

**Nineteenth-Century Media in Transition:  
Rewiring New York's New Journalism and the U.S. Realist Novel**

When Rupert Murdoch launched *The Daily* last February, he billed the news “app” designed exclusively for the iPad as an experiment in updating journalism for a twenty-first-century media technology. “The iPad demands that we completely re-imagine our craft,” he announced at a press event on February 2 (Boyd Meyers). Marketing *The Daily* as an effort “to take the best of traditional journalism...and combine it with the best of contemporary technology,” Murdoch positioned his venture to gain a profitable edge in a changing media landscape (“Press Release”).

Whether or not *The Daily* succeeds in achieving the influence and profits to which its investors aspire, it provides an instructive starting point for this paper’s consideration of nineteenth-century efforts to fashion new forms of news. Like the late-nineteenth-century genres of new journalism and the realist novel considered in the pages that follow, *The Daily* provides an indication of the way in which new technologies—through the work of editors, writers, designers, and developers—inspire and enable new methods of mediating the present.<sup>1</sup> Murdoch’s app is an attempt to fashion a new “model for how stories will be told” that exploits the new technology of the iPad while drawing on existing journalistic forms from print and broadcast media (“Press Release”). *The Daily*’s mobile, multi-media approach to news making may one day set the standard for what readers, or users, consider as credible stories about the present. Or, it may follow the path of the nineteenth-century texts analyzed herein—ultimately acquiring obsolescence as competing forms take the lead.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is what Marshall McLuhan refers to as “the change of scale or pace or pattern” that new technology “introduces into human affairs” (8).

<sup>2</sup> Among the competing genres of twenty-first-century news, I would include hyperlocal news sites, subscription-based online newspapers, and the personalized news feeds from social media such as Facebook and Twitter.

This paper situates New York’s new journalism<sup>3</sup>—in the form it took in Charles Dana’s *New York Sun* and Joseph Pulitzer’s *New York World* of the 1880s—and the U.S. realist novel—as represented by William Dean Howells’s 1889 novel *A Hazard of New Fortunes*—within the context of nineteenth-century media change. New journalism and the U.S. realist novel can be considered genres of what I am calling nineteenth-century news: the vast, transnational zone of nineteenth-century print culture dedicated to imagining new ways of capturing the present on the printed page. In the 1880s, within a proto-disciplinary print culture that had not yet come to a consensus on what defined news, writers representing a wide variety of genres—including those represented by Dana, Pulitzer and Howells—devoted a great deal of ink to exploring this question. They did so without recognizing the boundaries that the twentieth-century journalistic and literary professions would later draw between fact and fiction, personal impressions and professional points of view, and imaginative writing and objective reporting.<sup>4</sup>

From today’s perspective, Dana’s, Pulitzer’s, and Howells’s texts that approach news writing as an imaginative act may appear to be a world apart from news making as we know it. In their day, however, they played similar roles to Murdoch’s iPad app. Dana, Pulitzer, and Howells were all reacting to the rise of electric media technologies as they fashioned new kinds of stories that could convincingly capture the present on the printed page. Operating at the vanguard of the late nineteenth century’s efforts to imagine new forms of news, their texts confronted a number of

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew Arnold coined the term “new journalism” in his 1887 essay “Up to Easter” to describe what he considered to be a more sensational and less intellectually stimulating form of journalism that appeared in newspapers in Britain and the United States at the end of the nineteenth century. This paper focuses exclusively on New York’s new journalism of the 1880s, which I consider to have been led by the *New York Sun* and the *New York World*. My analysis here does not extend into what I consider to be a later phase of New York’s new journalism: the so-called “yellow journalism” of the late 1890s, which resulted primarily from the competition for readers between the *World* and the *New York Journal* after its purchase by William Randolph Hearst in 1895.

<sup>4</sup> On the formation of disciplinary boundaries in relation to the literary profession in the nineteenth century United States, I have found William Charvat’s *The Profession of Authorship in America* and Christopher Wilson’s *The Labor of Words* particularly helpful. I have also drawn from Michel Foucault’s discussion of the rationalization of knowledge in *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* and Raymond Williams’s analysis of the history of literature as a specialized category in *Marxism and Literature*.

interlocking aesthetic and political questions that have continued to surface alongside twentieth- and twenty-first-century new media: What are the points of reference that indicate that a text has captured something of life outside of the text? What boundaries define the space in which that life takes shape? And, perhaps most prominently, where does knowledge of that reality come from? Is that knowledge externally imposed from some point of distance? Or does it come from the personal impressions of a particularly sensitive observer?

Reconsidering new journalists' and novelists' reflections on these questions shows them in the process of imagining a new kind of information that could be impartial rather than personally motivated—and which the telegraph helped to inspire.<sup>5</sup> In addition, situating these texts within a larger history of the interactions between literature and other media elucidates the way in which writers and editors continually reshape old and new representational forms in relation to the new media technologies of their eras. Today, when printed newspapers hover on the brink of obsolescence, new genres such as weblogs, online newspapers, and apps like the *Daily* are raising questions about the boundaries of news that echo those addressed by nineteenth-century print culture and that may once again reconfigure our notions of fact and fiction.

### **The Currents of Nineteenth-Century News**

In late December 1889, a scathing review of William Dean Howells's novel *A Hazard of New Fortunes* appeared in the Joseph Pulitzer's popular daily, the *New York World*. The review, written by critic and reporter Andrew Wheeler (known to readers as Nym Crinkle), evaluates Howells's novel on the eve of its publication in book form.<sup>6</sup> Crinkle's disapproval of the novel centers on its depiction of New York City:

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<sup>5</sup> On the relationship between the telegraph and objectivity, see for example Richard Menke's *Telegraphic Realism*. The foundational theoretical text for this argument is McLuhan's *Understanding Media*.

<sup>6</sup> *A Hazard of New Fortunes* first ran in serial in *Harper's Weekly* between March and November 1889.

The reader who is at all familiar with the palpitant and distinctive characteristics of the metropolis will, I think, acknowledge that the author in his particularity has made an accurate study of door-knobs and bric-à-brac without perceiving the great vital currents of purpose and endeavor that throb and surge in crossing but ever-distinct channels and give an awful meaning to our complex life. (“Howells Out of His Sphere”)<sup>7</sup>

On its surface, Crinkle’s critique illustrates the much-discussed antagonism between the then-emerging discourses of literature and journalism during the period.<sup>8</sup> His analysis attacks the heart of what Howells sought to achieve in this meandering novel, which centers on the establishment of a literary periodical in New York City and repeatedly raises the nineteenth-century’s social question. The novel’s forays into the streets of New York, Crinkle claims, expose a myopic Howells seeking to access “a side of New York life with which [he] is entirely unfamiliar.” By claiming the authority to find “Howells Out of His Sphere,” as the headline announces, Crinkle implies that the territory invaded by *A Hazard of New Fortunes* rightfully belongs to reporters like himself.

Yet, even as Crinkle headlines the divide that he would like to draw between the novel and the *World*, his language also provides a glimpse of the currents that ran between them. Crinkle’s characterization of the “real” New York as a network of “vital currents” that “throb and surge” animates the city through a mix of metaphors that reference the electric grid that powered such nineteenth-century novelties as the light bulb, the telegraph, and the telephone. As we will see, such imagery provides an example of the many kinds of clues left by nineteenth-century texts that show

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<sup>7</sup> All subsequent citations come from this one-page article until otherwise noted.

<sup>8</sup> For some writers, including Howells and Henry James, this rivalry made it possible to envision new, modernized content for novels in contrast to what they portrayed as a barren, market-driven prose circulated by popular daily newspapers. For other U.S. novelists of the period who embraced newspaper writing, such as Stephen Crane and Frank Norris, defying the boundaries drawn by literature’s supposed competition with newspapers provided a convenient way of signaling the relevance of their novels to present-day occurrences. Among the most important studies informing this view are those that were inaugurated by Eric Sundquist’s *American Realism: New Essays*. In this paper, I am particularly indebted to Mark Seltzer’s consideration of Henry James’s narratives within the context of late nineteenth-century efforts to map, study, and control urban life in *Henry James and the Art of Power* and Amy Kaplan’s analysis of the realist novel’s relationship to late-nineteenth-century forms of mass media, including daily newspapers, in *The Social Construction of American Realism*.

them engaged in a process of media transition—of determining the how to tell the stories of their day.

Late-twentieth-century readings of the so-called realist novel genre—which *A Hazard of New Fortunes* has come to exemplify—help to unearth the dynamics hidden within Crinkle’s review. Since the 1980s, influential scholars of U.S. realism have emphasized the tendency of this slippery genre to make critical reflections on the way in the nineteenth century’s media technologies, emerging disciplines, and bureaucracy constructed reality. Realist novels accomplished this through their infamous omniscient narrators, who represented an impersonal, birds-eye point of view that provided an alternative to understanding the world through individualized impressions. As this now-familiar reading goes, the omniscient narrator’s effort to make the world of personal experience inconsequential never becomes fully realized. In novel after novel, the narrator’s perspective ends up undermined by romanticized characters who impose their personal designs and desires on the narrative; consequently, as Eric Sundquist has influentially argued, the genre ultimately “failed case by case by refusing to renounce romance and by leveling the barriers of aesthetic freedom too completely” (9). From the perspective of the twentieth-century literary field, assigning the realist novel this fatal flaw effectively increased its literary value. For unlike other nineteenth-century fields like sociology and criminology that were emerging as “colonizers of the urban scene,” these novels displayed critical self-reflection about the century’s rationalizing impulse (52).

Looking outside the boundaries of the twentieth-century literary field, this perspective opens the door to the shared territory that novels like *A Hazard of New Fortunes* and newspapers leading the charge for new journalism occupied within the proto-disciplinary terrain of nineteenth-century news. After all, as another channel of recent criticism has shown, realist texts engaged in the dramas that unfolded within the burgeoning print-based mass media of the United States at the end of the

nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> This is what Amy Kaplan perceptively argues in her study that marries poststructuralist insights to the history of the book. As she explains, realist narratives paid particular attention to other textual forms within nineteenth-century print culture:

Realism can also be understood as an argument, not only with older residual conventions, but with emergent forms of mass media from which it gains its power and against which it asserts itself. Realistic novels do more than juggle competing visions of social reality; they encompass conflicting forms and narratives which shape that reality. (13)

The often conflicting points of view and unresolved plotlines offered by realist texts, Kaplan suggests, echo and seek to overwrite the competing visions offered by newspapers, as well as magazines, mass-market fiction, and advertising. Kaplan's argument shows a variety of emerging forms of mass media intersecting with realist narratives in an effort to reach a single, national audience at a time when class conflict seemed to fracture U.S. culture into distinct spheres. It also paves the way for identifying the common ground between new journalism and the realist novel.

Realist novels and new journalism, in other words, represented efforts to keep pace with the changing landscape of print media at the outset of electric media. Drawing on Raymond Williams's theory of cultural competition and change, which Kaplan's citation also invokes, we can identify efforts to fashion new perspectives (like that of the omniscient narrator or the calls for increased factuality in new journalistic newspapers) as "emergent," in the sense that they forged "new meanings and values, new practices, and new relationships" that would mark a "new phase of the dominant culture" (123). At the same time, in order to compete within the new print market, many writers and editors participated in "a reaching back to those meanings and values which were created in actual societies and actual situations in the past" in order to harness a familiar point of reference and reshape it into something new (122). "The residual, by definition," Williams explains, "has been effectively formed in the past, but is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all

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<sup>9</sup> On professionalization and the literary market at the end of the nineteenth century in the United States, see Christopher Wilson, *The Labor of Words*, Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age*, and Daniel Borus, *Writing Realism*.

as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present” (123). As realist narratives forged their own conceptions of romance by drawing on older literary traditions, they recharged it as part of the debate over how to mediate modern life at the end of the nineteenth century. Yet, realist novels were not alone in wielding romance as a tool for achieving cultural status and responding to the new possibilities and challenges posed by nineteenth-century print technologies.

Returning now to Crinkle’s review, his critique of *A Hazard of New Fortunes* paints a picture of newspaper writing that looks quite different from the one focused on factual detail that appears in twentieth- and twenty-first century literary history. We might say that Crinkle’s article shows him reshaping the “old romantic ideals” that Howells sought to overwrite in his novels (19). Indeed, one of the faults that Crinkle finds with the novel is that it compels its readers to “plod wearily on page after page, with a superstitious and inherent notion that something will happen” (“Howells Out of His Sphere”). Devoid of epic dimensions, let alone plot-driven action, the novel ends up requiring Crinkle to perform the feat of “heroically reading this book.” Crinkle claims the city as the reporter’s domain on the grounds of a heroism that, he insists, Howells’s writing hopelessly lacks.

New York’s new journalistic newspapers repeatedly cast reporters in roles much like the one Crinkle assigns himself in “Howells Out of His Sphere.” Tracing these reporters’ errands through the terrain of nineteenth-century news compels a reconsideration of the persistent idea that late-nineteenth-century newspapers cohered into a consistent form that schooled novelists seeking to write about real life. On the contrary, *A Hazard of New Fortunes* situates Howells alongside new journalists at the vanguard of the late nineteenth century’s efforts to fashion new forms of news. Moreover, this novel that appears to be a world apart from news from today’s perspective may in fact have outpaced the new journalism of their day in imagining a form of writing that would ultimately inspire the commitment to “objectivity” made by the journalistic profession of the twentieth century.

## Romancing the Reporter

*New York Sun* owner Charles Dana once described late-nineteenth-century journalism as a lawless field: “There is no system of maxims or professional rules that I know of that is laid down for the guidance of the journalist” (153). New York newspapers from the period show editors and writers working hard to define and distinguish journalistic writing. Much like the diverse array of novels lumped together under the label of U.S. realism, nineteenth-century newspapers in the United States hardly looked uniform. When Pulitzer began introducing illustrations into his newspaper, for example, many other newspapers considered illustrations inappropriate distractions from the newspaper’s prose. Dana of the *Sun* called the inclusion of images in newspapers “a passing fashion” (98).

If there is one point upon which most of the leading New York newspapers seemed to agree in the 1880s and 1890s, it was their belief that making news was an imaginative act. Pulitzer insisted that his reporters produce:

What is original, distinctive, dramatic, romantic, thrilling, unique, curious, quaint, humorous, odd, apt to be talked about ... without impairing the confidence of the people in the truth of the stories or the character of the paper for reliability and scrupulous cleanness. (qtd. in Juergens 32)

The reporter’s role here is to dramatize and embellish the story. Dana of the *Sun* held a similar view:

The invariable law of a newspaper is to be interesting. Suppose you tell all the truths of science in a way that bores the reader; what is the good? The truths don’t stay in the mind, and nobody thinks any better of you because you have told him the truth tediously. The telling must be vivid and animating. (102)

Although Dana’s and Pulitzer’s approaches to news writing certainly had their differences, both editors display a view of news that does not draw the boundaries that the twentieth-century journalistic and literary professions would later establish between imaginative writing and objective reporting.



In the *World* and the *Sun*, reporters became the primary vehicle through which these papers fashioned new kinds of stories. In some cases, individual reporters, such as Julian Ralph, Richard Harding Davis, and Elizabeth Cochran (known to readers of the *World* as Nellie Bly) became celebrities, and often wrote themselves into their stories. More often, during this period when bylines were scarce, anonymous reporters wrote and figured themselves into news stories. Media historians have tended to understand these reporters as a step in the development of the twentieth-century mass press. Before the late nineteenth century, newspapers tended to be run and written by their editors, with the occasional help of freelance contributors. When newspapers began to hire reporters as staff members working for a single newspaper, these terms of employment marked a move toward the organization and specialization of the writing profession.

At the same time these reporters play a role within nineteenth-century news that is difficult to see if one is looking solely for the connections between nineteenth-century reporters and twentieth-century media. Through the figure of the reporter, new journalistic newspapers reached back to the form of the medieval romance and the earlier-nineteenth-century trope of walking in the city to reanimate these residual cultural forms with a new brand of news. As *Sun* reporter Julian Ralph once explained, the reporter was a “modern knight errant” whose work brought him in contact with a “wide ... and varied collection of peoples, subjects, and situations” (113).

These romantic heroes of new journalism animated the struggle to define the terrain of the modern city and to identify those who could claim expertise over it. The front page of the *New York Sun*, for example, regularly printed a column that boasted the title: “Life in the Metropolis, Dashes Here and There by the *Sun*’s Ubiquitous Reporters.” Through this repeated image of the *Sun*’s reporters, the modern city itself appears synonymous with the reporter’s beat.

An article published in the *Sun* a few days after the Great Blizzard of 1888, which dumped five feet of snow on New York City, shows this new journalistic reporter in action. Published

anonymously and titled “To Coney Island at Last,” this article sends an unnamed reporter across a still-deserted and snow-bound city to reach the iconic beach resort and bring back news. His errand takes the form of a romantic quest through a New York City made dangerous and unfamiliar by the storm. When the reporter finally arrives at Coney Island, he receives a hero’s welcome from the residents who received him “like a strange being from a far land” (1).<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, like his medieval predecessor who typically ends up winning the devotion of a female love interest, the *Sun*’s reporter finds himself rewarded for his heroic acts—through the devotion of a crowd of newspaper readers.

The reporter demonstrates that his role in making the news is far more important than that of the telegraph. With the telegraph lines frozen under mountains of snow from which only “the tops of the telegraph poles stuck out,” the reporter embodies the very act of delivering information that the telegraph lines had begun to dis-embody during the period.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the article points out that even a functioning telegraph line is not so remote from the human touch as it may appear. During the snow storm, “one or two telegraph lines were working at intervals all the while, but the blizzard happened to catch all the operators out of town, and the wires were as good as useless.” The main currents of nineteenth-century news, the article suggests, are not the electric ones running through the telegraph wires, but the romantic ones brought into view by the *Sun*’s intrepid reporters.

Fast-forwarding to the beginning of the twentieth century, we can catch a glimpse of how the romantic reporter of nineteenth-century news would be reinterpreted once the journalistic profession began to solidify its notions of fact and fiction and reject the idea that imagination had a role in credible writing about the present. By the turn of the twentieth century reporters in the United States had begun to wax nostalgic about their predecessors who appeared to have enjoyed an

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<sup>10</sup> All subsequent citations come from this one-page article until otherwise noted.

<sup>11</sup> As Menke has argued in the context of nineteenth-century British literature, “the telegraph encouraged an understanding of information as something essentially removed from its material markers” (77).

artistic license that was no longer available to reporters. In his 1902 short story, “A Derelict,” Richard Harding Davis, who made his name as a reporter for the *Sun* and the *Journal* in the 1880s and 1890s, offers such a view. The story features a brilliant but outmoded reporter named Charlie Channing, who can no longer succeed in a field increasingly dominated by a news agency called the Consolidated Press Syndicate. The syndicate demands a different kind of prose: “We do not want descriptive writing . . . We do not pay you to send us pen-pictures or prose-poems. We want the facts, all the facts, and nothing but the facts” (102). In this new world of “machine-made” news, the new journalistic reporter’s signature style no longer qualifies as news. Even the fictional form that Davis’s critique takes, as a short story, shows that by the turn of the century, nineteenth-century news would end up carved up into distinct regions. In that context, the intrepid reporter of the modern city would become the stuff of fiction.

### **Different Beats**

If Howells appears as an unlikely figure to place at the vanguard of nineteenth-century news, that is in part because of the way in which writers and scholars re-interpreted Howells and his novels once the dynamics of nineteenth-century news disappeared from view. Early twentieth-century writers in the United States who sought to make literary prose respond to their own modern times picked up images of Howells like those in Crinkle’s review with all the bitterness of the inheritors of a bankrupt legacy. Indicators of Howells’s alleged gentility that were far from definitive when the *World* published Crinkle’s review reappear in later characterizations of Howells as hard evidence of his fatal flaws. Frank Norris, for example, famously described Howells’s novels as capturing “the drama of a broken teacup, the tragedy of the walk down the block,” (174). Howells reappears in a similar light in Sinclair Lewis’s 1930 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, in which he called Howells “a pious little old maid whose greatest delight is to have tea at the vicarage” (qtd. in Borus 16). Even if Howells has fared slightly better in more recent criticism on the realist novel, his image has never

quite shaken all the dust that it seemed to acquire when early-twentieth-century writers and critics began to conceptualize his contribution to the literary field.

Obsolescence, however, has a tendency to be deceiving. Sometimes the cultural objects that appear to be the most outmoded are the ones that, at least for a short time, were innovators within a process of media transition. Within the context of nineteenth-century news, *A Hazard of New Fortunes* was one of these early innovations. It was a novel answer to the question of how to capture the present in print in a way that could be imaginative, credible, and inclusive.

Some of the characteristics that made *A Hazard of New Fortunes* novel are so commonplace today that they are hard to recognize: for example, the focus of the text on New York City. Critics have long considered the novel as one of the first to take New York City as its subject matter—an early effort, as Christopher Raczkowski puts it, to “represent the formative tensions of New York’s burgeoning modernity” (285). This focus on the city is significant because, as I have already suggested in the preceding section, the modern city was a central image of nineteenth-century news. Choosing New York as the site of news enabled Howells to signal his own designs of making news. Indeed, this is what Fulkerson, the character who sets *A Hazard of New Fortunes* in motion, suggests in his description of the new bi-weekly literary periodical that is the focal point of Howells’s novel. *Every Other Week* is the answer for people who “begin to look around and ask what’s new.” *A Hazard of New Fortunes* is a new kind of answer to the question of “What’s new?”

Through the pragmatic, middle-aged editor of *Everyone Other Week*, Basil March, the novel imagines a new point of view that departs from the passionate energy embodied by new journalistic reporter. March sees the city, instead, through the eyes of a dispassionate professional editor. In this world that confines the writer to the editorial office, the nineteenth-century trope of walking in the city no longer provides the heroic visions that it does for the reporters of the *Sun* and the *World*. While new journalism worked to recharge the figure of the pedestrian prowler, Howells outmodes

this figure through descriptions of an outdated impressionism. For example, during the infamously exhaustive apartment search that March and his wife conduct at the beginning of the novel, the couple encounters a New York City that is “no longer characteristic, no longer impressive” (58). They can identify things as “picturesque,” but they are no longer excited by them. Mrs. March’s effort to overcome this, at one point, gets written off by the narrator as “absented-minded, dreamy inefficiency” (86).

Ultimately, it is the machinery of the city—and not a well-attuned individual observer—that provides the Marches with the scenes of New York City that they cannot produce on their own. On the Elevated Train, March and his wife find an escape from the trials of their apartment search. And they finally experience the excitement that was missing for them earlier: “What suggestion! What drama! What infinite interest!” (84). The train provides the intensity and excitement that is no longer available to the pedestrian.

Scholars have long cited this famous passage as an illustration of the realist ethos. The elevated train provides the distance associated with the infamous omniscient narrator whose effort to make the world of personal experience inconsequential never becomes fully realized. Yet, considering the realist novel as a genre of nineteenth-century news requires reconsidering the idea that the genre sought to complete the realist project.

Since nineteenth-century news relied on the imagination of a skilled observer for its interest and credibility, the writers like Howells needed to strike a balance between the genre’s emerging impersonal perspective and the personal point of view. The novel’s rejection of individualized impressionism in favor of what I have called the “professional” point of view of Basil March provides an opportunity to observe the dynamics of nineteenth-century news. From a twenty-first-century perspective, it is easy to conclude that the novel’s privileging of professionalism seeks to overwrite the individual observer with a disembodied form of information. But professional distance

in *A Hazard of New Fortunes* does something different. The perspective that March achieves through his role as an editor for *Every Other Week* and his experience on the elevated train serves the purpose of bringing more people into the picture. Through the group brought together by *Every Other Week*, *A Hazard of New Fortunes* poses the question: Could credible news come from a group of observers representing multiple, even conflicting, points of view?

It is worth taking a moment to consider this motley crew of contributors, which the novel takes pains to portray as exceptional. United by Fulkerson's "beautiful vision of a lot of literary fellows breaking loose from the bondage of publishers and playing it alone," (8) the group enables, at least temporarily, the cooperation of "heterogeneous forces." As March explains it:

I don't believe there's another publication in New York that could bring together ... a fraternity and equality crank like poor old Lindau, a belated sociological crank like Woodburn, and a truculent speculator like Dryfoos, and a humanitarian dreamer like young Dryfoos, and a sentimentalist like me, and a nondescript like Beaton, and a pure advertising essence like Fulkerson. (375)

The novel creates a space in which characters whose individual perspectives represent competing realities "co-operate to a reality which March could not deny" (224). *A Hazard of New Fortunes* revises the individual act of imagining the modern city to realize his vision of a collective and more inclusive reality.

The novel manages to hold this reality together only temporarily. The streetcar strike that breaks out in the final phase of *A Hazard of New Fortunes* painfully reveals the shortcomings of the novel's shared approach to making nineteenth-century news. The contributors to *Every Other Week* cannot seem to find a way to make a connection to the strike. Additionally, when three of the publication's original members end up at the same street corner observing a riot that has broken out between the police and the strikers, two of them—the young reformer Conrad Dryfoos and the German socialist Lindau, end up dead. In addition, the scene suggests that, in order to experience the scene, each individual member needed to return to the impressionistic perspective that *Every*

*Other Week* sought to overwrite. March—who was the third person on the scene at the strike—finds himself relating with the passions of the crowd for a fleeting moment, only to struggle back to a position as a “philosophical observer.” Similarly, just before he is shot, Conrad experiences the scene in an “exalted mood” that gave “all events had a dream-like simultaneity.” It is through Conrad’s perspective that it finally becomes possible to see “a little way off, . . . a street-car, and around the car a tumult of shouting, cursing, struggling men.” From the “a little way off,” Conrad’s impression of the scene produces one of the only descriptions of the strikers in the novel.

Before writing off *A Hazard of New Fortunes* as a failure of another kind, however, it is worth considering the fact that Howells chose to make the challenges posed by the strike to *Every Other Week* at the center of the action. Zooming out to consider the novel as a whole, we might say that *A Hazard of New Fortunes* ultimately answers the question of “What’s new?” with another set of questions that it leaves unanswered: Is there a way to write without critical distance? Can writing lead to more inclusive imagined communities? And what is the relationship between writing and action?

From this perspective, *A Hazard of New Fortunes* might be called a novel of nineteenth-century news that captures nineteenth-century media in a transition state. Even as it upholds the idea of news writing as an imaginative act, the novel occupies the threshold between the individualized impressionism of the romantic reporter and the impersonal distance that would come with the journalistic profession of the twentieth century. Through the 1890s, Howells would continue to experiment with new ways of writing news. But, as the journalistic profession increasingly moved away from the idea that news writing was an imaginative act, Howells’s novels would look less and less like news and more and more like fiction.

## Looking Backward

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, an increasing awareness of the exclusive nature of even the most seemingly inclusive would lead writers throughout the Americas and on both sides of the growing divide between literature and journalism to ask similar questions: Whose realities were print publications constructing? What ends did they serve? And whose points of view did they leave out?<sup>12</sup> By the late 1890s in New York, a new generation of newspapers led by the *New York Times*, would begin to compete with new journalistic newspapers like the *World* and the *New York Journal* (in the form it took after its purchase by William Randolph Hearst in 1895) by capitalizing on this growing anxiety. From this emerging perspective, nineteenth-century news could be discredited as “freak journalism” that lacked the moral fiber to hold writers accountable for the realities they constructed.<sup>13</sup>

The journalistic and literary professions of the twentieth century subsequently reorganized the genres of nineteenth-century news along new lines—ultimately writing Howells into the story of the U.S. literary tradition and casting new journalism as an embarrassing moment in the history of a profession that has since learned to hold itself to “higher” standards. Resituating his text within the proto-disciplinary terrain of nineteenth-century news unearths a forgotten part of that story. For turn-of-the-century critics of nineteenth-century news drew on the visions of a depersonalized kind of news first imagined in novels like *A Hazard of New Fortunes*. From this perspective, we might say that the success of Howells’s novel in imagining the future of news ultimately ended the novel’s

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<sup>12</sup>Mark Twain’s 1889 novel *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, for example, transforms the utopian dimensions of nineteenth-century news into a dystopian disaster of epic proportions. In addition, José Martí, who wrote his *Escenas norteamericanas* [North American Scenes] from as foreign correspondence from New York for a variety of Spanish-language newspapers in New York and throughout Latin America, fashioned his own version of the heroic exploration of the city that we saw in the figure of the reporter and the utopian impulse of the U.S. realist novel. As I have argued elsewhere, his articles repeatedly refocus the action of the city away from privileged figures like the reporter of new journalism to the working-class crowds that did not have a voice within the modern city of nineteenth-century news.

<sup>13</sup> The term “freak journalism” appeared frequently in articles published in the *New York Times* in the late 1890s. For instance, two articles that appeared in the paper in 1897 boasted the headlines: “Freak Journalism and the Ball” and “A Question of Freak Ethics.”



ability to produce credible news. Once the journalistic profession began to hold its writers (however imperfectly) to a standard of objectivity, the idea of writing news without recognizing the boundaries between fact and fiction or professional and personal points of view became—as it were—unimaginable.

By looking backward at nineteenth-century news to reanimate the genres it contained and recharge the wires that connected them, we can gain insight into the way in which mass media in any era continually negotiate and reshape old and new representational forms. Granted, media and the communities they help to fashion have changed drastically since the heyday of the daily newspaper. The multi-dimensional and rigidly disciplined mass media that took shape around the turn of the twentieth century flattened and buried the print-centered field of nineteenth-century news. The modern city that once bustled with the nineteenth century's hottest news items has long ceased to be the absolute terrain of news. And print media themselves, following in the footsteps of the modern city, have taken on an air of obsolescence. It is not difficult to imagine a day when the act of reading a printed newspaper—or even opening a hard copy of a book rather than a file of one on a computer or a portable electronic device—will exhibit the same quaintness that permeates the image of the nineteenth-century modern city today.

At the same time, this very distancing of print and its imagined communities also makes it possible and fruitful to put nineteenth-century news in conversation with today's twenty-first century media. Nineteenth-century writers and editors seeking to register the world in print navigated a media landscape that, much like today's, was cluttered with older genres headed for obsolescence and newer ones that competed to become exciting and novel. Although today's new media, such as online newspapers and weblogs (or blogs), may look quite different from the nineteenth-century's telegraph-wired newspapers, twenty-first century media pose similar challenges

to writers and editors seeking to convince today's audiences that they are receiving the latest and greatest news.

With this in mind, it becomes possible to employ the lens of nineteenth-century news to consider the media landscape of the present. For although any mass medium—be it print, radio, television, or the web—encompasses the interlocking aesthetic and political questions that we have seen nineteenth-century writers confronting, today's new media also exhibit a particularly strong parallel to nineteenth-century news. In the early twentieth century, the professionalization of the literary and journalistic fields converged with the rise of film and television. Standards of journalistic objectivity, consequently, took shape in parallel with what would become the dominant media of the twentieth century. In such a context, a relatively clear boundary existed around the people who wrote and produced the news, the media they employed to do so, and the methods through which they provided readers, listeners, or viewers with the latest and greatest news. Certainly, competition and debate still took place within these boundaries, but the journalistic profession at least provided participants in this debate with a common point of reference—a way of situating such slippery concepts as legitimacy, accuracy, and responsibility.

At the outset of the twenty-first century, new media have begun competing with twentieth-century media, namely newspapers, television, and radio, to dominate the realm of news. While the journalistic profession has sought to adapt to this changing media landscape, new media have also brought new participants into the realm of producing news. Bloggers, for instance, have become news sources for many readers and even for some journalists. Myriad websites and social media make it possible for web users to produce and consume news in new ways, while changing the boundaries that surround news in the process.<sup>14</sup> These new media have and will continue to inspire

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<sup>14</sup> I am thinking, for example, of the Facebook newsfeed, which provides users with their own customized stream of news generated by their individualized networks of “friends.”

consternation and concern in some—particularly journalists.<sup>15</sup> From the perspective of the reader of nineteenth-century news, however, they also indicate the beginning of a sea change in the realm of news.

As news media fall out of alignment with the journalistic profession, twenty-first century news may begin to look more like the heterogeneous field of nineteenth-century news than the disciplined one of the twentieth century. In the coming years, so-called objective journalism will have to compete with an emerging, new-media approach to journalism that, in many ways, closely resembles the personal and opinion-driven forms of nineteenth-century news that the journalistic profession left behind. Much like the late nineteenth century, when writers and editors experimented with a variety of formats and styles in order to compete with each other for readers and cultural status, the twenty-first century promises to produce an eclectic field of news, which will likely shift the standards and boundaries of journalism in the process. And as newspaper businesses and journalists seek to reinvent themselves in order to reach twenty-first century audiences, the discipline of journalism and its interrelations with literature are poised to change drastically as well.

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<sup>15</sup> One recent example is a press conference held by President Obama in which he invited a blogger to bring a question about the protests in Iran from one of his contacts there. The move inspired intense criticism from the other White House correspondents. As one reporter explained, “my main feeling is that they could have accomplished this without taking what in my experience is the unprecedented step of planting a designated hitter in the briefing room ... I can’t remember anybody ever doing something like this” (“On the White House”). Interestingly, as in the *Times* articles of the late 1890s critiquing new journalism, the White House correspondent here opposes the presence of the blogger by attempting to undermine his legitimacy as a source of news.

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