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MAN OF LETTERS, LITERARY LADY, JOURNALIST OR REPORTER? *Contributors to the new mass press and the evolving role of the writer 1880 - 1920*

Sarah Lonsdale

Abstract:

The enormous changes wrought in the British newspaper industry during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries brought about a revolution in newspaper reading habits, financing and influence, all aspects of which have been well-documented by historians of the press. But what of the contributor, particularly the freelance whose millions of words formed, mostly anonymously, the content of the new mass market press? How did writers negotiate changes in the literary marketplace during this time as editors demanded more 'news' and less in the way of whimsical paragraphing, and sketches, the traditional newspaper output of the professional man, or woman, of letters? Through the study of memoirs, correspondence and the fictional output of contributors to the press during this time, it is possible to discern the often fraught relations between writers and their most lucrative market.

Keywords: Bourdieu, journalist, newspaper, freelance, man of letters, Northcliffe

In the autumn of 1920, a lively correspondence appeared in *The Journalist*, the National Union of Journalists' in-house paper, concerning the newly established London School of Journalism. In the November issue, one correspondent, F. G. Falla, questions the new institution's Director of Studies, the author Max Pemberton's appropriateness for the position. In a letter published in the previous month's issue, Pemberton claimed that he had been a journalist for more than thirty years. Falla writes: 'Mr Pemberton refers to his thirty years' career as a journalist. Most of us would rather have referred to him as a writer of popular novels...I venture to say that he is not regarded in *our calling* as a journalist'.¹

Comment [s1]:

I have moved everything down, so page one is just title, abstract and key words, as requested

In making this distinction, Falla identifies a literary evolution that had been taking place over the previous four decades, in which writers struggled to establish their position within either the literary, or journalistic world, or both. The years 1880 – 1920 span a phase of rapid transformation in the newspaper press. Using the spatial metaphor of the 'field' Chalaby contends that this phase is characterised by the passing of a pre-industrial set of newspaper practices and the establishment of a market-oriented newspaper industry and a new journalistic 'field' dominated by the new popular daily press. Press historians and sociologists such as Chalaby and Curran stress the 'privileged position of capital' in the creation of the modern press.² The new journalistic field 'is above all an industrial field' where discourse is 'commodified'.³ Scholars have devoted much attention to the emergence both of the new powerful popular papers and their proprietors, both of which warp traditional power fields with their new economic and political influence (as well as Chalaby and Curran, this period has been examined for example by Hampton and Brendon). However there has been little attention paid to those at the very bottom of the journalistic field, below even editors and news editors: the reporters and freelance writers who contributed millions of words for the consumption of the new readership. This is partly because, writing mostly anonymously, they have been difficult to identify. In addition, while the political economy model is useful in providing a broad structure for research, on its own it is too blunt a tool to explain and conceptualise the intricate struggles of individual artists and writers as they negotiate their way through their new literary marketplace.

The success of the popular daily newspaper press combined with other changes such as the arrival of cheap paperbacks and the explosion in national magazine titles, from 626 to 2447 between 1870 – 1900, brought opportunities to educated men and women who needed to earn

a living, but also a radical reappraisal of what being a writer, journalist or ‘man of letters’ meant.⁴ At the same time as the journalistic field was expanding, the literary field was changing in response to the enormous demand, from a newly literate public, for cultural goods. In his analysis of the development of the literary field in late nineteenth century France, Pierre Bourdieu notes that old-style patronage gave way to writers needing to satisfy the demands of the marketplace and that instead of poets and ‘difficult’ writers being prized, ‘writers who are the most compliant and conformist are invited into the field of power’.⁵ According to Bourdieu who, like Chalaby and Curran puts capital at the heart of these changes, the development of the press, ‘becoming increasingly read and increasingly profitable’, paved way for ‘journalists selling themselves to the highest bidder, former ‘martyrs of art’ turned guardians of artistic orthodoxy’.⁶ As a result, the literary field fractured, or became highly polarised, creating enormous resistance between the autonomous, ‘art for art’s sake’ pole and the ‘heteronomous’ economic pole. Moving between these poles becomes increasingly difficult for writers.⁷ While writers need the economic rewards of journalism they crave the ‘prodigious prestige’ that comes with being an artist.⁸ The early twentieth century journalist and novelist Rebecca West, for example, whose family was not wealthy, was paid just £224 for her 1920s novel *Harriet Hume* while she was paid £180 for a single article on ‘Gossip’ for the *Ladies Home Journal*.⁹ The exasperation of an intellectual writer who has to earn a living through popular journalism explodes in a 1922 letter: “I feel dead beat and never want to write another line. I hate *hate* HATE journalism”.¹⁰

While it is not possible to draw exact parallels between late nineteenth century France and Britain, there are enough similarities: the growth of literacy, the growth of the popular press and the decline in old-style artistic patronage, that Bourdieu’s concept of the literary and journalistic fields at this time is helpful in establishing a framework within which to analyse the struggles of writers operating within this rapidly changing marketplace. During this time the number of ‘quality’ papers in England costing one penny or more reduced from 42 in 1889 to 10 in 1913. During the same period the number of ‘popular’ halfpenny papers grew from 10 to 19.¹¹ In addition the prestigious Victorian literary periodicals such as *Fraser’s Magazine*, the *Edinburgh Review* and the *London Magazine* which published works by authors including de Quincey, Thackeray, Matthew Arnold, Charles Lamb and Carlyle either closed or struggled on in more popular form from 1880 onwards and never achieved their mid-Victorian prominence.¹² The market, therefore, for a more cultured journalistic discourse shrank while the market for popular journalism grew and as these changes occurred, so the

meaning of the word 'journalist' changed and the 'professional man of letters' who wrote fiction, essays for intellectual periodicals, paragraphs for the daily press and reviewed books for literary journals gradually died out.¹³ As the economic pole of journalism grew in strength, writers would find it increasingly difficult to find work within the dwindling market for intellectual periodicals and would be forced to find work in the popular press. Patrick Champagne describes the predicament of the journalist who seeks intellectual autonomy but is 'structurally condemned to produce under...economic constraints'. Using dramatic words, Champagne describes the journalist as being 'torn' between the contradictory demands of economic profitability and 'the imperatives proper to intellectual work.'¹⁴

The mass newspaper press required an enlarged workforce, both staff and freelance, to fill its columns. Census returns show that between 1881 and 1911 the numbers of people calling themselves 'journalist, author, editor, ' and 'reporter, shorthand writer' increased from just over 5,600 to nearly 14,000, a nearly threefold increase in three decades.¹⁵ This expansion of the numbers of writers, often from the newly literate lower middle classes created 'a veritable intellectual reserve army directly subject to the laws of the market' even though they may have dreamed of the 'romantic triumph' that comes with being a creative artist.¹⁶ Memoirs and biographies of journalists who graduated from reporter to top jobs in the new press industry exist (for example Bernard Falk's *He laughed in Fleet Street* (1931) and Russell Stannard's *With the Dictators of Fleet Street* (1934)). Both men, who reached the upper echelons of the popular press recall starting their newspaper careers writing fiction for provincial papers. But the vast bulk of contributors remain shadowy and indistinct. How did these men and women negotiate the press revolution – economic, technological and literary – that they were living through? In addition, what did writers like J. M. Barrie, Ford Madox Ford and Jerome K. Jerome, established novelists who began their careers in the periodical and newspaper press think about the evolving nature of their craft?

Dallas Liddle has already established that through reading mid-nineteenth century fictions about the newspaper press, writers' often fraught relationship with the genre of journalism at another time of newspaper proliferation may be discerned. The abolition of Stamp Duty and the subsequent expansion of journalism, argues Liddle, provoked a 'clash of genres' between literature and journalism expressed in the fictions of mid-century writers including Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Anthony Trollope.¹⁷ Similarly the impact of popular journalism was strongly felt in the early twentieth century fiction trade.¹⁸ Some writers, particularly H. G. Wells and Arnold Bennett benefitted enormously from serialising their fiction and writing

articles in the new mass press, although this did not prevent them from agonising over their relationship with popular newspapers.¹⁹ Others such as Henry James and Joseph Conrad retreated to a consciously ‘highbrow’ and elitist position.²⁰ In their studies of Victorian writers’ attitudes to the press, Rubery and Liddle confine themselves to canonical writers. Similarly while scholars such as John Carey and Patrick Collier have charted well-connected ‘highbrow’ authors’ hostile attitude to the growth of popular journalism, the views of writers such as T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf do not reflect the attitudes of most writers of the period who, out of economic necessity, had to write for the popular press. Scholars such as Chris Hopkins now make persuasive arguments for the study of non-canonical early twentieth century fictions. Contemporary commentator Philip Henderson argued that there is a section of the literary marketplace – often disparagingly referred to as ‘middlebrow’ – that may be described as ‘social activity’ and not, as in autonomous, or highbrow literature, ‘an isolated art form obeying its own laws’. Henderson contends that a truly great writer is wholly ‘of his age’ and has ‘*left something of value for succeeding ages*’.²¹

Pierre Bourdieu contends that at times when the journalistic field gains power within the larger field of cultural production, cultural producers tend to do one of two things: they either attack the journalistic field to undermine its claim to cultural capital, or find ways of joining it, to take advantage of its economic capital.²² In his major work on the literary field, *The Rules of Art*, Bourdieu successfully argues, using a sociological analysis of French novelist Flaubert’s *Sentimental Education* that the social structures novelists create in their fiction mirror the structure of the social space in which the authors are situated. At times when competition either for cultural recognition, or for financial reward becomes more intense, tensions within writers’ fiction, and other forms of discourse, become more apparent.²³ This essay, then, asks whether the fiction produced by ‘middlebrow’ writers 1880 - 1920 reveals within it writers’ struggles within a rapidly changing literary and journalistic marketplace. Applying Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of the ‘field’ to readings of fictions, letters and other discourses written at a time when the boundaries of the literary and journalistic field were being radically redrawn should help to reconstruct the dynamic context within which these writers were working.

Contradictory responses to working for the Press within contemporary fictions

For author Dolf Wyllarde for example, who wrote both novels and journalism at the turn of the twentieth century, the excitement of delivering an article to her Fleet Street editor is expressed in her forgotten ground-breaking novel about pioneer freelance women journalists, *The Pathway of the Pioneer* (1906):

The Press is the pulse of the moment, the incarnate vitality of to-day and those who once experience the thrill of being the tiniest particle in that great living force, find all things else a dead and silent world... From the incalculable staff of *The Times* to the short paragraphist in some trivial penny weekly, there is the electric sense of being behind the scenes in the world's drama, of knowing how the machinery works²⁴

For protagonist Magda Burke, a woman journalist struggling to maintain her independence, being part of the press 'machinery' which enables her to pay her rent is all she aspires to. She accepts any job her editor offers, even reporting on a cricket match at Lord's from the public stand because 'authorities at Lord's do not give seats to women reporters'.²⁵ The goal for many early twentieth century women journalists was primarily financial independence, with literary prestige, if it came, a delightful bonus.²⁶ For the novelist and critic Ford Madox Ford, writing journalism, as opposed to fiction is the subject of his early novel *The Inheritors* (1901), written partly with Joseph Conrad. Ford, best known for his tetralogy *Parade's End* (1924 – 28) has been called 'The last great European man of letters'.²⁷ As well as publishing more than two dozen novels and editing the *English Review* Ford wrote essays, reviews and articles for the *Daily Mail*, the short-lived Liberal newspaper *Tribune* and more literary periodicals such as the *Spectator* and *Outlook*.²⁸ In *The Inheritors* the hero, Granger, is very much a struggling 'Victorian man of letters' whose agent and publisher fail to sell enough of his books to allow him to live without muddying his hands in the newspaper press. Granger writes sketches of literary and political celebrities for the *Hour*, a weekly paper edited by Fox, 'the Journal-founder', modelled on Alfred Harmsworth.²⁹ At one point, the contrast between Granger's mercenary journalism, and real art, is brought to dramatic relief as he sees a sculptor working in a garret opposite him:

The ink was thick, pale and sticky; the pen spluttered. I wrote furiously, anxious to be done with it. Once I went and leaned over the balcony, trying to hit on a word that would not come... Through the open window of an opposite garret I could see a sculptor working at a colossal clay model. In his white blouse he seemed big, out of all proportion to the rest of the world³⁰

The insignificance of the narrator's journalism, which tears the 'coarse paper' he is writing on, compared to the almost super-human sculptor creating a work of art renders him ashamed and he experiences a bout of terrible vertigo.³¹ All the same, Ford takes great care to differentiate his unwillingly journalistic *alter ego* from 'one of the rats of the lower journalism..asthmatic, a mass of flesh' who confronts him in his club as the novel reaches its climax. Ford's attempt to position himself within the field – below a great sculptor, but above a 'rat' of the 'lower journalism' reveals the field as a dynamic area of struggle for cultural producers.³² Ford's self-positioning within his text is matched by a real-life incident at around the same time when his friend and collaborator Joseph Conrad, outraged at being congratulated that his novel *Nostromo* was being serialised in the cheap and popular *T. P. 's Weekly*, threw journalist Charles Hind downstairs during a party.³³ According to Bourdieu's diagram of the field of cultural production, serialisation is furthest away from the cultural pole, along with journalism and vaudeville.³⁴ For a cultural producer like Conrad, being forced, through 'dreadfully harassing poverty...to consent to that degradation of his art' produced a violent reaction.³⁵

'The Professional Man of Letters is becoming Starved Out'

In the 1880s and 1890s the road between newspapers and novels was a well-travelled one, followed by earlier Victorian authors including Charles Dickens and George Eliot. In J. M. Barrie's early novel *When a Man's Single* (1888) based on his own experiences at the *Nottingham Journal*, a dusty coat hanging in the reporters' room the of the *Silchester Mirror* is physical proof of this well-trodden path:

The coat had hung unbrushed on a nail for many years, and was so thick with dust that John Milton could draw pictures on it with his finger. According to legend, it was the coat of a distinguished novelist who had once been a reporter on the *Mirror* and had left Silchester unostentatiously by his window³⁶

Just two decades after the publication of *When a Man's Single*, and just over ten years after the launch of the *Daily Mail*, the literary landscape was already changing. Younger writers set out to be 'men of letters', expecting to be able to write books and essays in their spare time. However, exhausted after a day's reporting exploits, they were unable, in their lodgings in the evening to put pen to paper. In journalist Philip Gibbs's 1909 novel *The Street of Adventure*, hero Frank Luttrell embarks on his literary career with ambitions to be a 'man of letters'. His mentor, the world-weary narrator quickly disabuses him: 'The professional man

of letters is becoming starved out', he says, before engineering for Frank an introduction to the editor of a new popular Liberal daily, *The Liberal*, based on the *Tribune* (1906 – 1908) and for which Gibbs worked as literary editor and reporter.³⁷ Through Frank, Gibbs expresses his own literary frustrations: he wants to be a novelist and essayist, but the demands of daily reporting: chasing fire and crime stories, interviewing minor aristocrats and covering celebrity weddings mean at home in the evening he is too exhausted to turn his mind to more refined genres of writing:

Sometimes when he had an evening alone in his rooms at Staple Inn he sat down before blank sheets of paper with the idea of writing something that would satisfy his desire of artistic expression, but the thought of the day's adventures prevented all concentration of mind³⁸

Desk-bound Writer; Active Reporter

Journalists in the early twentieth century still expected to mix 'letters' with 'journalism' – often without leaving their 'Grub Street' garrets or the reading room at the British Museum - the way their predecessors did. Before finding fame as a humorous novelist, P. G.

Wodehouse earned a living in just such a manner:

'There was an evening paper in those days called the *Globe*... It had been a profitable source of income to me for some time because it ran on its front page what were called Turnovers, thousand-word articles of almost unparalleled dullness which turned over onto the second page. You dug these out of reference books and got a guinea for them³⁹

Similarly journalist and novelist Keble Howard records in his memoirs:

I wrote *Love and a Cottage*, *The God in the Garden* and *Love in June* in the hours between dinner and midnight whilst I was editing *The Sketch* [1899 – 1904], in addition to writing 'Motley Notes', articles for the *Daily Mail*⁴⁰

In *When a Man's Single* rookie Fleet Street freelancer Rob Angus is advised by old-timer Rorrison to look up whimsical anecdotes in encyclopaedias held at the British Museum if he wants to be successful.⁴¹ There is no suggestion that he should actually interview anyone. Recent scholarly work on the practice of journalism during this period has identified a steady

increase in the amount of direct quotes published in newspapers from about 1885 as journalists left their desks to go out and interview people.⁴² Similarly in a study of the turn-of-the-century Swedish Press, Jarlbrink records differences between the late nineteenth century desk-bound ‘man of letters’ and the early twentieth century ‘active reporter...doing a lot of work outside the office, alert interviewers, bad stenographers, marvellous news hunters’.. This changing practice evidently challenged many contributors to the press who had hitherto produced copy without leaving their desks. The novelist Stella Gibbons, for example, who worked as a reporter on the *Evening Standard* in the 1920s before turning to fiction, found reporting, ‘such exhausting work. You have to dash all over the place’.⁴³ The clash of old and new styles in journalism is dramatised in Jerome K. Jerome’s novel about journalism *Tommy and Co* (1904) where the old style ‘Grub Street’ journalist is the kindly, erudite and literary Peter Hope and the new reporter is ‘Tommy’, a street urchin who scoops the whole of Fleet Street in getting an interview with a foreign prince by climbing into his moving train carriage. In this novel the old and the new compliment each other: the old setting standards of professionalism and literacy, the new striking out cumbersome phrasing and introducing a popular touch which improves sales of the weekly paper *Good Humour*. By the time Jerome wrote *Tommy and Co*, a nostalgic portrayal of his own experiences of practising journalism in the 1890s, he was already a popular novelist with no need to supplement his income from newspaper commissions.⁴⁴ Other writers fared less well. In this letter to Northcliffe, popular author and journalist Twells Brex realises his whimsical page four paragraphs in the *Daily Mail* are increasingly redundant as the public thirsts for real news during the First World War:

I am carefully studying your present page four and I note that nearly all the articles are articles of *movement* or *action* and that you have no room now for the [humorous] sort that I have always done. The articles of movement and action are by people who have had the *actual experiences*. I cannot make a list of such articles⁴⁵

In a poignant reference to his market being literally squeezed, Brex attempts to make light, in his own column that he has been cut in half: “Mr Half Column Introduces Himself...Mr Whole Column, whom you have known in this page day after day for twenty-one years, will talk to you less often. I am his deputy.”⁴⁶

A Changing Newspaper Language

That early twentieth century novels written by journalists contain lengthy passages regarding the process of reporting and writing suggests journalists at this time were trying to define their position within the field of cultural production, responding to the pressures of being news reporters, yet having grown up with a different expectation and understanding of what ‘journalism’ was. With increasing emphasis on news and shorter articles came a more stylised, pared down way of reporting it. Contemporary commentator H. Simonis in 1917 notes how in the late nineteenth century, journalists on the *Telegraph* would describe a fish as a ‘finny denizen of the deep’ but that during the first years of the twentieth century the ‘fine writing of the old high-priced dailies gave way to plainer English more suited to the masses’.⁴⁷ In Jerome K. Jerome’s *Tommy and Co* Tommy finds fault with an old-style contributor who always describes tea as ‘the cup that cheers but not inebriates’ and crowds as a ‘hydra-headed monster’:

‘If you mean a big street,’ grumbled Tommy, who was going over proofs, ‘why not say a big street? Why must you always call it a “main artery”?’⁴⁸

Fearful of getting the sack, the contributor promises to write henceforth ‘English for the future’.⁴⁹ In their memoirs and their fiction, journalists reveal how they struggled to adapt their written style, and their expectations for themselves as writers. In *Daily Express* reporter Alphonse Courlander’s novel *Mightier than the Sword* (1912) new recruit to the *Day* newspaper Humphrey Quain gets advice from an experienced reporter:

Don’t bother about plans. Start right in with the main facts and put them at the top. Always begin with the facts, and tell the story in the first two paragraphs⁵⁰

This is a clear reference to the classic ‘inverted pyramid’ formula for news writing that evolved during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and which gradually replaced the earlier, more leisurely style of newspaper writing which had tended to tell news events chronologically, as in a work of fiction.⁵¹ Hardcastle, the cub reporter in *Daily Mail* journalist James Landsale Hodson’s novel *Grey Dawn – Red Night* (1929), who first started in journalism by writing poems about current affairs events, is ordered to write: ‘three hundred words at the outside, first person, with the guts in the first paragraph, not in the last sentence’.⁵² This formulaic method of writing news is anathema to the journalist who wants to write a novel in their spare time. In *The Street of Adventure*, hero Frank Luttrell tries to work on a novel after a day on the *Liberal*, but he is haunted by the sub editors’ blue pencil

that had left his prose just a string of ‘jolting sentences and disconnected phrases’.⁵³ For older journalists, like Tommy Pride in *Mightier than the Sword*, the skill of writing has to be re-learned: ‘This is Tommy Pride, one of the ancient bulwarks of the *Sentinel* until they fired him. Now he’s learning to be a halfpenny journalist’.⁵⁴

Space was another issue that clearly concerned Edwardian writers of ‘newspaper fiction’. In Keble Howard’s novel *Lord London* (1913), a fictionalised account of Northcliffe’s rise to power, Howard spends several pages describing the proprietor Hannibal Quain’s conundrum: if the paper was to be smaller in size than the traditional penny papers, and half the price, how was he to fit in both news stories and ‘sufficient advertisements to make the paper a financial success?’ The answer is the tabloidisation of news and comment that Northcliffe pioneered:

Hannibal, as we now know, solved it by printing the essence of the news of the day instead of the full reports printed by the penny papers, and by keeping his literary matter, such as dramatic criticism and literary reviews down to the smallest possible limits⁵⁵

This departure, the selling of words for less than they cost to produce via the subsidy of advertisement is the cause of the ‘struggle’ between literature and journalism identified in Cyril Connolly’s 1938 analysis of early twentieth century literary culture: ‘Fleet Street is a kind of bucket shop which unloads words on the public for less than they are worth’.⁵⁶ His solution, however, is not helpful to most aspiring writers: ‘The need for money is what causes over-production; therefore writers must have private incomes’.⁵⁷ Lord London’s wife suggests early on in the newspaper experiment that there may be literary producers who will be unhappy with this new method of treating words as a commodity rather than art: ‘I hope you won’t bring out a paper that we shall all have to read, Han... because we should have no time to read novels’.⁵⁸ Hannibal dismisses her reservations, telling her it would be commercial idiocy to undermine the reading public’s taste for fiction as most of his weekly and daily papers contain serialised novels and short stories. In another passage in the novel, a new recruit is given the task of ‘boiling down’ an 8,000 word short story to 1,500 words with no mention of how the story’s author might feel about this butchering.

Popular novelist Hall Caine’s furious 1908 letter to Northcliffe after an article he wrote for the *Daily Mail* was cut illustrates what one novelist felt about the brutal newspaper methods:

You cannot have meant to insult me by sending me the sub-editor's message to cut down an article out of which nobody living could remove a line without injuring it...it was the most condensed writing it was possible to produce and yet...it is returned to me with a request that I cut its two columns to one column⁵⁹

The Changing Status of 'Artist' and 'Journalist'

The idea that journalism is a necessary evil to support the struggling poet or novelist was a familiar theme for nineteenth century writers. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poem *Aurora Leigh* (1853 – 56), written when the abolition of Stamp Duty brought the price of newspapers down dramatically, is one such literary work to express this dichotomy:

The midnight oil
Would stink sometimes; there came some vulgar needs:
I had to live therefore I might work
...I wrote for cyclopaedias, magazines,
And weekly papers, holding up my name
To keep it from the mud⁶⁰

This contrast of the 'mud' of journalism with her real art, verse, is echoed in Frank Luttrell's difficulties in Gibbs's *The Street of Adventure* as he struggles to reconcile his journalism with his more literary leanings. However, where *Aurora Leigh* finds no redemption in writing to keep alive, Frank Luttrell claims that his journalist training will inevitably aid his fiction work: 'He must get to the heart of life before he could become a man of letters. He must know and see and suffer before he could be a truth-teller'.⁶¹ For Gibbs/Luttrell journalism is not just about earning money to pay for one's 'art': it helps one become a better artist by showing what real life is all about.

Humphrey Quain, the hero of Courlander's *Mightier than the Sword* takes the argument further. For him, journalism is an end in itself: he sees no nobler vocation than bringing the news back to his paper, and the prose he writes is not inferior to that of a novelist – maybe indeed journalism is more 'true' than any other kind of writing:

This was the journalist's sense – a sixth sense – which urges its possessor to set down everything he observes, and adds an infinite zest to life, since every experience, every thought, every new feeling, means something to write about. ... His thoughts ran in metaphors and symbols⁶²

Here once again we see manoeuvring within the field of cultural production. One of the 'rats' of 'the lower journalism' (Courlander was a *Daily Express* reporter) – is attempting to re-position journalism as a poetic art and thus acquire cultural capital for his product. On the novel's final page Quain dies the journalist-martyr's death, crushed by a French farmers' mob as he tries to get closer to the story he is trying to cover:

In that last moment, before all consciousness left him forever...an odd, whimsical idea twisted his lips into a smile as he thought: 'What a ripping story this will make for *The Day*'⁶³

The journalist as truth-telling martyr

Courlander is here making a bold claim for popular journalism. Far from being a downgraded discourse, it is a noble calling worth dying for. The protagonist's final thought: that his death will make a 'ripping story' for his paper – and therefore help it sell more copies – is, in text, a dramatic structuring of the journalist's predicament: the impossible, unresolvable contradiction of wanting to be 'the stalwart servant of truth' yet working for an enterprise 'that bears a price' and is therefore constantly subjected to economic exigencies.⁶⁴ In the famous nineteenth century novel about art versus journalism, George Gissing's *New Grub Street* (1891), true artists who cannot prostitute their pen to satisfy the new journalistic market die, or slowly starve. In *Mightier than the Sword* the image of the nineteenth century artist starving in a garret for his art has been replaced by the journalist-observer hero, dying as he tells the public of real events. In *The Street of Adventure*, when another young reporter dies of pneumonia after covering the story of a shipwreck, his fellow reporters call his death 'martyrdom' emphasising the noble cause for which he died.⁶⁵ Both Gibbs and Courlander had literary aspirations, yet saw newspaper journalism as a heroic apprenticeship, and even an end in itself. This idea of the journalist-as-truth-telling-martyr was reinforced by the deaths of several journalists in South Africa while covering the Boer Wars. Kitchener's tactics – which would be reversed in the First World War – were to make the Boer War correspondents take the same risks as the soldiers. E. F. Knight, the *Morning Post* correspondent had his arm shattered by a bullet; Mitchell of the *Standard* died of typhoid in

besieged Ladysmith; Hellowell, a *Daily Mail* correspondent was captured by the Boers trying to get his despatches out of Mafeking.⁶⁶ In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, before the Modernist movement began to reject realist narrative forms, the success of foreign correspondents such as G W Steevens in presenting real-life drama and tragedy in the vivid, impressionistic style that Steevens pioneered posed a bold challenge to realist fiction, a challenge celebrated in Edwardian novels written by journalists.

After Steevens' death at Ladysmith many journalists including Philip Gibbs and fellow *Daily Mail* journalist Charles Hands tried to emulate his style and bravado, and novelists did too. In a 1908 letter to his friend Northcliffe, Max Pemberton suggests: 'as a temporary change from fiction, I should like to do some work in the Steevens vein...I have not made sufficient use of my descriptive powers'. Knowing that by now the skills required by a successful reporter are very different to those of a novelist, Northcliffe declines the request.⁶⁷ Northcliffe had already fired a warning shot at 'Bohemians – many of them drunken, irregular rascals' who thought they could write for the modern newspaper press in 1903.⁶⁸ Whereas 'we shall always have the reporter with us', writers interested in 'literary and dramatic' work will now not find a place at his newspapers.⁶⁹ This modern newspaper proprietor's attack on journalists who saw themselves as literary men first, rather than reporters, is reproduced in fiction in Gibbs' *The Street of Adventure* when editor Bellamy, short of news copy for the next edition, says: 'I shall have to wake up some of my gentlemen downstairs. They're too fond of writing prose poems'.⁷⁰

Conclusion

Novelists who wrote journalism and journalists who wrote fiction 1880 – 1920 address in their work a wide range of issues thrown up by changes in the literary marketplace at a time when the journalistic and literary field boundaries were being disputed by cultural producers. Fictions express writers' preoccupation with the status of journalism, the role of the writer, and the market for which he was producing his material. These fictions, many ignored by the Academy, help reconstruct the dynamic struggles enjoined by agents at the birth of the popular press. Fictions by 'literary' writers express their fears that popular newspapers were distorting and degrading the market. Through their fiction, they distance themselves from popular journalism. Oxford-educated Aldous Huxley, for example, in his first published novel *Crome Yellow* stresses the difference between the protagonist poet and the journalist-machine Mr Barbecue-Smith who boasts of producing 3,800 words in two-and-a-half hours

while semi-conscious.⁷¹ Freelance contributors and reporters reveal a complex relationship with their powerful paymaster. Fictions reveal that far from cynically selling their pen to the 'highest bidder' or willingly 'commodifying' their discourse to suit the popular press these writers reflected deeply on their written style and how popular journalism was affecting it.⁷² Journalist-novelists operating during the second half of this period such as Gibbs and Courlander however reveal a certain defiant pride in their new medium. In another prolific journalist and novelist Edgar Wallace's thriller *The Council of Justice* (1908), journalists working on the new halfpenny *Megaphone* are supremely professional 'alert young men', finding clues in the unfolding anarchist plots long before either the police, politicians or verbose writers on the 'pompous' older papers.⁷³ Wallace was a Board School pupil for whom popular journalism was an escape from his adopted father's trade of Billingsgate fish porter.⁷⁴ Similarly James Lansdale Hodson's ability to write at all meant that he avoided his siblings' destiny of a life in a Manchester cotton mill.⁷⁵ Applying field theory to contemporary fictions enables analysis of individual agents' responses to the challenges of the newly configured marketplace. We can see their actions are 'the result of a complex...interplay' between their social and educational background and their position within the field.⁷⁶ They thus provide a route back into a world of struggling writers who scratched out a living with their pens as their professional world evolved rapidly around them.

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Notes

¹ F. G Falla to the editor, November 1920. *The Journalist*. NUJ Archives. (Emphasis added).

² Curran, "The industrialisation of the Press," 27.

³ Chalaby, *Invention of Journalism*, 35, 66.

⁴ Bonham-Carter *Authors by Profession*, 176.

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- ⁵ Bourdieu, *Rules of Art*, 49
- ⁶ Ibid, 49, 53, 59.
- ⁷ Benson and Neveu *The Journalistic Sphere*, 4-5.
- ⁸ Bourdieu, *Art*, 55.
- ⁹ West, *Letters of Rebecca West*, 113-114.
- ¹⁰ Ibid, 52.
- ¹¹ Chalaby, *Invention*, 168.
- ¹² Bonham-Carter, *Authors*, 53-63.
- ¹³ Gross, *The Rise and Fall*, 26-97.
- ¹⁴ Champagne "The 'double dependency'", 50, 57.
- ¹⁵ Great Britain Office for National Statistics *Census Data*.
- ¹⁶ Bourdieu, *Rules*, 55-57.
- ¹⁷ Liddle, *The Dynamics of Genre*, 168.
- ¹⁸ Bonham-Carter, *Authors*, 180.
- ¹⁹ See for example Bennett's play *What the Public Wants* (1909), a satire of Northcliffe and his empire
- ²⁰ See for example Rubery (2009).
- ²¹ Henderson, *The Novel Today*, 7, emphasis added.
- ²² Bourdieu, *On Television and Journalism*, 75.
- ²³ Bourdieu, *Rules of Art*, 3-40.
- ²⁴ Wyllarde, *Pathway of the Pioneer*, 35-36
- ²⁵ Ibid, 233.
- ²⁶ Lonsdale. "We Agreed that Women", 461-475
- ²⁷ Stang, *Ford Madox Ford*, 3.
- ²⁸ Saunders and Stang, *Ford: Critical Essays*, x.
- ²⁹ Ford, *Inheritors*, 41; McDonald, *British Literary Culture 1880-1914*, 178.
- ³⁰ Ford, *Inheritors*, 121.
- ³¹ Ibid, 122.
- ³² Ibid, 229.
- ³³ Ford, *Return to Yesterday*, 24-25.
- ³⁴ Bourdieu, *Rules of Art*, 124.
- ³⁵ Ford, *Return*, 25.
- ³⁶ Barrie, *When a Man's Single*, 35.
- ³⁷ Gibbs, *The Street of Adventure*, 24; Gibbs, *Adventures in Journalism*.
- ³⁸ Gibbs, *The Street*, 97.
- ³⁹ Wodehouse, *Over Seventy*, 28.
- ⁴⁰ Howard, *My Motley Life*, 178.
- ⁴¹ Barrie, *When a Man's*, 167.
- ⁴² Broesma, "The Rise of the Interview", 2013
- ⁴³ Oliver, *Out of the Woodshed*, 63.
- ⁴⁴ Jerome, *My Life and Times*, 55-57.
- ⁴⁵ Twells Brex to Lord Northcliffe, 29 May 1918. Northcliffe Papers, British Library, London. Add 62220.
- ⁴⁶ *Daily Mail*, 21 February 1917.
- ⁴⁷ Simonis, *Street of Ink*, 14.
- ⁴⁸ Jerome, *Tommy and Co.*, 138.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid, 139.
- ⁵⁰ Courlander, *Mightier than the Sword*, 102.
- ⁵¹ Scanlan, *Reporting and Writing*, 195.
- ⁵² Hodson, *Grey Dawn – Red Night*, 75.
- ⁵³ Gibbs, *Street*, 96.
- ⁵⁴ Courlander, *Mightier*, 15.
- ⁵⁵ Howard, *Lord London*, 235.
- ⁵⁶ Connolly, *Enemies of Promise*, 22.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid, 99
- ⁵⁸ Howard, *Lord London*, 202.
- ⁵⁹ Hall Caine to Lord Northcliffe, 8 May 1908. Northcliffe Papers, British Library, London. Add 62178.
- ⁶⁰ Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, 124.

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- ⁶¹ Gibbs, *Street*, 96.
- ⁶² Courlander, *Mightier*, 62.
- ⁶³ *Ibid*, 352.
- ⁶⁴ Champagne, “double dependency”, 50-51.
- ⁶⁵ Gibbs, *Street*, 35.
- ⁶⁶ Knightley, *First Casualty*, 56, 74; Wallace, *People*, 113; James, *High Pressure*, 142.
- ⁶⁷ Max Pemberton to Lord Northcliffe, 21 August 1908. Northcliffe Papers, British Library, London. Add 62177.
- ⁶⁸ Harmsworth, “The Making of a Newspaper”, 168
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 177.
- ⁷⁰ Gibbs, *Street*, 47.
- ⁷¹ Huxley, *Crome Yellow*, 224
- ⁷² Bourdieu, *Rules*, 59; Chalaby, *Invention*, 66.
- ⁷³ Wallace, *Council of Justice*, 188.
- ⁷⁴ Wallace, *People*, 96-121
- ⁷⁵ Hodson, *Grey Dawn*, 20
- ⁷⁶ Benson and Neveu, *The journalistic sphere*, 18.

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