individual journalist became the site where the newspaper’s conflicting desire for profit and public service credibility were played out. No less than the “welfare of the republic” was at stake, according to Joseph Pulitzer, who claimed for the journalism school he proposed at Columbia that “It will be the object of the college to make better journalists, who will make better newspapers, which will better serve the public” (679). Pulitzer’s plans for Columbia’s School of Journalism, released in 1904, reflected the same concerns as education programs proposed in the 1880s and 1890s in that it emphasized intellectual and ethical training over the mechanical skills of gathering and writing the news, a point I will elaborate shortly. This ethical and intellectual training was meant to equip the journalist to fulfill his public service function and to resist the pressures of commercialization and sensationalism.

One strategy education proponents including Pulitzer proposed was to completely distinguish the practice of journalism from business. Thus, Joseph Pulitzer explicitly mandated that Columbia’s school of journalism not teach business. He distinguished between “real” journalists and those “men who do a kind of newspaper work that requires neither culture nor conviction, but merely business training,” by which I assume Pulitzer is referring to those who managed the business affairs of the paper (Pulitzer “College 656). The real journalist “addresses the public every day as a writer or thinker” (Pulitzer “College” 657). The business man, “concentrates his brain on the commercial aspects of things, upon the
margin of profit, upon the reduction of expenses, upon buying white papers and selling it printed—and that is business” (Pulitzer “College” 657). In Pulitzer’s telling, the salaried journalist is a sort of public intellectual, thinking and writing in service to the public good. The businessman, on the other hand, is devoid of an intellectual life, his entire brain being concentrated on buying and selling. The distinction Pulitzer draws between “real journalists” and those merely concerned with business is that the journalist’s ethos was one of selfless service to the public. Pulitzer sought to safeguard this service ideal from the corrupting influence of the business office. The journalist in Pulitzer’s description is a teacher, defined by how his mind is applied to public concerns.

In contrast, the businessman commodifies his intellect. The “real” journalist is something, a thinker, inhabiting an important social role, while the businessman does something, concentrating his brain upon financial reward. The businessman’s pragmatic activity requires neither culture nor conviction. This description of the journalistic businessman inadvertently describes the entrepreneurial writer who concentrates his brain—and his writing—power on securing a profit rather than on embodying an ideal of service. For Pulitzer, “real” journalism is defined by an ideal of selfless service while the desire to profit from one’s work is mere “business.” For many of the thousands of freelance writers who contributed news matter to the daily newspaper, profit was among the primary motivators for writing for the daily newspaper. And as I will elaborate below, this entrepreneurial ethos influenced salaried newswriters as well, offering a countervailing force to the public service ethos espoused by Pulitzer and others.

Bent on protecting the salaried journalist from the money influence of business, Pulitzer proposed physically separating the journalist from the counting room as one means
of safeguarding the ethical practice of journalism from money influence, education proponents also suggested inculcating professional ethics in journalists. In 1872 Reid declared that that ambition of the ideal program of education he proposed for journalists in 1872 would be “to make Journalism a field for the ablest, to make its intelligence and its justice commensurate with its power, to make it a profession for gentlemen to pursue, moralists to rejoice in, and the Commonwealth to hold as a sure bulwark and high honor” (27). Reid proposed a curriculum packed with courses in history, law, and political economy in order to both give the aspiring journalist the knowledge he would need to report intelligently on political affairs, but also to inculcate the public servant with a deep awareness of his role as an information source in a democracy. The well trained journalist would thus be armed “with the thoroughness and accuracy needed for the instant and intelligent discussion which every new phase of politics demands” (Schools 17).

Like Reid, Pulitzer conceptualized the daily newspaper as a preacher and teacher to the public and therefore emphasized the importance of its educational function in arguing for better education for its workers. Nothing less than the welfare of the republic was at stake, he argued (679). Pulitzer proposed a curriculum very similar to the one Reid had earlier proposed. Moreover, he explicitly argued that the school’s first function would be to teach an idea of public service.

Public service training was often cast in militaristic terms, particularly the notion of an esprit de corps, a fraternal bond uniting the brotherhood of journalists in service to a shared sense of professional ethics. On the one hand, Pulitzer describes a process of inculcating the individual journalist with an abstract sense of duty to the public, which reformers hoped would arm journalists to resist the concrete pressures that awaited them in
the newsroom. They argued that higher education would cultivate an *esprit de corps* among journalists based on an ideal of ethical service to the public, essentially creating a fraternity of like-minded professionals who would then remake the newsroom. Pulitzer argued that what was needed to ensure that the newspaper fulfilled its public service mission was “a class feeling among journalists—one based not upon money, but upon morals, education and character” (649). Comparing the school to the training a military cadet would receive, Pulitzer argued that moral courage was a trait that could be cultivated and strengthened through training, just as soldiers were trained in order to cultivate courage under fire: “If the mind can be taught to expose the body fearlessly to wounds and death cannot the soul be taught to cling to its convictions against temptation, prejudice, obloquy and persecution?” he asked (646). In his comparison of the journalist under pressure with the cadet under fire, Pulitzer describes an education that would reach the aspiring journalist’s *soul*. More than preparing an immersion in professional ethics, Pulitzer is aiming to remake journalism literally from the inside out by molding the individual journalist’s morals to fit the institution’s public service goals.

Indeed, Reid had predicted that the first generation of college educated young men would remake the profession within ten years (13). The temptations that Pulitzer refers to are not external enemies, but rather challenges the journalist might face within his own newsroom. Pulitzer aimed to make the individual journalist fearless in the face of the temptation to sensationalize or to pander to the will of advertisers, pressures that would surround him within his own newsroom.

The problem with the public service ideal is that it could become a cover for beliefs that were ultimately disempowering to the journalist. The preacher/teacher model describes
the journalist as an intellectually independent professional working for the public good. But the reality is that this conception of the journalist’s role also justified the reporter’s ill treatment and subordination within the news organization (Nerone 386). Pulitzer again emphasized this with a military comparison, using the metaphor of the West Point cadet, stating that the cadet’s low pay was ameliorated by the sense of “honor and pride in his profession” (650). Moreover, the “class feeling” engendered by the notion of an *esprit de corps* could also breed a damaging exclusivity. Programs of journalism were introduced in many American colleges as early as the 1880s, but did not become a requirement for entering the profession until well into the twentieth century. Even without being reinforced through higher education programs, an *esprit de corps* did exist among journalists. However, rather than being based on shared moral principles, as Reid and Pulitzer had anticipated, this sense of fraternity grew from a shared class feeling. As Solomon notes, journalists subscribed to a white collar identity, perhaps rooted in the distinction between the intellectual labor of writing and the dirty work of printing (Solomon 129). This class identity prevented editorial news workers from finding common cause with technical workers like printers. Even though trade unions, including the powerful International Typesetters Union, opened their ranks to reporters in the 1890s steeped in a notion of newswork as public service, journalists were reluctant to join other workers in striking for improved working conditions (Solomon “Site of”128). The education programs proposed by Reid, Pulitzer, and others aimed to make journalists even more conscious of their public service role, likely increasing their reluctance to find common cause with laborers.

For reporters, the ideal of public service was predicated on an ideal of sacrifice, with sacrifice to the story and the newspaper seen as the logical extension of an overarching
concern with serving the public (Salcetti 55). Indeed, education proponents on the one hand spoke of developing an *esprit de corps*, or allegiance to the ethical norms of a group of professional peers, as a means of empowering the individual journalist to resist corrupting influences in the profit-driven newsroom.

At the same time, martial metaphors in other texts emphasize the lowly reporter’s corporal qualities, particularly his devotion to the news organization. Shuman compares the journalist to an anonymous foot soldier who must “carry out his chief’s orders or die in the attempt” (47). The “Chief” Shuman refers to here is the City Editor, the reporter’s direct supervisor. Rather than an *esprit de corps*, the band of brothers fighting for a common cause that Reid described, corporal metaphors like Shuman’s foot soldier cultivate the notion of an individual loyal to a commanding officer, who is in turn an extension of the corporate news organization. This subsuming of the journalist as an individual into the greater body of the journalistic army was also reflected in the anonymity of newswork before bylines became the norm. In 1894, Shuman’s textbook warns the aspiring journalist not to hope for public distinction in his chosen career because the only rewards the individual journalist should expect will come in the form of validation from other journalists:

Anonymity is one of the foundation stones of American journalism… the great rank and file of the newspaper fraternity, brilliant as well as mediocre, are known all their lives to their readers as, ‘the Times reporter,’ ‘the Herald editor,’ etc., and even if they rise to the managing editorship of their papers they are scarcely known by name outside their own office doors. So a sensible newspaper man, in giving advice to beginners, says: ‘Banish from your heads at once any nonsense about becoming celebrated. Be content with distinction
in your own office. Be renowned within its walls for industry, accuracy, speed and good copy. If you must have a wider celebrity than that you would better seek it in some other field. (84-85)

Here, the journalist’s identity is subsumed within the larger identity of the news organization. The individual is reduced to his position title within the news organization. As a member of a “fraternity,” the reporter is instructed to find validation solely in the esteem of his peers, the news organization that defines his identity also assesses his performance. In Reid and Pulitzer’s conception, a journalistic fraternity would strengthen the journalist’s resolve to resist moral corruption in the newsroom by rooting him in the professional ethics of a large class of workers. In Shuman’s account, the fraternity serves as a replacement for public recognition, justifying the subsuming of the journalist into the larger body of the newspaper. The entrepreneurial model of journalism offered an alternative, rejecting membership in any fraternity and instead conceptualizing the journalist as an independent agent. While these values were most explicitly attached to freelance newswork, they also affected some salaried newsworkers. In lieu of the self-sacrificing soldier, the entrepreneurial model of journalism drew on metaphors of business and commerce, encouraging journalists to embrace the profit motive at the individual level. Moreover, these metaphors informed the journalist’s conception of his right to claim and profit from his written work by recasting this work as a manufactured product to which the writer was entitled to affix his brand name. In fact, this representation encouraged journalists to rebel against anonymity, eschewing the adulation of peers in favor of the financial remuneration public recognition could earn, a point I will return to shortly.

Business as a metaphor for professional writing
In the inaugural issue of *The Writer*, a trade journal for those attempting to make a living from freelance literary and journalistic writing, journalist C.M. Hammond, describes freelance writing as the production of a saleable commodity:

The production, sale, and consumption of newspaper and magazine articles are governed by laws similar to those which govern the production, sale, and consumption of most other things. You must first be sure you are producing a thing for which there is a demand. You must sell it to one who realizes that demand and the consumer must feel that he has been benefitted by the purchase. (“How to Get” 7)

The conception of the print marketplace and of the writer’s relation to it is vastly different from the public service ideal. Rather than describing the writer as a selfless public servant, Hammond instead places him in the role of a manufacturer and salesman, creating a commodity for sale in the competitive marketplace. The marketplace here is rule-governed, subject to laws of supply and demand which the writer/producer must master in order to successfully market his wares. It is unclear whether the consumer in this model is the publisher who buys the material for publication or the reader who buys the publication in which the writing appears. Regardless, Hammond’s emphasis on demand for the product as well as on customer satisfaction with the purchased good suggest an awareness that goods required marketing to shape consumer desires.

In Hammond’s accounting, the written article is a product; the more time one devotes to writing, the more products one will have to sell, thereby increasing the likelihood of publication and profit. It was just one of the tangible, earthy metaphors contributors to *The Writer* used to describe the written “product.” For example, contributor Maude Meredith
urges writers to think of their work as “marketable literary goods” (53). As such, she
admonishes writers to first identify the publication that has use for the type of material they
are best able to produce and then to submit what they “offer for sale” “in salable form,” i.e.
neatly written and error free (55). This advice was directed broadly at The Writer’s
readership, which included both journalistic and literary writers. Programs of study based on
public service model were designed to equip journalists with a keen understanding of their
moral responsibility to a democratic populace and to arm them with the necessary knowledge
to provide what Reid describes as “instant and intelligent discussion which every new phase
of politics demands” (17). The entrepreneurial model lacks this political imperative,
emptying writing of the sense of urgency, the kairotic occasion that prompts a rhetorical act.
Rather, writing in the entrepreneurial model is occasioned only by promise of a paycheck.
This is Pulitzer’s nightmare scenario: the journalist’s calling emptied of “culture and
conviction” and focused entirely on business.

Hammond’s account of professional writing demystifies the writing process, equating
it with a skill or trade that can be mastered and turned to profit. Unencumbered by the whims
of the muse, not beholden to an ideal of literary fame and, finally, uncoupled from the burden
of serving the public, the professional writer in Hammond’s representation is more akin to a
farmer who reaps an economic reward proportional to his investment of time and labor.
“Literature,” writes Hammond, “is a productive field that with a certain amount of labor will,
barring accidents, produce a certain amount of gain. With a like amount of ability and
training required to bring success in any profession or trade you can make as sure a success,
and as substantial success in literature” (“How to make,” 143). Whereas the public service
ideal elevated the practice of journalism to a noble calling, Hammond’s workaday metaphor
brings the journalist back down to earth. Hammond also compares the writer to a cabinetmaker, which, like his farming metaphor suggests that writing is not only a learnable skill, but one lacking an overtly ethical component. The cabinetmaker’s responsibility is to build a solid piece of furniture, not to uphold democracy by educating the populous. While Hammond’s metaphoric models for journalism do promote steady work habits, an obvious virtue, they are a far cry from the public service model of journalistic writing which, in some descriptions, places it on a plane above even the statesmen who read it.

The entrepreneurial model conflicted not only with the public service ideal, but also with the literary apprenticeship model described in the previous chapter. The writer who represented journalism as a literary apprenticeship assumed that writing—at least in its expressive, literary forms—was sacred, a higher calling one prepared for by honing one’s craft and nurturing one’s unique inner vision. According to The Writer, the activity of writing is work and written output is a commodity.

This conflict was articulated explicitly in an exchange of letters between Hammond and some Writer readers. One letter writer, J.M.D., idealizes the “famous fields of literary life” he wishes to enter, imagining the writing life as a permanent emancipation from “office drudgery” and “the monotonous routine of a miserable existence and still more miserable pittance” (qtd. in Hammond “Writing” 33). Thus liberated, he imagines not only changing his material conditions, but changing himself: “I would work as I never worked before, with a strong, resolute determination, looking always straight before me, and never let a despairing thought enter my breast” (33). Here, J.M.D. internalizes the motive for writing, envisioning it as a transformative experience rather than the production of a marketable commodity. He conceptualizes writing as an emancipation from his office routine as a
bookkeeper. And the value of writing for J.M.D. is measured in a transformation of the writing self. If he does see writing as “work,” it is a special kind of self-propagating, emotionally nurturing work that, unlike labor, which tires the body, instead fuels the spirit. And yet, even a cursory reading of the magazine’s “Helpful Hints and Suggestions” would disabuse even the most careless reader of the notion that the writing life was anything but “office drudgery,” Underscoring the notion that the writer was engaged in a rational production process. These columns offer a glimpse of the minutiae of the professional writer’s daily work life. Their attention to the trivial details of office life suggests that writing is indeed a form of production requiring steady habits and a well-appointed office. “The man who sits at his desk to write without paper, pen, pencil, ink, mucilage, and shears within easy reach is almost as foolish as the man who might undertake to build a house with a jack-knifes for his only tool” admonishes editor Henry Hills. “Writing is a trade, and writers who do not avail themselves of the best tools obtainable for their purpose, must always work at a disadvantage” (Hills “Tools for Writers” 107). A typical example of the tips and tools described by readers is an item from reader “H.W.C.” H.W.C. contests an earlier suggestion made by a reader that lemons made excellent pen cleaners. On the contrary, H.W.C. insists, an uncut raw potato does the same job with less trouble. Furthermore, he concludes, “The potato lasts until it shrivels” (147). Other writers contributed tips for customizing typewriters to make them more efficient or for setting up desks to make them more comfortable places to work for hours at a time. This was the workaday world of the professional writer. Month after month, these tips, as well as the descriptions of professional writers’ office spaces featured in nearly every issue, reinforced the notion that writing was work requiring proper equipment, steady hours, and regular habits, a description which for some might sound
exactly like the kind of “office drudgery” J.M.D. hoped to escape when abandoning
bookkeeping to become a writer.

Moreover, J.M.D. errs gravely in mixing the literary aspirant’s preoccupation with
self-expression with the entrepreneurial writer’s preoccupation with profit. The title of
Hammond’s response, “Writing as Vocation or Avocation” emphasizes the degree to which
these two aims were contradictory (emphasis mine). In the article, Hammond first takes
J.M.D to task for trying to measure success in terms of both artistic accomplishment and
profit. While some might measure success in the size of paychecks, for others, success might
be measured in “that satisfaction which comes when a writer has expressed, in a manner to
satisfy himself, a thought that has been born within his brain.” In that case, writes Hammond,
J.M.D.’s poetic efforts had already been amply rewarded when he saw a few poems
published in the daily newspaper (33). Thus the personal and the profitable motives are
rendered distinct from each other. Indeed, J.M.D. describes the experience of seeing his few
lines of poetry in print in nearly ecstatic terms, suggesting that his investment in his writing
was deeply personal: “each word seemed to stand out in letters of fire before my eyes as I
read and re-read them a thousand times over, until they fairly danced in my whirling and
excited brain” (qtd. in Hammond “Writing” 34). Compare this way of reading one’s own
published work to the one The Writer editor William H. Hills advises in a how-to article for
aspiring newspaper correspondents. In order to learn what style of writing a particular editor
favors, Hills advises writers to carefully study the newspaper in which they wish to publish.
Then, if their work is accepted, Hills advises writers to observe its appearance in print
carefully, noting any editorial changes to the text as well as any typographical tricks the
ditor might have employed—such as decorative typefaces or increased leading between
lines of type—to add special emphasis to select sections of the published piece. “In short
time, if you do this, you will know pretty well what sort of stuff your editor likes to get,”
Hills writes (“Advice III” 49). Hills is describing a process of instruction in which the writer
learns the conventions of a given publication by trying his hand at it and then treating his
editor’s corrections as a form of feedback to inform future attempts. Where J.M.D. had
imagined his own words dancing in his feverish brain, Hills describes a much more detached
stance to the published material. Hill’s ideal reader would be more likely to see dollar signs
dancing in his brain as he coolly analyzed the content and style of his successfully published
work in search of insight into the editor’s mind. In Hill’s description, the purpose of studying
one’s published work is to learn the reader’s (or publisher’s) expectations and thereby
improve one’s chances of publishing and profiting from one’s work.

However, other descriptions of this process emphasize the skill building aspect of this
feedback loop while still emphasizing the profit motive. In such descriptions writing for
multiple outlets gives the writer the opportunity to learn multiple styles and to receive
indirect feedback from a variety of readers. This practice in turn builds the writer’s
repertoire, creating further opportunities to profit. For example, H.R. Chamberlain describes
the opportunity to write for multiple editors as one of the benefits of telegraph corresponding.
The telegraph correspondent was typically a reporter who supplemented his income by
wiring dispatches to multiple papers. The opportunity to generate a variety of content
“develops’ all a man’s newspaper faculties… symmetrically” writes Chamberlain, and his
description emphasizes that he is speaking not only of the recognition of saleable news, but
also the correspondent’s writing ability: “His news instinct is in constant action; his literary
powers are trained and tested daily” (192). Moreover, it is his exposure to the wants of
multiple editors that provides the most benefit: “in serving more than one paper he gets a broader training” (192). By emphasizing the feedback loop of submissions, sales, feedback, further submissions, the entrepreneurial model describes writing as a valuable skill that could be turned to greater profit with practice.

**The influence of entrepreneurship on salaried journalists**

The public service model of professionalism made the journalist a public servant, dependent on the newspaper to provide an outlet for the journalist’s professional skill. Since the journalist was serving the public through the mouthpiece of the newspaper, allegiance to the news organization was encouraged. In contrast, the representation of journalism as an entrepreneurial profession benefited journalists by giving them occupational mobility and a sense of group cohesion, the entrepreneurial model made the journalist a free agent. Since writing was a portable skill, and particularly since journalists often wrote for more than one publication or in more than one mode, the journalist was encouraged to see himself as a skilled professional driven by self-interest to find the most lucrative post. In his study of the harsh working conditions reporters of the 1890s endured, Smythe points to the frequent movement of journalists between papers as evidence of occupational instability (218). On the one hand, frequent movement offers proof that journalists were hired and fired at the will of sometimes capricious editors (Solomon 120).

On the other hand it could also suggest that changing employers was only one way the journalist could secure better working conditions. In fact, *The Journalist* frequently recorded the movements of journalists between newspapers as qualified individuals were recruited by better paying papers. In notices listed in columns such as “Well Known Men,” the trade publication celebrated journalists whose stellar work at one paper earned them a
higher paid or better respected position at another. This is another variation on the *esprit de corps* Reid hoped to encourage among journalists. However, rather than cultivating a selfless loyalty to a single employer, this fraternity of journalists ensures that good work is recognized and financially rewarded. While the public might not know who wrote the stories in their daily newspaper, the journalistic fraternity could recognize the work of its members. As Shuman, the sensible reporter will “Banish from your heads at once any nonsense about becoming celebrated. Be content with distinction in your own office” (84). Jesse Lynch Williams fictionalized this phenomenon in his story “The Stolen Story,” in which Billy Woods the (New York) *Day* ’s star reporter earns a city-wide reputation for the quality of his reporting and is actively recruited by other newspapers throughout the city. Eventually, he is hired away by the *Earth* for a higher salary and more freedom. Joseph Pulitzer would have been all too familiar with this practice, having seen it from the other side. In January 1896 Pulitzer lost his entire Sunday staff in a two-day wage war initiated by William Randolph Hearst. Hearst absconded with the entire staff, including R.F. Outcault, the creator of the famous “Yellow Kid” cartoon, leaving Pulitzer with only a secretary (Mindich *Just* 116). Perhaps it is no surprise that Pulitzer expressed hope that professional education would discourage journalists from valuing money above all else. Thus, the individual journalist’s mobility can be read as a sign of the individual’s empowerment through his sense of himself as a free agent. In this reading, the journalist possesses valuable skills for which he knows there is a market. In fact, this notion is further highlighted in some journalists’ efforts to secure bylines for their work.

Journalists who sought the recognition conferred by bylines drew on discourses of entrepreneurship to justify their right to claim credit for the written products they produced.
They sought a relationship with the public that was not mediated through their employer. This public recognition could then be leveraged into higher pay or a better position at another paper. For example, in the exchange of letters between C.M. Hammond and the two aspiring professional writers quoted above, J.M.D. describes publishing his poems under the pseudonym of his three-year-old daughter. This was a grave error according to Hammond. If the poems had been good enough, other papers would have printed them, a common practice at the time for which J.M.D. would not have been directly compensated. However, his name and reputation would be spread among editors and readers. The lack of financial remuneration would have been made up for in brand image.

National advertising had made the brand name an important marketing tool for mass produced goods that required large volume sales. The Puritan pilgrim on the Quaker Oats box was one of the first nationally recognized trade images and in 1870, became one of the first such image to be granted trademark protection (Beniger 267). The widow of chocolate manufacturer Walter Baker reportedly earned a $10,000 per year royalty for use of her family name after selling the company to Henry L. Pierce in the 1880s (Beniger 269). These brand names and images provided a useful model for the entrepreneurial writer attempting to market his wares. The Writer encouraged professional writers to treat their pen names as brand names. In fact, The Writer’s editor, William H. Hills explicitly compares mass market goods and written products: “A writer’s signature is not really his whole stock in trade… but it may become quite valuable and important to him as the sign or ‘stand’ of a famous firm, or the trade-mark of a popular patented article,” he writes (“Writer’s Signature” 23). Hills is identifying the writer’s name as itself a sort of product, a stock in trade, having a value of its own, like Baker’s. Thus, Hills encouraged aspiring writers to select their pen name early and
to use it consistently. “The writer’s name, then comes to have an actual value of its own. Its value is high or low according to the work he does. His aim, of course, is to give to his name the highest possible value as soon as he possibly can” (23). C.M. Harger likewise compares the writer’s name to a trademark: “a literary name becomes a trade-mark representing such a grade or kind of goods” (149). Harger is specifically describing literary writers, who he urges to select a specific field of literature in which to develop their unique style. But C.M. Hammond instructed both literary and journalistic writers that once they had established their reputations, their name became “an advertisement of the most valuable sort” increasing both the demand and the remuneration for future work (Hammond “Writing” 34). In these examples, the writer’s name comes to represent a “brand” that the writer then uses to ease the sale of future work.

However, some salaried newsworkers saw name recognition as a way to connect them with their work in the minds of readers, cultivating a potentially lucrative form of brand loyalty. This name recognition would then create demand that would give writers bargaining power with editors. This argument suggests a radical departure from the way the journalist’s relationship to the written text and to the reading public conceptualized. Before the Civil War, journalists argued for the right to withhold their names from articles in order to protect their ability to speak freely about matters of political import (Dicken-Garcia 292 n. 34). Through the Civil War, nom de plumes were typical, if attributions were used at all, until 1863 when General George Hooker decreed that news about the Union’s war effort must be published under bylines so that journalist’s might be held accountable for the veracity of their reports as well as for any harm the release of information might cause (Schudson 68). By the
1880s, while special features, essays and fiction sometimes carried bylines, news reports rarely did.

Describing the byline as both a privilege and a right, an editorial in the trade journal *The Journalist* conceptualized the byline as both an endorsement of the article’s quality and an acknowledgement of its authorship. The latter was particularly important as a tool for earning the writer not only the recognition, but also the money he deserved. The byline should denote that the article’s style and diction are up to the paper’s standards, the editorialist argues. At the same time, “until writers, reporters, and others insist on signing such work as they wish to sign, and insist on its publication as they hand it in, they will never command their own prices” (“Star System” 8). Thus, the byline is explicitly connected to the writer’s bargaining ability. This point was made even more explicit in a later editorial that essentially blamed journalists for their inability to secure adequate compensation from editors:

> It seems not to be generally understood by journalists that the main reason why they have to plod along in one beaten track is that they have no individuality. While they allow themselves to remain the obscure parts of great newspaper machines, rather than appearing as the personal performers of certain lines of good work, they can expect nothing but poor pay and little recognition. (*Journalist*)

Here the name makes the work “personal,” attaching it to an “individuality” which results in better pay. Without it, the writer becomes less than human, either a cog in the machine or a plodding animal. Thus, by personalizing the writer’s work, the byline also promised to restore him to personhood, to elevate him above the level of a soulless beast of burden. This
description of the connection between the writer’s name and profitability differs from those discussed earlier in that more than just an attempt to increase profit by building brand recognition, the effort to secure name recognition here is more profoundly an attempt to resist the depersonalizing influence of the corporate machine by asserting the writer’s individuality. However, these examples of journalists’ attempts to claim ownership of their work and the examples of freelance writers’ efforts to imprint their written products with their unique brand names described above both describe writing as a valuable produce produced by a writer seeking to profit from his work.

**Critiques of entrepreneurial models of journalism**

The representation of journalism as a form of entrepreneurship was subject to some of the critiques public service models of education had sought to overcome, namely that it emptied writing of its ethical component. Pulitzer had distinguished the true journalist who “addresses the public every day as a writer or thinker” from the mere businessman who “concentrates his brain on the commercial aspects of things” (657). Rather than professionals turning their writing skill toward a support of the public good, journalists who were represented as entrepreneurs presented what some regarded as an ethically barren deployment of professional skill. In the same period when the worker’s entrepreneurial bent was being encouraged, several critiques of the entrepreneurial mindset appeared in *The Writer*. These critiques recast the independent businessperson as an indentured servant whose talents were enslaved to the employer.

However, these critiques are notable in that rather than singling journalists out for betraying professional ideals, they instead imply that by adopting professional models at all, journalists betray the overarching public service ideal of their occupation. In essence, rather
than disputing entrepreneurship as an appropriate model of professionalism for the reporter, they contest the propriety of conceptualizing journalism as a profession at all. For example, Forrest Morgan compares editorialists to lawyers “taking briefs for any client who pays them for it, not concerning themselves whether the latter ought to be hanged or not, and quite often believing he ought to be” (12). Likewise, while acknowledging that salaried journalists were paid wages comparable to those of other professional groups, Peters reminds readers that, like the lawyer, the salaried writer was essentially a brain for hire, “retained…to advocate special interests” (Peters 53). Peters compared this condition of employment to a form of slavery. The salaried writer was a “servant… substituting the master’s will for his own” (54). Though he may choose his master, “during the period of service, he must surrender his liberty no less than he would have surrendered it in the days of villein [sic] and serf” (54). This passage describes the opposite of the esprit de corps. Rather than being morally grounded in a professional fraternity that empowers the individual to resist corporate pressures, the journalist is described here as an individual, and more importantly an individual unmoored from any corrective association. He is thus powerless against his enslavement to the corporation.

At an institutional level, newspapers in the late nineteenth century were often accused of selling editorial content to advertisers. For example, they were known to reward advertiser loyalty by offering favorable mentions of products within the news columns, or to withdraw editorial content advertisers disapproved of (Dicken-Garcia 188). These corrupt editorial practices could be read as selling the newspaper’s written content in exchange for advertising dollars. In describing the journalist as a corporate slave, Peters describes a situation in which the worker is beholden to a corporation that is potentially enslaved to the profit motive itself.
The public service model today

Despite its role in limiting the autonomy of the individual journalist, the public service model continues to be the most widely recognized model of journalistic professionalism. In the early nineteen-nineties, a consortium of journalists who were concerned about the profession’s future began investigating the core values of the profession. They spent three years interviewing journalists and concerned citizens in an effort to identify a set of values to unite journalists and to help shape journalism in the twenty-first century. Their report, published in 1997 as the book *The Elements of Journalism*, identified journalism’s primary mission as being to “provide people with information they need to be free and self-governing” (Kovach and Rosenstiel 5). The rest of the book elaborated ten principles journalists should embrace—and that the public needed to recognize that journalists embraced—in order to fulfill that mission. Their list reads like the mandates elaborated in Williams’ 1906 “Journalist’s Creed”: it states that journalism’s first obligation is to the truth and its first loyalty is to the citizenry. More importantly, the *Elements* outlines a set of values and practices the individual journalist should adhere to. For example, journalism practitioners are called upon to be independent monitors of power who exercise their personal conscience. Here again is the notion that the individual journalist is an independent-minded professional, devoted through a sense of professional duty to the public good. While neither Williams’ 1906 “Creed” or its 1997 counterpart gained the institutional backing that would elevate it to a professional ethical standard like the physician’s Hippocratic Oath, their articulation of an ideal of public service demonstrates how durable and pervasive that model of journalism is.

Conclusion
In the late nineteenth century, the American press was seen as failing in its long-held responsibility as a teacher to the public and a watchdog of democracy. Commercialism and sensationalism were two related characteristics of late century journalism that threatened to corrupt the reading public. The burden of upholding the institution of journalism’s public mandate was shifted onto the shoulders of individual journalists. Some prominent editors argued for better training for journalists in order to combat these dangers. Higher education was seen as a way to inculcate journalists with a sense of professional responsibility that would help them resist the pressures of the commercialized newsroom. At the same time, the public service model potentially disempowered journalists by subsuming them within the news institution and also provided justification for their low pay. It may also have prevented journalists from joining workers in less service-oriented newspaper occupations to work collectively for higher pay and better working conditions. The representation of journalism as a form of entrepreneurship provided an alternate and potentially more empowering model. Drawing metaphors from business, this model of journalistic professionalism described the journalist as an independent businessperson marketing a valuable commodity. Writing is conceptualized in this representation as a learnable craft, a marketable skill that can be improved with practice. This was particularly true for freelance journalists who wrote for a variety of publications—this varied experience provided practice by exposing the writer to multiple communities of readers. By figuring the journalist as an autonomous agent and by emphasizing the marketability of the journalist’s writing skill, the representation of journalism as a form of entrepreneurship empowered even salaried journalists to advocate for their rights, rights compromised under the public service model. Arguments in favor of bylines are one example of this advocacy. In the next chapter I turn to a related model of
journalistic professionalism, the representation of journalism as a form of knowledge work. Like the entrepreneur, the knowledge worker conceptualizes himself as a skilled professional. However, whereas the entrepreneur markets his writing skills, the knowledge worker aims to profit from his information gathering abilities.
Chapter Four: The Representation of Journalism

as a Form of Knowledge Work

Introduction

In May 1887, the trade publication *The Journalist* eulogized Frank W. Ballard, “the most useful toiler in insurance journalism,” with a quarter page obituary, including a large engraving of the deceased. Ballard is described as a journalist, yet he did not work for a daily newspaper. Rather, his career was devoted to writing about the insurance industry for the trade, or “class” periodical *Insurance Age*. Moreover, Ballard’s obituary does not celebrate his facility with the pen, but rather his vast knowledge of the insurance business and his ability to ferret out and present its minutia to readers. “There are editors who may have written a better article than Ballard ever did,” *The Journalist* concedes,

but while they produced one, he wrought a hundred, and while they were drawing upon imagination and indulging in word portrayals, he delved into statistical reports, compiled corporate experiences, evolved ratios and by every device of presentation, proved the great achievements of the life and fire underwriters. (“Frank Ballard” 13)

This comparison of Ballard’s writing to other editors’ contrasts two different conceptions of what the work of journalism was really about, pitting journalism as a literary and even imaginative writing activity against a notion of journalism as research.

In the previous chapter I described journalists who represented their work as a form of entrepreneurship. But while those writers also emphasized their work ethic and prodigious output, writing skill remained the bedrock of their professional self-identification. In contrast, Ballard’s obituary de-emphasizes and even denigrates the writing aspects of his profession,
instead representing journalism as an information gathering profession. In Ballard’s obituary, daily journalism is dismissed as an “indulgence,” and its practices suggest passivity, with the writer merely “drawing upon” a pre-existing imaginative capacity. In contrast, journalism as practiced by Ballard is an active profession, described with a number of active transitive verbs describing Ballard’s engagement with information: Ballard “delved,” “compiled,” and “evolved” information. And his professional status relies not on his facility with words, but rather his facility with the information valued by his readers. By describing writing as secondary to his information gathering and processing capabilities, *The Journalist* represents Ballard as a knowledge worker, a journalist whose professional status is based on his specialized knowledge rather than on his ability to write.

This chapter describes the representation of the journalist as a knowledge worker, a representation that privileged special knowledge and newsgathering ability over the ability to tell a story in a compelling style. In fact, writing in this representation is devalued and, to some extent, even disappears. Many journalists still wrote, of course, but the emphasis on information gathering and disseminating presumed a notion of writing as a transparent vehicle for the transmission of information. Writing was emptied of any association with self-expression as it carried in the representation of journalism as a literary apprenticeship, and it was not valued as a marketable professional skill as it was in the representation of journalism as entrepreneurship. Rather, writing was simply a container for information, and a highly formulaic news story form, the inverted pyramid, emerged in this period, providing an efficient means of organizing and presenting information. Trade journal writers like Ballard were exaggerated examples of this form of professionalism. These writers leveraged professional or hobbyist knowledge of a specialized field into a potentially lucrative career
with one of the innumerable trade publications to emerge late in the century. However, this representation can be seen as well among reporters at daily newspapers, the group most typically brought to mind when describing “the journalist.” In fact, trade journal descriptions of the two occupations depict them as two branches of the same tree, sharing a common root in the notion that information is a saleable commodity. The journalist’s “nose for news,” the innate ability that allowed the best journalists to identify valuable information, was a potent metaphor that literally embodied the representation of journalism as a knowledge gathering profession.

_The Journalist_ frequently featured journalistic workers like Ballard, a type of journalist often overlooked in the historical literature. Unlike the entrepreneurial journalist described in the previous chapter, these workers made no claims to professionalism based on writing ability; rather, they capitalized on their unique knowledge and information gathering skills. Yet both representations are rooted in a larger conception of journalism as a business. Ballard’s obituary made sense to readers because _The Journalist_’s readers conceptualized journalism as a business engaged in the buying and selling of information. For example, from the date of its first issue, _The Journalist_ typically featured a front-page photograph of an important person in journalism, often accompanied by a written profile on the cover or inside pages. In the first months of publication, many of those profiled were associated with both daily news reporting and trade or quality journal publishing. _The Journalist_ not only celebrated their industry and business acumen, but emphasized their membership in the journalistic fraternity. For example, the March 26, 1887 edition of the periodical features a front-page profile of William Berri, publisher of _The Brooklyn Standard_, and “One of the fathers of trade journalism.” Berri got his start in journalism managing the _Carpet Trade._ He
then started *The Paint and Oil Trade*, and the article praises both publications for providing vital information to their constituents as well as for earning a handy profit from advertisers. While Berri’s association with the *Brooklyn Standard* clearly places him among the ranks of daily news journalists, *The Journalist* goes to great lengths to emphasize that his journalistic credentials include his association with specialty publications. In fact, the article emphasizes the association between daily and trade newspapers by describing them as two subfields within the larger class of journalism. Trade newspapers are described as “specialties” in contrast to the “general field” of daily news journalism (“A Man,” 2). Journalism as presented in front-page profiles like Berri’s is neither a public service nor a writing profession, but rather a business, more specifically, the business of brokering information.

Similarly, the May 21, 1887 edition of *The Journalist* features a front-page sketch of Louis Klopsch, owner of the Pictorial Associated Press, a subscription service that provided portraits and biographical sketches of famous people to the daily newspapers. While the biographical sketches provided by Klopsch’s Pictorial Associated Press are used by some of the leading newspapers of the day, the article’s primary concern seems to be with celebrating Klopsch’s business acumen. Titled “An Enterprising Publisher,” the article commends Klopsch for his “ambition, zealous efforts, and business triumphs,” all related to his role as a buyer and seller of information (1). The article details how he got his start publishing an advertising flyer, which *The Journalist* notes provided useful information for its readers. He parlayed the profits from this endeavor into a publication called the *Daily Hotel Reporter*, which printed a complete list of all arrivals at New York City hotels and provided trade information on the hotel industry. Like Berri, Klopsch’s genius is in identifying a market for
information and then providing that information. In both cases, writing quality is simply irrelevant.

In the following, I describe the representation of the profession of journalism as a form of knowledge work. This representation was made possible by several important changes in the way that news was gathered, as well as in how it was defined. Late in the nineteenth century, the activity of gathering the news became separated from the activity of writing it. And, rather than attracting readers with compelling human interest stories told in narrative style, many newspapers began drawing readers by offering more information-driven stories on an array of topics. The transformation of news into an information commodity transformed the writer’s role, subordinating writing ability to information gathering. The inverted pyramid complements this representation of journalism by offering an easily mastered and transparent vehicle for transmitting information. This representation reflected conceptions of writing as a transparent vehicle for the transfer of information and of the journalist’s occupational role as simply a knowledge gathering specialist. While some information oriented writers, like Ballard, earned professional status and the respect of his peers, journalists who conceptualized journalism as a more writerly profession chafed at the imposition of formulaic writing and the mass production writing processes imposed by the newspaper’s information driven business model. Their resistance underscores that this representation carried weight, creating real scenes of conflict about what the professional role of the journalist should be. Historical accounts of the period have been dominated by the voices of those journalists who resisted the representation of journalism as knowledge work. While those voices are important, my aim is to expand the view of this period to include
those who not only embraced the transformation of news into an information commodity, but also worked to profit from it.

**Journalism as a form of knowledge work**

While *The Journalist*’s readers would not have referred to themselves using the twentieth century term “knowledge workers,” I use it to describe journalists like Berri, Ballard, and Klopsch in order to emphasize the value placed on journalists’ information gathering abilities. “Knowledge work,” as described in studies in Economics and Sociology, describes a professional activity, typically performed by a trained specialist, that creates, alters or verifies knowledge, including reading, listening, computing, conveying, and analyzing information (Drucker). Writers are among the special kind of knowledge worker Marc Uri Porat defines as “knowledge distributors,” workers whose primary occupational duty is to produce knowledge and for whom information assumes “the form of a knowledge commodity” (103). Sociological and economic studies of knowledge work typically begin after the Industrial Revolution because they are concerned with the period when knowledge work is thought to have begun contributing the majority share of the nation’s gross domestic product. However, journalists as an occupational group were already performing an information gathering function within the news bureaucracy as early as the 1830s when reporters began collecting police court reports and legislative proceedings. These efforts escalated as the scope of the newspaper’s coverage expanded. Thus, before the information revolution transformed the American economy at large, the journalist already reflected aspects of sociologists’ and economists’ working definitions of “knowledge workers.”
Class periodicals and the commodification of knowledge

A trend toward specialization in all occupational fields in the late nineteenth led to the emergence of a large number of periodicals that catered to every occupational group imaginable. Indeed, as The Journalist reported in 1887: “Almost every profession and calling has its representative journal, which keeps its readers posted on all matters of general interest to his peculiar line of work or life” (“Chat” 7). A column in The Journalist lists a few of the groups served by specialty publications including: silk workers (three publications); keepers of honeybees (six); dentists (18); the deaf dumb and blind (19); prohibition proponents (128) and liquor dealers (eight) (“Some Statistics” 14). This list represents both the diversity and the expansive coverage of specialty publications. The Journalist and The Writer were among a growing number of “class” periodicals addressed to every occupational group imaginable including barbers, launderers, and undertakers (Mott History 104). This trend only accelerated as the century progressed.

The number and diversity of such periodicals offered myriad opportunities for both aspiring freelance and salaried writers to find work. Moreover, the connection between these specialty publications and the world of daily news journalism was closer than might be assumed. In fact, some argued that the aspiring news writer might parlay his specialized knowledge into a job writing for a specialty publication and then from there, move into daily news journalism. Writing in The Journalist, C. Palmer argued that class periodicals had developed in pace with daily news journalism and that, in fact, the two were both branches of the larger tree of journalism. In fact, Palmer argues:

trade journals are becoming so numerous and their patrons so exacting in their requirements that many of these now working in the general field must, in the
near future, be withdrawn therefrom, and put to work on specialties, for it seems to be a well settled fact that a course of work on daily newspapers is of the greatest advantage in newspaper work of a special kind. (qtd in “A Man” 2)

In Palmer’s description, the daily newworker is simply a generalist, acquiring necessary skills that, with further training, can be parlayed into specialization in trade journalism. Fno. Allen, writing in *The Writer*, argues the inverse, that specialty publications offer those with special knowledge the opportunity to parlay that knowledge into a position on a specialty publication. From there, they might gain the general skills necessary to move into daily news journalism (57). In both cases, it is assumed that daily news journalism requires a base level of skills and that the only distinction between trade and daily news journalism is the degree of special knowledge possessed by the journalist. The fact that Ballard was eulogized in *The Journalist*, a trade publication for journalists published by journalists, suggests that the journalistic community not only considered class periodical writers members of the journalistic fellowship, but regarded writing for the class periodicals as a worthwhile professional pursuit.

In fact, an 1887 editorial in *The Journalist* titled “Value of Trade Papers” praises class periodicals as examples of “ Knowledge, properly applied, and combined with a certain amount of talent” (10). Such papers are “a credit to the arduous and honest occupation of journalism (10). Not only are trade journals praised for identifying and presenting useful knowledge for readers, but are in fact described as a credit to the profession, suggesting that the skill and industry of a figure like Ballard was considered by some to be a defining quality of journalism itself. This is important to note because Ballard and his peers in the trade
periodicals are almost completely overlooked in the historical literature on journalism. Frank Luther Mott’s expansive history of American Journalism includes a short section about *The Journalist*, but neglects to mention the journalists who wrote for trade journals like it, nor does Emery and Emery’s *The Press In America*. Clearly, this group of journalists has been overlooking in the historical literature, leaving unexamined the values underpinning their sense of professionalism and their relative stature in the profession. In fact, their inclusion in publications like *The Journalist*, a trade publication for journalists, suggests that trade journalists were in fact journalists. In this representation, knowledge gathering ability is the journalist’s most important professional activity. In fact, judged on these terms, the trade publication writer is the professional *par excellence*.

The conception of writing underpinning this representation clashed dramatically with that of the representation of journalism as a form of literary apprenticeship described in Chapter Two. This contrast is illustrated by an exchange of letters in *The Writer*, in which a trade journalist urged two aspiring writers to consider trade journalism. In advising the aspiring writers, J.M.D. and W.B.F., to consider writing for specialty and class periodicals, trade journalist Fno. Allen not only highlights the extensive market offered by class periodicals, but also the conceptualization of specialized trade or disciplinary knowledge as a commodity in the print marketplace. J.M.D. was a bookkeeper by trade. Given his trade knowledge, Allen argues, J.M.D. might be “swept comfortably on to fortune” at *The Office* or another of the many organs devoted to office work (Allen 58). Disregarding the fact that W.B.F. had written of his desire to write *poetry*, Allen urges him to consider writing for one of the numerous trade magazines devoted to printing, such as the highly successful *Inland Printer*. From there, his printing knowledge might ultimately be parlayed into a comfortable
career writing for the daily newspapers. “Cannot [W.B.F.] see that he knows more about printing than he does of any other means of earning a livelihood?” Allen asks. Having secured a writing position based on his knowledge of printing, he could then “acquire a knowledge of newspaper methods, men, and manners, which would make his entrance into daily journalism much easier than it would be to a graduate from the composing room” (57-58). Allen’s incredulity that W.B.F. and J.M.D. have thus far failed to recognize the value of their special trade knowledge speaks to a profound contrast in conceptions of professional writing. W.B.F. and J.M.D. conceptualize writing as a form of self-expression.

Indeed, J.M.D. describes the experience of seeing his few lines of poetry in print in nearly ecstatic terms, suggesting that his investment in his writing was deeply personal: “each word seemed to stand out in letters of fire before my eyes as a I read and re-read them a thousand times over, until they fairly danced in my whirling and excited brain” (qtd. in Hammond “Writing” 34). J.M.D. is preoccupied with the words on the page. In contrast, Allen conceptualizes writing as secondary to the real work of brokering information and he discretely ignores J.M.D. description of his ecstatic mental pas de deux with his own words, instead urging him to capitalize on the special knowledge he possesses. Allen’s views most closely reflect the editorial ethos of the trade periodicals for writers like The Writer and The Journalist. In fact, W.B.F. and J.M.D.’s letters were excerpted in an article titled, “Journalism as Vocation and Avocation,” with the article’s author, C.M. Hammond, using them to illustrate the folly of assuming one might write for both fulfillment of an expressive urge and for profit.

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13 This passage also illustrates the separation of printing, writing, and editing duties that took place around the mid-nineteenth century when writing and printing were cordoned off from one another and printing ceased to be an entrée into journalism.
The representation of the journalist as a knowledge worker is a response to profound changes not only to how news was conceptualized, but also in the way the news writer’s occupational role was constructed. This representation is predicated on several assumptions: first, that “news” is information; that this information is a valuable commodity; that gathering and reporting news are separate activities; and that the news professional is defined as one who can effectively gather and appraise the news commodity. These assumptions reflect changes that occurred gradually throughout the nineteenth century, changes that, to some degree, reflect the separation of writing and printing outlined in Chapter One.

Re-conceptualizing news as information

Between 1800 and 1900, the focus and form of the typical news story changed dramatically. The orientation of news stories shifted from presenting ideas to describing events, and the techniques for conveying events changed from presenting news as a dramatized “story” to conveying news as straightforward, unadorned information (Dicken-Garcia 69-71). The emphasis on information as a defining quality of news is historically relatively recent. News content in the early press had, in general, been idea centered, reflecting the fledgling country’s preoccupation with debating fundamental ideas about government and democracy. By mid-century, the press was increasingly emphasizing events over ideas, providing descriptions of occurrences, typically local ones, as well as of important people in the community (Dicken-Garcia 82-86). By the end of the nineteenth century, the style of each newspaper’s overall presentation of news tended to skew toward either a dramatized “story” model or a dry, factual “information” model. Exemplified by the New York Times under the leadership of Adolph Ochs, the information model of news reporting presented straightforward accounts of facts or events relatively unembellished with
the dramatic conventions associated with fiction writing, such as dialogue, conflict, or elaboration of character (Campbell 6). This style emphasized the newspaper’s authority as an information purveyor by presenting information in a detached, impartial manner (Campbell 6, Schudson 90).

**Conceptualizing information as a commodity**

The shift toward an information-driven model of news went hand-in-hand with a re-conceptualization of news as a commodity. In earlier eras, newspapers had enjoyed the patronage of the political parties they supported. The political press of the early to mid-nineteenth century was a party organ, a clearinghouse for political news and party propaganda. However, by end of the century, newspapers relied almost entirely on advertising revenue. “News,” directed at consumers rather than voters, increasingly came to be regarded as a commodity, valued more for its ability to lure readers than to inform a politically responsible citizenry (Baldasty Ch. 2). This conceptualization of news obviously challenged the public service ideal of journalism described in the previous chapter and, in fact, many arguments in favor of higher education for journalism focused on the public service ideal as a corrective to this commodification.

The timeliness of news became an important measure of its quality as newspapers competed for readers based on the speed of their newsgathering operations. In the highly competitive world of urban daily newspapers, the biggest, most powerful papers, those that gained dominance, were those that distinguished themselves by securing the freshest, most up-to-the-minute news both at home and from abroad using the most modern newsgathering techniques (Solomon 116). In fact, papers in the period began emphasizing the source of their news, datelining a story “by telegraph” or occasionally even including the news source in the
headline in order to emphasize the speed of their newsgathering technology (Schudson 66).

As the newspaper’s foot soldiers, reporters and correspondents were charged with finding that information. Late nineteenth-century representations of journalism as a form of knowledge work celebrate journalists’ superior newsgathering ability, reflecting both the conception of news as an information commodity and the acceleration of the news cycle. As I will discuss in more detail below, the “nose for news,” the ability to identify valuable information, became a highly prized quality for journalists. However, this emphasis on the gathering of timely news contributed to the separation of information gathering and news writing. It also served to devalue the writing of news by making it a disposable commodity packaged for effective transmission.

The separation of news gathering and news writing

While the conceptualization of news as an information commodity provides the backdrop, a widely overlooked component in this story is the separation of news gathering from writing. In fact, the representation of journalism as a form of knowledge work is predicated on the notion that the processes of gathering news and of writing news stories are distinct, and even separable. Newswriting is described as a mechanical process in which information is collected into discrete packets that can be transmitted and reassembled into formulaic stories. Here is an instance in which examining the conceptions of writing that inform models of journalistic professionalism proves particularly helpful by highlighting the tensions and limitations that shaped the professional roles made available to journalists. Those roles were not predetermined by the technologies journalists took up, but rather those technologies influenced journalist’s composing processes and in turn the value assigned writing processes became bound up with conceptions of the technologies themselves.
The conception of newswriting as a mechanical process emerged gradually, with information gathering and writing dividing at the same time that developments in communication and printing technology were enabling dramatic changes in the news profession as a whole. I want to emphasize that I am not drawing a direct causal connection between technological developments and changing occupational norms. Rather, while these technological changes may have been a necessary precondition to the separation of information gathering and writing, they were one cluster among a confluence of changes that shaped the profession. My interest lies not in mapping those changes, but rather in describing conceptions of writing these changes enabled and in tracing the representations of the profession that emerged in response to these conceptions of writing. That said, these technological changes were unique in that they not only enabled the emergence of a representation of journalism as knowledge work, but also provided metaphors for conceptualizing the work of gathering and writing the news.

The journalist as a writing machine

Throughout the late nineteenth century, the newswriter’s work was increasingly mediated at all stages by machines like the telegraph, telephone, and typewriter. The increased intervention of machines automated the activities of writing to the point that reporters were themselves often described as writing (or transcription) machines. In fact, the notion of newsreporting as a journalistic occupation was deeply wedded to the technologies that made it possible on a large scale.

Yet, even before the introduction of the telegraph in the 1840s, the word “report” described accounts of official proceedings like court hearings, legislative meetings, rendered verbatim using a system of inscription known as shorthand or stenographic reporting
Shorthand systems attempted to automate the recording of speech by giving users an elaborate system of symbols for capturing sound. Promoters of stenographic systems emphasized the machine-like qualities of the stenographic reporter in order to promote the reliability and factuality of reports generated using their systems (Gitelman 41-43). Contemporary accounts of shorthand reporting supported this notion of reporting as machine-like recording.

The fusion of inscriptive and communication technologies that ensued when the shorthand reporter telegraphed information to the daily newspaper enhanced the notion that the reporter was simply another machine in the chain of machines that brought a speaker’s words to the pages of the newspaper. For example, an 1865 article in the American Phrenological Journal titled “Reporters and Reporting” describes the occupational activity of a reporter as copying speeches in shorthand and telegraphing them to a newspaper compositor. In this and other accounts, the reporter assumes a passive role, simply gathering speech that has been made a tangible object and relaying it on to the next machine in the process:

> The shorthand writer has every word of it, as it falls from the lips of the speaker, and as soon as the last word is uttered, he hurries to the telegraph office, commences to copy his notes, and the telegrapher to send them five hundred miles away, where the compositor commences to put them in type, and before daylight fifty thousand copies of the morning papers are on their way at railroad speed to half a million readers. (“Reporters and Reporting” 124)
The reporter’s role here is almost entirely mechanical, with the reporter exercising very little agency. He “has” every word of the story and his first action is to “copy” the notes he’s gathered, reducing him from a writer to a transcriber. Language takes on a tangible quality with the words themselves being treated like the commodity brought to market. The words fall from the lips of the speaker to be caught by the reporter who transcribes them into notes, which are translated into the dots and dashes of the telegraph, and then re-translated by the typesetter. The reporter, like the telegraph operator, is reduced merely to a technician who operates one of the machines that delivers words to readers. In another similar description, the reporter disappears entirely, submerged in the technological processes of news gathering and dissemination: “Court proceedings, meetings, descriptions of ceremonial events, and the like are “daggerreotyped on the spot by the aid of phonographic reporting; and by the aid of the newspapers, and the means of rapid communication, they are sent from country to country, and from one section of the nation to all others” (“Reporters and Reporting” 124, emphasis added). In this description, the reporter and other technicians disappear entirely so that machines are performing the work of collecting, transmitting, and disseminating information. The activities of gathering and writing news are fused into a single mechanical activity in a chain of processes culminating in the words printed on the page. The metaphor of the daggerreotype is particularly illustrative here in that it explicitly renders the gathering of information in mechanical terms.

As increasing varieties of information began passing over the wires, including not just speeches recorded verbatim, but disaster and human-interest stories as well, the noun “report” came to denote all telegraphed news (Blondheim 226, note 6). And yet, the verb “reporting” continued to denote a mechanized reproduction of verbatim speech and even a
“photographic” rendering of scenes and images. Barnhurst and Nerone use the term “walking description” to describe a body of writing techniques for presenting visual information “including dramaturgy, depictions of demeanor, and the presentation of visual data” common in nineteenth-century newspapers before printing technology enabled photographic depictions of news events (Barnhurst and Nerone 19). Even as the reporter’s role expanded from transcription of speech to description of scenes and events, the activities of news reporting were still conceptualized in mechanistic terms, rendering the reporter as a newsgathering and writing machine, when he figured at all in the mechanized process of newsgathering and distribution.

An article in the trade journal The Writer instructed aspiring news writers to adopt the “descriptive” style popular in newspapers. The successful writer, “watches men,” using “his observations as data” in order to “[construct] suggestive sentences that convey the picture in the rough to the reader.” “Like the dry plate of a camera,” the writer’s mind forms “an indelible picture of the frown, gesture, or what not. After that, memory and an accurate use of words are all that is required to reproduce the scene just as it occurred” (Burton 82-83, emphasis added). Here again, the reporter is not only a passive observer, but a photographic machine, his mind a “daguerreotype plate” that collects visual “data” in order to “construct” the scene for readers. Writing is described as an “accurate” use of words, suggesting that the writing process is a simple ne of selection, applying the correct label to the image observed. Walking description as a body of techniques faded from use after newspapers began printing news photos (Barnhurst and Nerone “Form” 19).

However, the conception of reporting as photographic capturing of real life endured as one manifestation of a general trend toward describing the activities of news gathering and
writing in mechanistic terms that render the reporter as a sort of writing machine. A fact that one author writing about journalism acknowledges. After describing the act of reporting as recording impressions, the article’s writer concedes “this work makes merely well-developed machines of us” (82).

The automation of writing—the notion that discrete packets of information could be collected and distributed by machine—contributed to the separation of news gathering and writing. Reporters on the street collected the audible and visual data, transcribing speech and mentally “daguerreotyping” images. Eventually, the process of gathering and reporting the news was physically divided between multiple workers. For example, telephones enabled reporters on the street, known as “leg men” to gather information that they phoned in to “rewrite men” stationed in the office, reducing the amount of time between an event occurring and its description in the paper (Wilson 24). Thus, the mechanization of newsgathering and news writing allowed their separation into distinct activities, often performed by different people. But more importantly, newswriting as a mechanized process could be regarded as a form of mass production, and therefore devalued. Photos of newsrooms suggest that by the 1890s, these offices had begun to resemble sweatshops, with rows of typewriters lined up on desks (Nerone and Barnhurst 438).

The impact on writing was that the skills associated with newsgathering became highly prized. Whereas writing and even fact gathering were seen as mechanical activity, the ability to identify a valuable piece of information could not be mechanized. Charles Dana, editor of the The (New York) Sun described accuracy, or “the faculty of seeing a thing as it is,” rather than writing ability as one of the primary benefits college education could offer the aspiring journalist (Dana 33). In fact, Dana describes news sense and attention to detail as
being more important than the ability to write grammatically. For example, he describes a “genius” reporter who “always got the fact so exactly, and he saw the picturesque, the interesting and important aspect of it so vividly, that it was worth another man’s while, who possessed the knowledge of grammar and spelling, to go over the report and write it out” (55). By defining the “genius” as the one recognizes the interesting and important facts and is able to capture them accurately rather than the one who “write[s] it up,” Dana is not only describing the separation of writing and newsgathering, but also seems to be placing newsgathering in a privileged position. Writing here is reduced to knowledge of mechanics: grammar and spelling and the activity of writing is reduced to an automatic process—given the exceptional facts provided by the information gatherer, the writer need merely “write out” the story. Dana is clearly describing a separation of news gathering from news writing.¹⁴

The subordination of writing to information gathering

The separation and privileging of newsgathering over writing shaped journalistic professionalism by locating the journalist’s claims to professional status in his unique ability to gather information. In representations of journalism as a form of knowledge work, news sense, or the “nose for news,” a fine-grained sense of what information would be most likely to appeal to readers, is described as the fundamental skill that ensures success.

One of the hallmarks of a profession as defined in sociological literature is that it is organized around a body of esoteric knowledge unavailable to the public. This knowledge is certified and transmitted through a sanctioned set of educational practices (Larson 210). Lacking a certifying test or professional board, this informal, ad-hoc induction into the

¹⁴ However, it should be noted that this example is a rare one in Dana’s discussions of the practice of journalism. In fact, The Sun under Dana’s leadership was described as “the newspaperman’s newspaper” because of the liveliness of the paper’s writing.
profession through the development of news sense was the closest thing the profession had to a process of certification. In nineteenth-century representations of journalism as a form of knowledge work, the ability to recognize a saleable news commodity is described as the unique skill that elevates the journalist’s labors to a form of specialized work. Mastering the ability to recognize what a news item is “worth” signifies the journalist’s absorption of professional knowledge and values. As Copeland states, “The moment a young man exhibits that journalistic *instinct* and prompt *judgment* which enables him to determine, without consultation with his superiors, exactly what an item is worth in point of space, he is on the highway to promotion and his success in the profession is assured” (8). News sense here is described as an *instinct* or a judgment, suggesting a trait the writer might naturally possess. However, the apprenticeship process implied in the reporter’s service to the City Editor suggests that this potential must be cultivated through training.

Descriptions of the new journalist acquiring or developing the nose for news depict the process whereby a new generation of journalists were drawn into the representation of journalism as a form of knowledge work. For example, in his 1894 textbook *Steps Into Journalism*, Edwin Shuman describes the process whereby the novice reporter develops news sense through direct instruction by his superior, the City Editor. The reporter is dispatched to investigate a potential story. He then reports the essential facts of the story to his superior, the City Editor. “in a flash [the City Editor] will weigh the value of the story, take into account the space still to be filled, and tell the reporter how many words to make of it—whether a stickful, two or three sticks, half a column or a column “(60). The commodification of news is obvious in this passage: news is reduced to an information commodity weighable like so much bullion and its value is measured in the amount of space it is allowed to take up in the
paper. Its monetary weight reflects its material presence on the page. This measure had real value for reporters as well. Reporters were rarely paid on salary, rather they were paid “on space,” usually figured as a dollar amount per column inch of published writing. So the difference between two or three sticks could mean a significant pay difference for the reporter. Thus, the ability to spot a story of interest to readers was a valuable skill, in terms of earnings, but also in terms of professional stature, not only determining the reporter’s real income, but also signifying his right to claim professional status. The initiate relies on the news sense of the expert, the City Editor and the initiate’s mastery of the knowledge the City Editor possesses signifies his induction into the profession.

In fact, the ability to recognize and appraise the relative value of information was so highly prized that many editors placed it above writing ability when listing the skills necessary to the journalist. Horace White, editor of the Chicago Tribune described the nose for news as the “first technical requirement” for journalism. But more importantly, White claimed that it was more important than proficiency in composition, which could be taught, while the nose for news must be acquired through experience (Camp Journalists 26). Talcott Williams, a seasoned journalist and the first director of Columbia’s Pulitzer School of Journalism, puts an even finer point on the issue by describing writing ability as a “mere tool” for a journalist. The journalist, writes Williams, “may write very ill and still be a superb newspaperman. Every journalist of experience has known men who could not compose and only wrote halting, monosyllabic, mechanical sentences, who were excellent reporters”(Williams The Newspaper Man 8). For Williams, the value of the news product inheres in its usefulness or novelty as information rather than in the quality of storytelling with which it is delivered. The value of the nose for news, particularly its emphasis over the
ability to write, suggests an emphasis on newsgathering, a sense that information gathering skill, rather than the ability to write, is the mark of the true journalist. This denigration of writing in favor of newsgathering accompanied a formalization of news writing. Indeed, the representation of journalism as a form of knowledge work values information over presentation, or substance over writing style, which is perfectly suited by the inverted pyramid, a highly formulaic news form that emerged after the Civil War.

**The inverted pyramid, a functional form for presenting information**

The inverted pyramid news story is a reduction to a collection of pertinent facts related to who the story is about, the central action of the story, and other details of when and were the story occurred, journalism’s famous “who, what, when, where, why and how.” The most compelling of these facts is summarized in the lead sentence, with the rest of the facts following in descending order of importance. The ability to recognize and prioritize the most relevant facts is another example of the skill required of the knowledge worker. Shuman describes a reporter, having gotten all the facts of a story, composing it in his head during the streetcar ride to the office:

During the ride you have your thinking cap on, and are arranging the facts in your head so that when you reach your desk you will have your opening sentences all ready to dash down, and the rest of the story arranged in your mind just as if you were going to give the whole as an extempore speech, point after point, all ready to flow from the nib of your pen as fast as you can scribble. That is the way it goes with the reporter who knows his business. But woe to the man who comes back with the whole thing in a jumble in his head, so that he cannot write it out in a reasonable time. (52)
The notion of arranging the story “point after point” suggests that there is a single, systematic way to organize information, which the unskilled reporter has no mastery of. Moreover, the composing process is reduced to a collection of verbs that de-emphasize invention or the individual initiative of the writer, who simply “scribble[s]”: The lead is “dash[ed] down” and the rest of the details “flow from the nib of the pen,” with “flow” implying an automatic process which renders the writers as a mere technician operating the pen.

The inverted pyramid first appeared in American newspapers immediately after the Civil War in press accounts of Abraham Lincoln’s assassination, and the form may have been influenced by the terse battlefield bulletins that had been written by military leaders during the war and often printed whole cloth in the daily newspapers (Mindich Just the Facts 68-69). David Mindich has demonstrated that the reports of Lincoln’s death printed immediately after the shooting in Ford’s theater were penned by the Secretary of State, Henry Stanton, and his assistant, Charles Dana, who would later go on to run the The (New York) Sun. Mindich’s account describes the composition of the stories as an effort to disseminate news of Lincoln’s death as quickly and efficiently as possible. In fact, Mindich conjectures that Stanton’s first dispatch to the papers after the shooting may have been the first inverted pyramid news story published in American papers (70). By the 1890s, the form was widely used in news stories.

As described above, newspapers in the period between the end of the Civil War and the turn of the nineteenth century tended to skew more toward a news or information model, with the information model eventually prevailing (Schudson 102). The inverted pyramid news story complimented the information model perfectly by ostensibly providing a
transparent vehicle for the transmission of facts.¹⁵ As a copyeditor informed the young Theodore Dreiser, “News is information. People want it quick, sharp, clear” (*Newspaper Days* 52). By the 1890s, the form was both widely recognized and widely taught. A sign on the wall of the *New York World* in the 1890s exhorted reporters: “Accuracy; Accuracy; Accuracy! Who? What? Where? When? How? The Facts—The Color—The Facts!” (qtd. in Schudson 78). In fact, by the 1890s, the form, though not mentioned by name, was beginning to show up in textbooks. For example, his 1894 textbook, *Steps Into Journalism*, Edwin Shuman tells aspiring journalists to “carry the news to your readers with the cream always on top. Be sure, too, to get these three things into your first paragraph: The actors, the place and the time at which the event occurred” (31). Journalism students today would likely recognize the seeds of today’s summary lead in Shuman’s advice. Today, critics of the inverted pyramid argue that it obscures more than it illuminates, flattening nuance and perpetuating the status quo by privileging the voices of power, the police and government officials that most often serve as journalists’ sources. And yet, in the late nineteenth century it was seen as a way to transmit pure, unclouded information.

At the same time, some journalists saw the inverted pyramid story form as overly restrictive and stultifying. For example, in later life, Julius Chambers described the writing style demanded of him by the New York *Tribune* in the 1870s as “The Grocer’s Bill”: “Facts; facts; nothing but the facts. So many peas at so much a peck; so much molasses at so much a quart…it was a rigid system, rigidly enforced” (qtd. in Schudson 77). Lincoln Steffens made a similar claim about his apprenticeship at the *Evening Post*: “Reporters were to report the

¹⁵ Michael Schudson describes journalists before the first World War as “naïve empiricists” in that “they believed that facts are not human statements about the world but aspects of the world itself” (6). Secure in their faith in democracy and progress, many mainstream journalists saw their work as providing an unclouded documentation of reality.
news as it happened, like machines, without prejudice, color, and without style; all alike. Humor or any sign of personality in our reports was caught, rebuked, and, in time, suppressed” (qtd. in Schudson 77). However, in their emphasis on the machine-like qualities of news writing, this resistance to the inverted pyramid news form can also be read a resistance to the representation of journalism as a form of knowledge work and the conception of writing that made it possible. For example, Chambers argues against the reduction of news to quantifiable facts and observable details, in a rigidly enforced system that precludes the possibility of writerly autonomy. Steffens reiterates this sense by complaining about the lack of “any sign of personality” in news reports and the reduction of the reporter to a machine. In their resistance to what they see as the depersonalizing effects of treating journalism like a knowledge commodity, these writers provide further proof that this model of journalism was both real and powerful. In fact, fictional portrayals of journalism also engaged with this representation of journalism, further suggesting that this representation of the profession offered a compelling way of understanding the journalist’s professional role.

The short story writer and celebrity journalist Richard Harding Davis presented a critical portrait of the journalist as information worker in his short story “The Derelict.” Preoccupied with a romantic conception of the journalist as a literary adventurer, Davis disparages the knowledge worker, viewing that representation of journalism as a betrayal of journalism as a writing profession. In contrast, Jesse Lynch Williams offers a favorable representation of the journalist as knowledge worker, aligning the news reporter with social scientists documenting the realities of urban experience. Clearly, the representation of journalists as knowledge workers existed as a potent way of conceptualizing the work of
Moreover, the fact that Davis was able to caricature the representation in order to
draw out what he saw as a fundamental problem with journalism as it had come to be
practiced in the 1890s underscores the pervasiveness of this way of representing journalistic
professionalism.

**Resistance to the journalistic knowledge worker in “The Derelict”**

Davis’s story, “The Derelict,” concerns the friendly rivalry between two very
different reporters covering the outbreak of the Spanish American War. The first, Keating, is
a salaried correspondent with the Consolidated Press, a fictionalized version of the
Associated Press. Keating is the CP’s star reporter, producing unemotional, fact-laden
stories, which are described as being “as picturesque reading as the quotations of a stock
ticker” (164). In contrast, Charles Channing, though an unreliable drunkard, is described as
“a genius” by his fellow reporters. He writes in a descriptive narrative style that is deeply
imbued with his own sensibility, reaching readers on an emotional level. Critics have read the
story as a critique of the Associated Press and its homogenizing—or consolidating—effect on
news writing. For example, Osborne describes the story as in part an attack on the
Consolidated (Associated) Press and in part a contrast between two newspaper men” (50).
The Consolidated Press’s negative effect on the individual is personified by its star reporter,
Keating, who Osborn describes as a “man whose talent has been blighted by the press
bureau’s demand for cold, colorless ‘facts” (50). Osborne’s assessment of the colorlessness of
the Consolidated Press’s writing style is well-substantiated in the story; however, his
assessment of Keating’s talent is not. Nothing in the text suggests that Keating is a writer
whose talents have been warped by newswriting. Rather, he described as a distasteful and
disagreeable man who is well suited to the writing that Davis likewise presents as
disagreeable. More than simply a critique of an individual institution, Davis levels an attack at the entire notion of journalism as knowledge work. He offers Channing as a flawed representation of a more literary conception of journalist, fighting vainly against the commodification of news, the acceleration of the news cycle, and the attendant devaluing of writing.

In Davis’s story, Keating is a superstar at the Consolidated Press, but not well liked among other reporters. In contrast, Channing is regarded as a “genius” by the other reporters because his colorful writing style transforms even the most mundane story into a work of art. In this example, Davis directly confronts the model of news as information, describing a fictional situation in which the human interest story, artfully told, prevails over hard news. Davis describes Keating’s fact-driven passionless work as “his ‘stories,’ as all newspaper writings are called by the men who write them” (111). Moreover, Keating’s stories “were as picturesque readings as the quotations of a sock ticker. The personal equation appeared no more offensively than it does in a page of typewriting in his work” (111). The scare quotes around the word ‘story’ and the parenthetical explanation that all journalists refer to their writing as “stories” emphasize the degree to which all stories are not created the same in Davis’s fictional world. The equation of Keating’s work with the output of a stock-ticker is particularly damning, reducing Keating to a mere information producing machine, a machine that simply spits out transmitted facts. This imagery is further reinforced by the reference to the “page of typewriting,” which invokes the typewriters used by “rewrite men” to mass produce news stories based on the raw data phoned in by “leg men” on the streets. Davis describes Keating as writing indifferently on any topic at hand from a board meeting to a mining disaster, collecting “facts and his salary” with equal degrees of detachment (114). In
short, Davis dams Keating for being merely a fact spewing machine, a salary man pursuing a professional career—for which he is being richly rewarded—rather than a writer pursuing the richness and pathos of life experience.

Unlike Keating’s dry, dispassionate reports of facts, Channing’s writing style is passionate and personal. One journalist, comparing Channing’s work to his own says,

I’m a better news gatherer than Charlie, I can collect facts and I can put them together well enough, too, so that if a man starts to read my story he’ll probably follow it to the bottom of the column, and he may turn over the page, too. But I can’t say the things, because I can’t see the things that Charlie sees.

(115, emphasis added).

The connection between facts and reader is underscored here—the writer describes himself as collecting facts and “putting them together,” gathering packets of information and assembling them into a story that readers consume. But Channing is credited with seeing, not in the way the daguerreotype captures an image of visible surfaces, but rather seeing below the surface of everyday life to the emotional core beneath. In this regard, Channing might be closer to what William Dean Howells’s description of his efforts to make his journalistic work literary (Years 178). In fact, he’s legendary among journalists for failing to report on a big assignment he’d been sent to cover and instead writing an emotional description of a bum whose dog had died. His dog story earned more attention from the public than the news event written up in other papers. Channing’s genius lies in seeing the story beyond the mere event and then investing his stories with the uniqueness of his singular individuality. The result is a higher form journalism.
And yet, Channing cannot find a regular place on a paper because he will not be held down to deadlines or the schedule of consistent and reliable output demanded by the modern news office. Channing’s inability to conform to the demands of the mechanized newsroom is also obvious in his failure to get any of his dispatches published. While in Cuba, he sends dispatches to various papers via postal mail. Despite the high quality of their writing, these dispatches are passed over for the more costly, but more timely bulletins telegraphed in by other reporters. Again, Davis’s account underscores the negative effects of new newsgathering models, this time showing that communication technologies enable the fast transfer of information at the expense of quality writing.

Davis’s negative representation of the journalist as knowledge worker gives life to the frustrations felt by many journalists who held a more literary conception of the profession. Some journalists like Chambers entered journalism with the expectation of honing their writing skills and were therefore sorely disappointed by the fact-driven style of the modern newsroom. In fact, Lincoln Steffens had the opportunity to lead the New York Commercial Advertiser in a short-lived experiment, to gather together the best creative writers he could hire in order to treat news in a way that was both factual and literary. In a sense, Steffens created the conditions whereby a writer like Channing would have flourished: he recruited young college graduates with writing talents and perhaps literary ambitions to gather stories and present them in a lively fashion (Campbell 99). The experiment was short-lived and unsuccessful, and may have contributed to Steffens’ later bitterness about his experience in daily news journalism.

With Channing, Davis presents an alternative course daily journalism might have taken where the journalistic story itself could be a form of literature. He imagines what Thomas
Connery describes as a “third way” of depicting reality, a literary form of journalist that is a response to objective news reporting on the one hand and Realist literary depictions on the other. Connery claims depictions of literary journalism in the fiction of RH Davis illustrate, “a resistance to restricting the form and content of newspaper journalism, and [suggest] that two categories of printed prose to depict observed life were not enough, but a third—a literary journalism—was possible and necessary” (5). In Davis’s telling, journalism can itself be an artistic literary pursuit. Thus Davis dramatizes the shortcomings of the information model of journalism and presents a fantasy of the triumph of a more writerly orientation to the news story—a fantasy that appealed to a particular subset of people who regarded journalism as a form of expressive writing rather than as a knowledge profession. Chambers found corresponding more amenable, traveling the world and becoming a celebrity journalist. The experiences of celebrity journalists like Chambers and Davis were exceptional: they wrote under their own bylines and enjoyed considerably more autonomy than the reporter on the street. Historical accounts of the period have been colored by the autobiographical accounts of writers like these, typically former journalists who moved on to professional literary careers. Their accounts of their journalism experience cannot be taken wholesale without considering their unique orientation to the profession.

The dramatic climax of the story occurs when Keating falls down drunk on the eve of an important story. Channing composes the story in his stead, telegraphing the story to the Consolidated Press’s office under Keating’s byline. In this example, what Connery described as Davis’s “third way” of representing reality is illustrated clearly as an artistic rendering of subjective experience, a literary self-expression fused with observable facts. Channing’s composition of the story of the great sea battle becomes conflated with a battle between his
creative mind and a tropical fever that is consuming his body. While describing the battle scene, his very body becomes a battlefield. Waves of fever sweep over his body like a wave-swept ship at sea: “The turmoil of leaping engines and of throbbing pulses was confused with the story he was writing, and while his mind was inflamed with pictures of warring battleships, his body was swept by the fever” (134). However, the resulting “story of the war” is a literary as well as journalistic success, described as both a “naval history” and as “the only piece of literature the war has produced” (137). However, the story he has produced is also resolutely news, as Channing claims upon handing over the story for telegraphing. It is filled with “facts, facts, facts, facts,” he exclaims before collapsing to the floor (137). Davis, the journalist turned novelist here presents a fantasy version of the news story: an amalgam of information and literary dramatization. The dramatic circumstances around the news story’s composition contrasts markedly with the “stock ticker” quality of Keating’s stories. Keating, the writing machine, simply spits out transmitted facts. Channing labors to create something new, an effort that nearly kills him. Keating is a machine; Channing is a tortured, self-ameliorating artist. The fact that Channing publishes the story under Keating’s byline further underscores the notion that Channing is foremost a writer, motivated not by money but by a conception of writing as giving voice to his unique vision, regardless of what he might gain from it. In the previous chapter, I described self-branding writers driven by an entrepreneurial ethos. This chapter describes knowledge professionals who market their information gathering abilities. In both instances, journalists are described as purveyors of a valuable commodity, whether that commodity is their writing skill or their ability to gather knowledge. By publishing his work under another journalist’s name, Channing breaks with the dominant ethos of his era: The credit earned for the story is meaningless to him; his only
aim is to express his unique vision. In doing so, he contrasts sharply with the self-aggrandizing Keating for whom information is a commodity that buys him professional advancement.

Davis’s negative portrayal of the journalist as knowledge worker reflects his dissatisfactions with late century journalism. Davis’s own experience of journalism in the 1880s included earning recognition among his journalistic peers before earning public recognition through his short-story writing and stunt-reporting. On his first day at the New York Evening Sun in 1889, a street hustler swindled Davis, an incident he wrote up as an amusing vignette that ran under the headline “Our Green Reporter” (Weber 114). In this instance, Davis not only offers a subjective narrative account of an event, but he is written into the story’s headline, radically inserting his individuality into the news story. The portrait that emerges from this account suggests that “Our green reporter” enjoyed an autonomy and creative freedom that was becoming increasingly rare for the typical rank and file reporter. In fact, according to his brother and biographer, Charles Belmont Davis, Davis enjoyed free rein as a reporter at the Evening Sun, dividing his time between hard news reporting, writing features on theatre people, and investigating and writing a series of first-person accounts of his infiltration of a gang of robbers. The latter series, the Van Bibber stories, garnered Davis fame. Though published anonymously, Davis’s authorship of the stories was generally known—especially after he used the information he’d gained to help police arrest the gang. Thus Davis’s journalistic career diverged from that of the more typical, anonymous rank and file news reporter. In fact, after the publication of the Van Bibber stories, followed by the publication of his first widely successful short story soon after, Davis became a literary and journalistic celebrity. “Gallagher, a Newspaper Story” appeared to wide acclaim in
Scribner’s Magazine in 1890, allowing Davis to continue in journalism as a highly paid correspondent hired as much for name-recognition as for his information gathering abilities.

In effect, Davis was an exceptional figure whose experience should not be taken as representative of the vast majority of reporters in the 1880s and 1890s. Thus, his fictional accounts of journalism border on the fantastic, reflecting not only the relatively unusual circumstances of his own career, but also a nostalgia for an era that barely existed for anyone other than reporters and correspondents who managed to achieve an elite status and leave behind the workaday routines of the rank-and-file journalist. Like Davis, Channing writes for the adventure of it. But unlike Davis, he doesn’t earn the recognition he deserves. According to his brother and biographer, Charles Belmont, Davis didn’t care that his most famous stories were initially published anonymously because his unique voice showed through (44). Channing on the other hand, fades into obscurity. We see him at the end of “The Derelict” penniless and hungry, watching from afar as Keating celebrates his promotion to the Consolidated Press’s Paris bureau, based largely on the success of the story Channing wrote in his stead.

Celebrating the journalist as knowledge worker

While Davis presented a contrarian image of the journalist as knowledge worker, another former journalist was celebrating the reporter’s emerging professional role. In a series of highly popular short-stories published in a variety of magazines and collected in The Stolen Story and Other Newspaper Stories in 1899, Jesse Lynch Williams rejects any association between literature and journalism, instead positioning the journalist among more established professionals like physicians and attorneys in a market economy built around information exchange. In his short story “The New Reporter,” the eponymous hero identified
only as Linton eschews all notion of himself as a writer, instead conceptualizing his professional role as that of a social scientist observing and recording reality in order to package it as a news commodity.

Linton learns that reporting is “a business involving considerable specialized knowledge, to be learned by experiments and mistakes, like every other job” (21). This specialized knowledge includes not only developing the nose for news, but also mastering the detached, clinical stance of the professional observer. Linton’s professional model is the social scientist or clinician, not the creative writer. For example, observing heart-rending scenes like a group of bawling children being separate from their mothers at the city jail, Linton observes, unmoved: “It was his business to watch all this, so, like a doctor, he was learning to observe suffering and disease from a purely professional point of view” which allows him to look on and to report on the events he witnesses dispassionately (83). This is the opposite of Channing’s unique vision, his ability to see the things other reporters cannot. Linton passively observes and records what appears before him, making a conscious effort not to probe too deeply into his subjective response to the events he witnesses. In fact, Linton left his studies in Sociology at a German University in order to become a reporter. This is not the aspiring novelist collecting scenes and stories for some future literary study. Rather, Linton’s sense of himself as a social scientist is typical of reporters in the period, which Schudson attributes to the Progressive era’s “craze” for systematic social research (72). For these reporters, as for the writers of trade of “quality” periodicals, writing is secondary if not irrelevant to the project of gathering information. In fact, Linton reduces the information he gathers for the daily newspaper to a base commodity: “He told himself that news was a commodity and that there was just as much dignity in the getting, handling, selling of it as of
woollens [sic] or professional opinion or any other article of merchandise” (87). The flattening effect of commodification is obvious here, expert opinion is reduced to the same level as woolens, suggesting that the intellectual products of the educated mind are, in the end, still just products. Further, the equation of news with these commodities is underscored by the verbs “getting,” “handling” and “selling.” Like the mechanical metaphors for reporters described above, the language in this passage suggests that the news commodity is a tangible item to be handled rather than something filtered through the mind of the reporter.

Thus, Linton describes the writing style required by his position simply as a skill that must be learned. In fact, he argues that “not even William Shakespeare would know what to get or how to put it without some training at reporting. To be sure he might get better things and put them in immortal English, but his copy would not ‘get by the desk’” (21). Here, Linton is explicitly countering a writerly notion of the profession. Journalism does not require writing skill, and not even the Bard with his famous eye for the pathos of the human condition would know “what to get,” i.e. how to perform the vital information gathering aspects of the profession, or how to write it in a way that the newspaper could publish. Both Davis and Williams represent the work of journalism as knowledge work. However, Davis’s account parodies the knowledge worker, making him not only a bad writer, but a distasteful person: Keating is a prideful, ungracious drunk. In contrast, Linton is a likeable protagonist. Lynch portrays his struggles to find his footing in an emerging profession sympathetically. Davis’s portrayal is an extended protest against the perversion of journalism’s literary qualities. There are no literary qualities in William’s portrayal of journalism: it is a profession among other professions.
Conclusion

Richard Harding Davis was not alone in resisting the assumptions about journalism and journalistic writing that underpinned the representation of journalism as a form of knowledge work. The voices of Davis and those I quoted above who protested against the inverted pyramid news form are well documented in the historical literature. In fact, the notion that, on the whole, journalists clung to a conceptualization of their profession rooted in their ability as writers has skewed historical accounts of the period, so that the historical accounts of late nineteenth-century American journalism have privileged a conflict narrative that pits story minded journalists against their information oriented newspapers. This conflict narrative elides the experiences of knowledge workers like Linton—as well as his real life counterparts in the daily newspapers and trade publications of the late nineteenth century. These journalists were viewed as purveyors of a valuable commodity in an emerging information economy. And yet, in describing newspapers’ shifts from story to news orientations, Schudson claims that journalists as a class resisted the change. His argument is predicated on the notion that all journalists shared a common notion of professionalism as a fusion of the information and story models. Schudson states that “reporters subscribed concurrently to the ideals of factuality and of entertainment in writing the news” while “some of the papers they worked for chose identities that strongly emphasized one ideal or the other” (89). While I have benefited from Schudson’s analysis of the period, particularly his notion of reporting as a social invention of the period, I dispute his sense of “reporters” as a unitary group of professionals united by a common ideology. As I have attempted to demonstrate throughout, journalists as a class of workers were conceptualized using several competing models of professionalism. The representations available invited journalists to adopt multiple and sometimes competing models of professionalism. These representations described and helped
make sense of the emerging profession, and further had material effects in terms of the formation of occupational and educational structures.

For example, Talcott Williams, is quoted above describing writing as a “mere tool” for the journalist, while news sense, or the ability to identify a saleable story was the most vital qualification. Williams was the Director of the Columbia School of Journalism; however, his view of the relationship between writing and newsgathering was not shared by everyone at the school. In fact, the school published, *Writing of Today: Models of Journalistic Prose*, edited by J.W. Cunliffe, an English professor and associate director of the journalism school, and Gerhard Lomer, an instructor at the school. The book presents descriptive and narrative articles, personal sketches and interviews, and literary criticism by writers including George Bernard Shaw and George Ade, William Butler Yeats, and Willa Cather. Describing the variety of literary and nonfiction writing samples as “journalistic prose” models suggests an expansive conception of journalistic writing. Moreover, a former student later claimed that Robert MacAlarney, the school’s first Practical Journalism instructor, required students to quote at least 20 rhymed lines of *Alice in Wonderland* as part of their final exam in order to impress upon them an appreciation for melodious language (Letter to Alice Lidell Hargreaves). These examples speak to a classroom emphasis on writing as craft and journalism as a *writing* pursuit. The contradiction between these glimpses of writing instruction in the Columbia classroom and Talcott’s rejection of writing as a fundamental skill underscores the point I have argued throughout: the multiple ways of representing journalism available simultaneously account for variations in the conceptualization of journalism, even among members of a single organization charged with educating a new generation of journalists.

The representation of journalism as a form of knowledge work was one among several
representations available. It provided one way of conceptualizing the work of journalism, accounting for changing conceptions of “news” as information, as well as conceptions of journalistic writing as a mechanized activity. This representation elevated information gathering to the journalist’s primary and most important activity. Writing in this representation was undervalued, even ignored, and at times reduced to a formulaic rendering of observed “facts.” This representation of journalistic professionalism, seemed to debase writing for many, stripping journalistic writing of literary embellishment and threatening to rob the journalist of an individual writing voice. This representation also conferred professional status on a group of workers whose forte was finding information rather than writing it up. However, this representation also devalued writing in a profession in which many staked a professional claim based in their writing ability. Thus, the professional role of the journalist was elevated for those who saw themselves foremost as information gatherers but was lowered for those who saw themselves foremost as writers.
Conclusion

In the late nineteenth century, Americans for the first time began attempting to elaborate a theory of journalistic professionalism (Dicken-Garcia 156). In hundreds of magazine and newspaper articles, as well as in speeches, trade publications, textbooks, and even fiction, both those inside and outside the profession attempted to make sense of the structure of daily newspaper, to define its social role, and to codify a set of standards of behaviors for its workers. The various ways of representing the journalist that emerged from these conversations were shaped by multiple, sometimes competing conceptions of writing, the nature of authorship, and the proper role of the journalist in relation to the text.

The notion that journalism could serve as an apprenticeship to literature signaled that daily news journalism was becoming a respectable profession in America. Trade book publisher Henry Holt encouraged college graduates who aspired to a literary career to apprentice in journalism in order to earn a living while developing their craft. At the same time, aspiring litterateurs were warned not to stay in journalism too long. This conflict speaks to the contradictory conception of writing underpinning the representation of journalism as a literary apprenticeship. On the one hand, writing is conceptualized as a learnable skill at which one might improve with practice, given a reasonable amount of talent. On the other hand, the practice offered was in a quick style of writing that if learned too well, could hinder one’s facility with other styles. Moreover, daily news journalism could be a gritty business, exposing the reporter to unseemly images or desensitizing him to images of pathos, dulling the emotional responsitivity and sensibility needed to create literature. By conceptualizing the journalist as an acolyte, an apprentice to a higher calling, journalism in this representation becomes a degraded, and potentially degrading form of authorship. The corrosive effects of
journalism on the aspiring litterateur are played out not only in terms of style and ability but also in terms of character. The journalist as dissipated drunk has become a stock character in fiction and film. Jesse Lynch Williams’ short story “The Old Reporter” presents one such example, Billy Woods, a highly successful journalist whose long daily news career ruined his capacity for doing any other kind of writing. He failed at freelance journalism because “he had subordinated his own personality to that of the paper’s for so long that now his own was afraid to speak” (260). He also failed to complete “the book” he talked endlessly about. The end of the story finds him a penniless drunk on the streets, one who more prosperous journalists avoid. The Billy Woodses are extreme representations of the pernicious assumption that journalism is at best an apprenticeship for literary writing, and at worst a graveyard for literary talent. The journalist as a professional is thus always lacking, always subordinate to the literary writer, to whose position he aspired. William Dean Howells strikes what has become a well-worn note in describing the relationship between “literary men” and journalists: “I fancy… that most journalists would have been literary men if they could, at the beginning, and that the kindness they almost always show to young authors is an effect of the self-pity they feel for their own thwarted wish to be authors” (22). This position has, unfortunately, been taken up in contemporary scholarship about the relationship between literature and journalism. For example, in contemporary descriptions of 1890s journalists as “semicovert novelists” or novelists in training (Ziff 157, Schudson 69). The result is that even as journalism gained recognition as a profession, its subordinate status in relation to literary writing meant that journalists were perpetually regarded as either apprentices aspiring or failed literary artists.
The representation of journalism as an entrepreneur was based in the notion that writing was a learnable skill. The entrepreneurial writer purposefully rejected any conception of writing as an expressive art. Journalists who regarded their work as a form of entrepreneurship were unabashedly profit-driven, conceptualizing their writing ability as a marketable skill and the text is a commodity to be molded to the demands of the buyer. These journalists were part of a larger class of writers attempting to make a living from the period’s burgeoning print marketplace, whether through production of literary or journalistic writing. For these writers, authorship was a profession requiring special skill. The trade journal *The Writer* provided these writers a handbook on the practicalities of living by the pen as well as a forum for discussing issues affecting the profession of writing. The *Writer* promoted a model of professionalism modeled on metaphors of business: writers of all stripes were encouraged to treat their writing like a commodity to be molded to fit market demands and to treat their bylines like a brand-name, securing higher profits by building name recognition for quality work. Entrepreneurship also empowered the salaried journalist to value his self interest. For example, some journalists agitated for bylines based on the notion that recognition of their names would provide a tool for leveraging higher salaries or courting higher paying employers. This empowerment served as a counter-balance to the disempowering position journalists suffered in the prevailing conception of journalism as a form of public service. Press reformers of the period drew on the public service model to justify low wages and to reduce the autonomy of the journalist. The public service ideal continues to shape scholarship on the period, eliding entrepreneurial journalists and obscuring their relation to the larger class of writers attempting to make a living from the pen in this period.
The representation of journalism as a form of knowledge work was similar to the entrepreneurial representation in that both emphasized the journalist’s special skills. However, whereas the entrepreneurial journalist was primarily a writer, a “pen for hire,” the representation of journalism as a form of knowledge work devalued writing, emphasizing instead the journalist’s special knowledge and research skills. Adoption of communication and printing technologies like the telegraph, telephone, and typewriter contributed to a separation of newsgathering and news writing, emphasizing a conception of writing as a transparent vehicle for the transmission of information. At the same time, growing emphasis on timeliness as well as a conception of news as pure information rather than a source of entertainment contributed to a remodeling of the news story itself, encouraging writers to shift away from lively narrative accounts of events and instead adopt a more straightforward writing style. In fact, some editors began to privilege the gathering of news over writing skill and the “nose for news” or ability to recognize a valuable story, became a sought after quality among reporters. The inverted pyramid, an emerging story form in this period, which promised to present unbiased information quickly and without unnecessary adornment. It complimented this information driven model of news writing perfectly.

As I have attempted to demonstrate throughout, no single representation definitively described journalism in the period. Rather, each offered one way of interpreting the conditions in which journalists worked, viewed through the lens of a particular view of writing. Each representation assumed a unique conceptualization of writing and positioned the writer in particular ways. These representations were shaped by the communication and printing technologies that organized newswork. They were also shaped by emerging management structures and the corporate organization of the daily newspaper as a business.
And yet, they were not predetermined; rather, each representation demonstrates one way of rationalizing material conditions and of positioning the newsworker in relation to other workers. Moreover, each served a purpose, and each was available for deployment by any individual at any time. In fact, one individual might deploy a different instantiation of the discourse of professionalism depending on his/her purpose or audience. Thus, for example, textbook writer Edwin Shuman deployed the model of literary apprenticeship in order to frame the unpleasant aspects of news reporting within a redemptive narrative of artistic development. In contrast, the literary writer William Dean Howells deployed the same model to validate Realist literature’s claims to authenticity, and then selectively disputed some aspects of the typical representation to distinguish the work of the literary artist from the journalistic hack. In describing these deployments of discourses of professionalism as “representations,” my intention has been to describe how conceptions of writing were instantiated in discourse that also accounted for the observable conditions shaping the occupation of journalism. These representations made sense because they appeared to reflect the “reality” of daily news work. At the same time, they carried weight, influencing things like the creation of educational regimes to train future journalists. The sometimes contradictory representations I described endured. In fact, they continue to inform conversations about issues such as the professional status of the journalist, the relationship of journalistic to other forms of writing, and the proper education of the journalist. In fact, new media forms have prompted new conversations about journalism, re-energizing the ongoing attempt to elaborate a new theory of journalistic professionalism.

Journalists in the late nineteenth century negotiated a crowded discursive field offering multiple ways of conceptualizing their professional roles. They worked to assert
their status as valuable professionals in an expanding information economy, and to situate themselves as writers among a burgeoning class of writing professionals. Journalists in the early twenty-first century are likewise attempting to negotiate professional identities in an evolving occupational structure. Blogging and citizen journalism are just two of the innovations destabilizing traditional occupational structures, allowing new entrants into the occupation. As the traditional print-based news organizations, long seen as the bedrock of the mainstream media, begin to evolve (and some say fade), the journalist’s professional and occupational roles are more contingent and open to interpretation than ever before.

Even amid the upheaval in the print news industry, many voices in both the traditional and new media continue to assert the importance of journalists. There are efforts underway in many quarters to re-imagine the role of the journalist in the 21st century, to redefine who the journalist is and what special skills or characteristics define the journalist. And in these conversations, the representations I identify in the nineteenth century continue to jostle for a space at the forefront of thinking about who the journalist is and what the journalist does. Despite the approaching demise of the print news industry, commentators stress the continuing need for the vital social function the newspaper reporter performs, emphasizing the public service model endemic to the profession since its earliest days. For example, On Tuesday, March 24, Democratic Senator Benjamin Cardin introduced a Congressional bill to save newspapers. Dubbed the “Newspaper Revitalization Act,” the bill would encourage newspapers to reorganize as non-profits that operated for educational purposes, gaining a similar tax status to public broadcasting companies. Cardin described the bill: “The business model for newspapers, based on circulation and advertising revenue, is broken, and that is a real tragedy for communities across the nation and for our democracy.”
(Cardin qtd. in Ferraro). As described in a previous chapter, nineteenth-century press reformers sought to balance the new institution’s democratic function with the news organization’s corporate mandate to make a profit. Cardin likewise emphasizes the newspaper’s role as a democratic institution, but proposes to sever it from business. The advertising driven business models that caused late nineteenth-century press critics such distress are no longer workable, and new models are needed if the print newspaper will survive. However, others argue that the institution itself is not important; rather, the vital information gathering function it serves is the real commodity threatened by the threatened demise of the print newspaper.

Business and legislative efforts to save print newspapers are vain in a digitized world, argues Clay Shirky a professor of telecommunications history at NYU. But, in a widely read and distributed blog post, Shirky argues:

Society doesn’t need newspapers. What we need is journalism. For a century, the imperative to strengthen journalism and to strengthen newspapers has been so tightly wound as to be indistinguishable. That’s been a fine accident to have, but when that accident stops, as it is stopping before our eyes, we’re going to need lots of other ways to strengthen journalism instead. (Shirky)

Shirky, an interactive telecommunications researcher, is arguing from a conception of the journalism as an information gathering profession. Shirky’s model of professionalism is also rooted in a public service model of journalism, but he conceptualizes the journalist’s primary role as creating and distributing knowledge. For example, he describes the primary work of the newspaper as gathering information whether it be “covering every angle of a huge story

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16 As of April 2009, Shirky’s blog post had been “bookmarked” more than 4,000 times by users of Delicious.com, an online service that allows readers to “tag” and share interesting online content.
— to the daily grind of attending the City Council meeting, just in case” (n.p). “This coverage creates benefits even for people who aren’t newspaper readers, because the work of print journalists is used by everyone from politicians to district attorneys to talk radio hosts to bloggers” (n.p). In this description, “coverage” and “work” are synonymous, and neither term suggests the actual words written in the newspaper. Rather, Shirky here seems to be describing information as a formless abstraction. So, when he argues that “Society doesn’t need newspapers. What we need is journalism,” journalism is implicitly defined as information or knowledge. Moreover, this is knowledge of a particular kind, rooted in an ideal of public service, what he calls “accountability journalism,” or stories that hold public figures and institutions accountable to the public good. Andrew Keen, a self-styled anti-new media polemicist likewise insists on the vital public service function of the journalist—traditionally a print journalist. And like Shirky, he also conceptualizes the journalist primarily as an information gatherer. However, they differ markedly in their conception of the journalist’s professional role. Shirky is the author of a popular book on crowd sourcing—the aggregation of small bits of information gathered by large numbers of people to create and analyze large pools of data. In Here Comes Everybody, Shirky imagines a future in which the type of investigative reporting he sees as a vital contribution of the print newspaper to the transparent function of democracy is performed by legions of amateurs, a collection of regular citizens doing the work of Barnhurst and Nerone’s “super-citizen” journalist of the 1950s. Indeed, Shirky hints that the alternative to traditional print news media might turn out to be a collection of systems we have not seen before staffed largely by amateurs. Keen rejects the notion that a patchwork of systems run by amateurs will ever replace traditional print journalism. In fact, he rejects what he dubs the “cult of the amateur,”
the infatuation with citizen journalism and crowd sourcing, and other forms of amateur journalism on the grounds that the most motivated amateur could never match the training and skill of the typical journalist.

The representation of journalism as a form of entrepreneurship is also reemerging with renewed vigor as the breakdown of traditional news media outlets places more impetus on journalists to effectively market themselves in a highly competitive marketplace. In fact, in a previous chapter, I described Joseph Pulitzer’s attempts to safeguard the public service function of the journalist by strictly separating business and journalism in his proposed school of journalism at Columbia University. However, in March 2009, the school reversed its 100 year commitment to the separation of business and journalism when it announced plans to revise its curriculum to include more business courses to help graduates develop the business skills. While acknowledging that journalism schools have traditionally resisted teaching the business of journalism, Bill Grueskin, the school’s Dean of Academic Affairs argues that business considerations have always been a fundamental part of journalism. The school’s goal in including business training to educate students about changes in the industry and help them communicate more effectively with the personnel in the advertising and marketing departments of whatever media organizations may employ them in the future (Moltz).

Columbia is a bit behind the curve in embracing an entrepreneurial representation of journalism. In addition to offering expanded hands-on coursework in new media journalism, many journalism schools also offer some form of business training for journalists aimed at helping them learn to market their skills. For example, Temple University offers an undergraduate elective in “Entrepreneurial journalism,” which teaches students how to
identify niche markets not currently served by other media outlets. Students learn how to
design business models and to lay the groundwork for creating new media outlets such as
websites that would provide hyperlocal news coverage of communities or geographic areas
not served by local papers (Mangan) As one graduate of Temple’s program states, “you have
to create your own job” (Mangan). Students in their third year of CUNY’s graduate
journalism program who believe there is a good chance they’ll work in online journalism are
encouraged to take Entrepreneurial Journalism along with an advanced course on Interactive
Journalism (CUNY).

My point throughout has been to examine the discursive construction of journalistic
professionalism, to demonstrate how constructed, and contingent, conceptions of the
journalist’s professional role are. The rough outline of journalism’s rapidly changing
landscape offered here obviously suffers from presentism, a myopic view of the present that
overlooks the decades between the 1890s and today. The point of these comparisons is not to
argue that contemporary discourse is a carryover of nineteenth-century ones, or to argue that
“everything old is new again,” but rather to highlight the myriad influences shaping
representations of journalism in any age. Representations of journalistic professionalism are
shaped by multiple, sometimes competing, conceptions of writing, the nature of authorship,
and the proper role of the journalist in relation to the text. And these conceptions, in turn are
subject to the shaping influence of social and cultural forces like emerging technologies and
educational regimes. Thus, a retrospective examination of the representations of journalism
in the late nineteenth century, while not intended to speak directly to the concerns of today,
might still offer some insight into the mutability of journalist’s professional roles and their
adaptability in response to changing conditions.
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