

JOURNALISM IN BRITAIN

a historical introduction

MARTIN
CONBOY



Journalism in Britain

Es war einmal ein Kind
Das wusch sich nie das Ohr.
Da wuchs ihm aus dem Ohr, o Schreck
Ein kleiner Baum hervor.
(Brecht)

Für Lara Mathilda (nicht mehr ein Kind!)

Journalism in Britain

A Historical Introduction

Martin Conboy



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Contents

Introduction	1
Distinguishing Between News and Journalism	1
Different Traditions of Journalism	2
The Importance of Miscellany for Journalism	3
Journalism as a Discourse	4
Why History Matters	6
1 Journalism and the Coming of Mass Markets	8
Picking Up the Commercial Pace	8
Newnes – Preparing the Ground for Mass Market Papers	11
Stead – Pioneering the Popular Campaign	12
The Extension of the New Journalism	14
Drawing in the Popular Audience	16
Creating a Mass Daily Publication: Harmsworth's <i>Daily Mail</i>	17
Harmsworth's First Imitator: The <i>Daily Express</i>	18
Adapting the Language of the Popular Press	18
2 The Impact of Broadcasting and the Public Sphere	21
The Potential of Radio	22
Navigating Political Challenges	23
Aiming for a National Consensus	24
Fear and Morality	25
Creating Journalism for the Listening Audience	25
War Shapes a National Channel of Communication	26
Growth in Content and Scope	27
The Advent of Commercial Radio Journalism	28
Digital Innovation in Radio Journalism Audience Construction	28
Television Journalism: A Slow Start	29
The Broadcasting Monopoly Cracks	30
The BBC Responds to Competition	32
ITN Ups the Stakes	33
Thatcher and the Onslaught on Public Service Broadcasting	34
John Birt and the BBC's Push for Populism	35
Attempts at Renewal	36
The Contribution of Channel Four	37
Documentary and Current Affairs	38
Celebrity Investigative Journalism	39

3	Patterns of Ownership and Control	43
	Commercial Imperatives: Advertising and Audiences	44
	The Direct Influence of Ownership	44
	Journalism, Business and the Press Barons	45
	Northcliffe, Beaverbrook and Rothermere: Impact and Consequences	46
	The Limits of Personal Influence	47
	Reconfiguration of the Popular Market	49
	Postwar: Between Barons and Moguls	50
	Thomson: A New Vision of Control	51
	The Political Effects of Corporate Consensus	52
	Murdoch: The Ultimate Mogul	53
	Maxwell: Bombast and Bankruptcy	56
	Proprietors and Editors: Shifts in Power	56
	Political Concerns About Press Content	58
	Press Complaints Commission	59
	State Regulation and Broadcast Journalism	61
	Overt State Control	63
4	Women as Consumers and Producers of Journalism	67
	Women: Hidden From the Mainstream	68
	Nineteenth-Century Women Journalists	68
	Advocacy Journalism	69
	The Return of the Suppressed	70
	Women Become a Key Market	71
	Women's Radicalism Reborn	73
	Women Journalists on the Radio	74
	Women and Television Journalism	76
	Surveys and Statistics	77
	Academic Debate	78
	New Girls: New Ghetto?	78
5	Technology and Journalism	81
	Technology's Roles	81
	Photography and Journalism	82
	Technology and Newspaper Language	83
	Broadcast Journalism: Effects and Consequences	85
	On the Cusp between Radio and Television	86
	The Shaping of Television Journalism	89
	Newspapers: Technological Change Delayed	92
	The Wapping Revolution	93
	Media Multiplication	96
	The Ironies of Instant Access	98
	Convergence and Journalism	100
	Fitting the News to the Customer	100
	Online Challenge and Change	101

The Visual Impact of Online Journalism	103
Contesting the Achievements of Online Journalism	104
Technology, Journalism and Postmodernity	105
6 Styling the Century: Tabloid Journalism	109
The Tabloid is Named	110
The <i>Daily Mirror</i> : A Commercial for the Working Class	110
Speaking for the People	112
The <i>Sun</i> : A Blue-Collar Vernacular for a New Generation	114
Sexualizing Popular Culture	115
The Tabloids and Royalty: Declining Deference	116
Tabloidization: Process or Panic?	117
Changing Formats	118
Changing Style	118
The Virtues of Tabloid Style	119
From Newspapers to the Wider World	121
Celebrity and Tabloid Culture	123
7 Journalism and Political Coverage	126
The Democratic Ideal	126
The Lobby	128
Press Secretaries and Political Influence	128
Newspapers and Political Reporting	129
The Style of Political Reporting	131
Broadcast Journalism and the State	132
The Broadcasting Paradox: Increase and Decline	133
The Televising of Parliament	134
Serving the Public or Fostering Cynicism	135
Quality Decline or Dumbing Down?	137
PR – Complement or Enemy?	138
Political Reporting and the Web	139
8 Alternative Journalism	142
Defining an Alternative Tradition	142
Radical Women's Press	143
The Trades Union Model	144
Socialist and Communist Publications	145
The Commercial Consolidation of the <i>Daily Herald</i>	145
The Long Decline of the <i>Daily Herald</i>	146
The 1960s: Contexts and Titles	146
Local Alternative Journalism	147
<i>Red Pepper</i>	148
Alternative Journalism as Social Empowerment	149
Alternatives Within the Mainstream	150
Web-Alternatives	151

9 Magazine Journalism: The Most Influential Genre	154
Women's Magazines: Setting Patterns of Expectation	155
Late Victorian Era	156
The New Journalism and Women's Magazines	156
Mid-Century Developments	157
From the Swinging Sixties to Teen Mags	158
The Tradition of the General Magazine	160
From Generalist to Specialist	161
Men's Magazines	161
10 Hacks or Heroes?	165
The Rise of the Hack	165
Reputation and Reflection	167
The National Union of Journalists	168
Technology and the Erosion of Professional Territory	170
Education as a Professionalizing Trend	171
Scepticism from Within	172
Social Composition – Who Are They?	173
Heroes	174
11 Local Journalism	179
The Arrival of the Local	179
The Peak of the Market: Consolidation	180
New Technology and the Local Press	182
Regional Television Journalism	183
Local Radio Journalism	185
The Scottish Experience	185
Broadcasting Devolution in Scotland	187
Journalism in Wales: Community and Identity	188
Conclusion	191
History and the Spectrum of Journalism	191
<i>Chronology</i>	195
<i>Bibliography</i>	201
<i>Index</i>	221

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Nether Edge, October 2010

Introduction

This introduction will do two things. First, it will outline a working definition of journalism. Second, it will make the case why the history of journalism is important to our contemporary understanding of its role in society. Throughout the book, the history of journalism over the twentieth century will be assessed against the definitions of this opening chapter as it has adapted to and been shaped by political, economic and technological pressures.

Distinguishing Between News and Journalism

First, we need to be able to distinguish between news and journalism. We can ask a friend if they have any news. We don't ask if they have any journalism, and despite the common use of the word 'news' as a synonym for 'journalism', the latter is a very particular set of traditions for the dissemination of news. Journalism must have an institutional framework for its engagement with the facts about and opinions on the contemporary world. It is varied in its form, technological platform and genre. Its forms can range from hard news or a commentary on contemporary politics to satirical reviews or celebrity gossip, to name but a few. It has also changed significantly over time in both its content and its emphasis under political, cultural, economic and technological pressures. Journalism is very much of its time and therefore also very much rooted in its own history.

News is an essential lubricant in human affairs and is certainly as old as social interaction itself. In centuries gone by, travellers, soldiers, merchants, even farmers returning from market, might be asked what news they had heard. Such news did not depend upon formal modes of transmission such as print and later broadcasting and could be equally well exchanged in public meeting places, both official and unofficial – the church, the tavern or the village pump! Journalism, as a commercially structured, periodically produced extension of the older patterns of informal dissemination of information and commentary, is a more recent practice. The features of journalism which distinguish it from the more malleable concept of 'news' lie in the regularity of its publication, which is sometimes referred to as its 'periodicity', and the consistency of its commercial and professional packaging. This means that journalism takes on a shape and an identity which remain recognizable and therefore saleable over time. The point at which we can begin to distinguish it from the more general term of 'news' may be coupled with the introduction of the word 'journalism' into the English language in 1833, when it was first used in the *Westminster Review* in a discussion of the changes in periodical publications of the time. It has been claimed that this neologism was required to encompass the linkage between

high cultural forms such as the periodical *Edinburgh* and *Westminster Reviews* and the commercial daily press. Campbell describes how the new word came to signify the yoking of higher and lower cultural forms which was a challenge to existing cultural distinctions (2000: 40). Journalism became structured around the commercialization and ultimately the popularization of the flow of information and opinion about events in the world (Conboy, 2004: 122).

To corroborate the comparatively recent distinctiveness of journalism, in contrast to news, Chalaby (1998) claims that it was as late as 1855, with the final lifting of taxes on newspapers – the so-called ‘taxes on knowledge’ – that journalism as we understand it today began to take shape as a commodified form of public address, a product that could be conceived and designed primarily to be sold at a profit to a regular market. Others such as Briggs and Burke (2002), Sommerville (1996) and Raymond (1996) have argued that all the ingredients necessary for journalism had been present within British society for a lot longer, even if it took the economic and political convulsions of the mid-nineteenth century to bring them into something approaching this consistently marketable and profitable form. Indeed, there had been a variety of successful periodical publications since the seventeenth century which had provided a wide range of experiments in disseminating information about the world to a paying audience. All this makes a strong base-line for arguing that to understand journalism we need to grasp both its antecedents and the way in which it was created as a response to radical changes in the flow of information. These two observations have a particular importance for the challenges and opportunities which are impacting upon it in the present as it seeks to navigate turbulent economic and technological changes.

Different Traditions of Journalism

By the end of the nineteenth century, the productive dialogue between high and popular culture had reached a particularly fertile moment, as demonstrated by a note sent from one giant of Victorian journalism, Newnes, to another, Stead, in 1890 on their parting as collaborators on the *Review of Reviews*:

There is one kind of journalism which directs the affairs of nations; it makes and unmakes cabinets; it upsets governments, builds up navies and does many other great things. It is magnificent. This is your journalism. There is another kind of journalism which has no such great ambitions. It is content to plod on, year after year, giving wholesome and harmless entertainment to crowds of hardworking people, craving for a little fun and amusement. It is quite humble and unpretentious. This is my journalism. (Friederichs, 1911: 116–17)

This division of the goals of two distinct forms of journalism is a neat encapsulation of the point of departure for the modern period of journalism, where journalism could be located either as a politically charged form of communication whose goal

was to challenge and change society or as a form of populist entertainment which aimed principally to distract a majority of the population from their daily cares. It had become a kind of textual spectrum which stretched from absolute entertainment to an impassioned attention to political affairs.

Some have argued – in company with the second President of the United States of America, Thomas Jefferson – that given a choice between government without newspapers and newspapers without government, they would prefer the latter. Carey (1996) has made a strong contemporary argument, for instance, that journalism is in fact synonymous with democracy:

Journalism is another name for democracy or, better, you cannot have journalism without democracy. The practices of journalism are not self-justifying; rather, they are justified in terms of the consequences they engender, namely the constitution of a democratic social order.

The Importance of Miscellany for Journalism

Yet, beyond these somewhat exaggerated claims for the primacy of one variety – one main function of journalism, we might say – the journalism which emerged after the lifting of taxes in 1855 has been constituted as a commercial mixture whose contribution to democracy combined altruism with anarchy, investigation with innuendo, and social concern with sensationalist tub-thumping. It is only in its broadest contribution to public understanding that it can, rightly, be considered as one commentator has proposed: ‘The primary sense-making practice of modernity’ (Hartley, 1996: 12). Journalism contributes to the needs of the modern society precisely because of its ability to engage with the multiple levels of our daily lives, which are sometimes occupied by serious social or political questions and at others are lightened by gossip, witty commentary or observations on the merits of newly released films and music or recently published books. Journalism’s miscellany assists us in dealing with the complexity of modernity, and because of its need for mass markets in the twentieth century, it responds on a genuinely popular level by providing this miscellany for mass consumption.

The miscellany across what we might call journalism’s spectrum has been complicated still further by the fact that in all its forms it has been defined – and indeed judged – from a variety of perspectives, meaning that it is expected to perform several (sometimes incompatible) tasks simultaneously. These perspectives include its relationship to democracy; its publication of information of contemporary importance; its ability to provide topical and popular entertainment; its ability through critical intervention and commentary to monitor the activities of the rich and influential; and through these activities, to monitor also the extent to which it has acted as a stimulus to the constitution of an interrelating series of public spheres by its ability to foster public discussion. These public spheres range from an austere intellectual forum to the rowdy knockabout of political mockery, and from the interests of those

intent on monitoring the policies of MPs to those who prefer to scrutinize the tastes and lifestyles of celebrities. In many expressions of journalism's repertoire, levity and good humour have had a part to play, whether this has meant the incorporation of an element of entertainment either in its content – such as human interest or a witty writing style – or through the juxtaposition of more distracting trivial matters along with the serious.

The building blocks of all journalism are the report, the news bulletin and the feature article whether in a written or broadcast format. To these we might add the opinion piece, the commentary, the interview and the editorial, together with interactive features such as letters to the editor and more recent additions such as vox pops, phone-ins, live studio debates and e-mails. It is this range of interaction between genre and audience which has distinguished journalism from mere 'news'. Moreover, within the basic configurations of contemporary journalism there are many combinations and crossovers that challenge more traditionalist distinctions between hard news and soft news, fact and opinion, information and entertainment. Journalism has within this variety always enabled conflicting views of its functions to co-exist without closure around any one of them. It is, in fact, an extraordinarily flexible set of communicative practices. Good journalism has always been able to accommodate a variety of genres, styles and intentions – as we can witness today from the serious analysis of *Newsnight* to the mass appeal of the *Sun*'s well-honed reactionary iconoclasm; from the agenda-setting *Channel 4 News* to the alternative voice of *Indymedia*. Journalism needs to encompass this variety as it seeks to maintain an engagement with the facts of events in the modern world. There are still however hierarchies of believability within journalism, from BBC News and the so-called 'newspapers of record' to the *Sunday Sport* and Kelvin MacKenzie's late and unlamented News Bunny, from the gossip columns of celebrity magazines to the probing of anarchist online publications. Even these hierarchies are problematized by an 'informed scepticism about what is read, seen and heard in the journalistic media' which McNair (1998: 39) assumes is a common, and we might add healthy, feature of journalism's contemporary reception environment.

Journalism as a Discourse

Given the multi-faceted nature highlighted above, journalism can best be described as a form of discourse. In a first sense of the word, this means that it can only be understood as a series of debates and even disagreements concerning what can and cannot be considered as journalism and, as one might expect, these debates ebb and flow over time. Journalism has emerged both as consisting of the claims and counter-claims of a variety of speakers on its behalf – meaning that we must always keep in mind a multiple set relationships for the practice of journalism, with society, with its commercial requirements, with politics, and also as a relatively autonomous cultural practice with its own traditions and history. Journalism can be viewed as an intersection of many conflicting interests, with some of these, at various points

in history, having clearer priority than others. Furthermore, it is a set of practices which is structured by the constraints of time, space, money and competition. Within these constraints, Deuze (2005a) argues that it is, to a large extent, the way in which journalists themselves have come to talk about their practice which defines contemporary journalism, while the nature of these same constraints was instrumental historically in the structuring of journalism as a form of language that was confident enough to be able to distinguish itself from its sources through editorial interventions in Matheson's (2000) account of early twentieth-century British newspapers.

Discourse – according to the second sense in which it is often used in contemporary debates around language and culture – is a term influenced by the writing of Michel Foucault (1974). Discourses, according to Foucault, are intrinsically bound up with questions of power since they give expression to the meanings and values of institutions or practices and, in doing so, claim authority for themselves. The discourse of journalism defines, describes and limits what it is possible to say with respect to journalism, whether at its margins or at its institutional core. It describes the ways in which it is possible to think about and criticize the characteristic practices of journalism. One advantage of considering journalism in this way is that it denaturalizes certain common-sense assumptions that are made about it and enables us to criticize these and question their logic. For the purposes of this historical overview, it also assists us in assessing how the dominant opinions in debates over journalism's power and value have altered over time. Certainly, from a historical perspective, many of the expectations which we have come to associate with journalism can be regarded discursively, such as the freedom of the press, the news media as a 'Fourth Estate' and its objectivity, the political functions of journalism and the often obscured economic imperative of journalism – its political economy.

Another advantage of considering journalism as a discourse is that it enables us to view it as creating new forms of power as well as new forms of access to representation. This suggests that journalism has never simply contested the power which lay outside its own sphere of influence – for instance, political power – but that it has instead always been deeply involved in the creation of power structures themselves and particularly, but not exclusively, those power structures which operate within public communication. One of the most widespread fallacies, the so-called 'Whig account of journalism' (Curran and Seaton, 2003), sees it as the triumphant march of the political emancipation of Western societies through their news media (Siebert, 1965). Journalism itself has contributed to this account and drawn upon it as a way of legitimating its relationship with the political status quo. Most recently this underpinned many attempts by Western journalism agencies, including the BBC, to provide journalism training to Eastern European countries based on a tacit assumption that Western free market or public service models of journalism were an inevitable evolutionary step for newly democratized states. Considering journalism as a discourse disrupts any inevitability in the direction which it has taken or the milestones on this trajectory and highlights instead the ways that its development has always been accompanied by disagreement and political preference. In addition, it encourages us to emphasize the variety of practices which it has incorporated over the centuries

and demonstrates how much of journalism's resilience and vitality come from its ability to adapt to changes in cultural and economic conditions.

Why History Matters

One of the main reasons for understanding the history of journalism is that it provides us with a clearer context in which to explore claims concerning the inevitability of change or conservatism within journalism today. For instance, when considering whether the internet will consign the newspaper, radio journalism or television journalism to history's scrapheap, we might do well to bear in mind the fact that no media technology has as yet been obliterated by an innovation and so, despite anxieties and prophecies to the contrary, newspapers have not been forced out of business by the power of radio, the cinema was not ousted by television, radio was not displaced by television, and the internet has done nothing so far but add to the richness of the journalistic spectrum. History can help us to appreciate the diversity and the adaptability of journalism and to discourage any view of a simple trajectory, either downhill from a golden peak or uphill towards a state of technological or professional perfection. If anything, its movement across time can best be described as a zig-zag which according to Briggs and Burke (2002) has characterized most of the communication media's history.

Writing specifically about newspapers, Black sees journalism's history as being profoundly informed by the changes necessary within a competitive market:

Change is therefore a central theme in newspaper history, not only because of its occurrence, and the speed of its occurrence, but also as the awareness of change creates a sense of transience and opportunity. Each period of English newspaper history can be presented as one of transformation, shifts in content, production, distribution, the nature of competition, and the social context. (2001: 1)

By focusing on journalism's history, we can begin to address whether we are really witnessing the final countdown for this particular form of public communication; how journalism has reacted to previous crises; and how today's debates can be illuminated by an appreciation that what we understand by journalism and its main functions has changed over the last hundred years and will, no doubt, continue to change over the next century.

The contours of contemporary journalism had been set long before the dawn of the twentieth century. In the next chapter, we will consider some of the more pertinent changes of the late nineteenth century which enabled journalism to emerge and develop as such a robust and influential form of public communication. These will focus on the continuities which have allowed journalism to maintain a coherence over the last hundred years during an unprecedented period of cultural and technological change. Providing such a historical context, it is hoped, will better enable us to understand the nature of those challenges it faces in the present.

Conclusion

No single-sentence definition of journalism is really adequate to describe the complexity and variety of its output. It encompasses a wide range of practices which together share an overriding concern with the public communication of contemporary affairs and the discussion of those affairs. Journalism, in mapping the contours of the contemporary world, does so across what we might term a textual spectrum. It has developed as a commercial product which depends as much on the regularity of its appearance as on the stability of its character within a highly differentiated market. The specifics of its expression have been shaped over time by a variety of cultural, technological, economic and political factors, and the present forms of journalism bear all the hallmarks of these historical influences. That is why history is so important to understanding the journalism of the present day.

FURTHER READING

- Briggs, A. and Burke, P. (2002) *A Social History of the Media*. Cambridge: Polity. In its early chapters, this provides an illuminating account of the ways in which journalism grew out of a range of technological, cultural and political motivations from the Early Modern period to the dawn of the modern age.
- Raymond, J. (1996) *The Invention of the Newspaper: English Newsbooks, 1641–1649*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. This provides a collection of very specific and detailed accounts of the publications of this radical period in English history, which saw the emergence of practices that were to help in defining the contours of what later came to be called journalism.
- Smith, A. (1979) *The Newspaper: An international History*. London: Thames and Hudson. This is a colourful and engaging account of the rise of the newspaper as an international medium for public communication.
- Sommerville, J. (1996) *The News Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. This explores the radical changes in understanding the contemporary world which were necessary for the practices of newsgathering and dissemination to gain value in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It also proposes that the development of 'news' is a truly revolutionary moment in social developments in Western Europe.

1

Journalism and the Coming of Mass Markets

Introduction

It would be no exaggeration to say that modern journalism began in 1896 – on 4 May 1896, to be precise. This was not because of any single innovation in format or technology but in the way that Alfred Harmsworth's *Daily Mail*, launched on that day, managed to draw a complex range of technical, commercial and textual features into one publication. An astute awareness of the requirements of advertisers, a recognition of the social aspirations of a class of new reader, an ability to produce economies of scale in production, and the organizational genius to be able to distribute this rapidly and effectively, enabled it to become the first truly mass circulation paper, to the extent that by 1900 it was selling in excess of a million copies per day. Chalaby has claimed that with the *Daily Mail*, Harmsworth brought the daily newspaper into the twentieth century and modernized journalism in the process (Chalaby, 2000: 34). However, none of this emerged from a vacuum. Harmsworth was simply a brilliant co-ordinator of these various elements.

This revolution also ushered in what we may call the popular century, where developments in the popular newspaper began to drive the practices of the entire press and where these commercial concerns consolidated their dominance as ever more channels of communication became available. Yet the *Daily Mail*, which was to have such a profound effect on the structure of the journalism of the next century, was the culmination of a sequence of events that had started with a government decision to abolish taxes on newspapers in 1855. This chapter will set out the chronology and debates around the emergence of mass popular markets from the late nineteenth century and show how these were to influence all subsequent mainstream journalism.

Picking Up the Commercial Pace

The abolition of taxes on newspapers in 1855 had begun to release the full force of competition into newspaper production. Elements of sensationalism and entertainment which had hitherto been prominent in the Sunday market were now to be included in the most successful launch of the period, the *Daily Telegraph*, in the very same year as the taxes were lifted. Henceforth newspapers would survive as

commercial concerns or not at all. They would do so by maximizing their profits through targeting a topical miscellany aimed at specific readerships that were to be addressed with increasing efficiency. Of course this did not occur overnight, but the process which would lead to a full appreciation of the commercial potential of journalism had nevertheless been unleashed.

This commercialization contributed to a longer-term shift from a genteel view of journalism as an occupation for men of letters to one which saw it as predominantly to do with the satisfaction of market needs. Yet journalism has moved in a complex and sometimes surprising fashion since 1855 and its liberalization after the lifting of taxes to the twenty-first century, despite the fact that certain patterns have remained persistent. The economics of the market, for example, have combined with technological innovations to produce significant changes in journalism's organization, distribution and content. However, this is no straightforward narrative of either triumph or decline, as these changes continue to pose profound challenges – particularly for print journalism – even today. Taking this perspective on the centrality of change to any history of journalism, Smith sees it as being determined by its own structural shortcomings in reaching its self-declared goals:

In the course of four hundred years the newspaper press has not finally dealt with the issues into which it was born. Its methods of production and distribution are always inadequate to the ideals and purposes which appear to rise from the activities of collecting news. Every century or so they undergo a major alteration ... (1978: 183)

If the contemporary age can provide evidence of an on-going major reassessment of how the commercial needs of journalism continue to match its 'ideals and purposes', then one must stress that these were first highlighted in the mid-Victorian era. This continuity from 1855 to the present has been remarked upon by Negrine, who observed how, according to the great historian of political journalism, Koss, there were concerns in the Victorian era about issues which still have a very contemporary ring to them: '... the commercialism of the press, the effect of advertising, the trend to sensationalism, concentration of ownership, and the reduction of political coverage' (Negrine, 1994: 39).

While some would characterize the changes which followed on from 1855 as the decline of a golden age of journalism (Ensor, 1968), others would argue more pragmatically that what had hitherto provided a discourse of public dialogue was from that point onwards replaced by a much more systematically commodified discourse which created what we now recognize as the modern variety of journalism (Chalaby, 1998: 66) – one which targeted the public only insofar as the public constituted a market that could be exploited commercially. Some nineteenth-century commentators applauded these developments and saw this period as providing a rejuvenation in journalism:

... in the early sixties ... journalism was at a turning point. A poor order of things was passing away; a better order of things ... by the attraction of many fresh, bright, strong, and scholarly minds to journalism as a power – was coming in, and coming in on well prepared ground. (Greenwood, 1897: 708)

Driven by the improved climate for commercial newspapers after 1855, the penny press of the middle Victorian era was beginning to experiment with a lighter style and more human interest, perhaps best characterized by the 'Telegraphese' of George Augustus Sala and the influential gossip column 'The Flaneur' by Edmund Yates in Samuel Lucas's penny *Morning Star*, founded in 1856. At the same time the respectable, upmarket papers such as *The Times* and the *Morning Post* maintained a sober and anonymous gravitas in their journalism, bringing 'a heavy overdose of politics' (Herd, 1952: 222) with verbatim accounts of Parliament that were composed in blocks of solid and unbroken type and without the sort of banner headlines with which we are familiar today. The tradition of anonymous authorship in journalism was gradually being eroded via the naming of writers in the more popular magazines, and by the 1870s correspondence columns, signed articles and personal details were being used at the cheaper end of the daily newspaper market as well. This had the effect of introducing an apparent pluralism made up of many authors and spokespeople in place of a single authority and the voice of the newspaper as an institution, which had been the implicit norm up to this point in Victorian journalism (Jackson, 2001: 145).

A transatlantic cable was laid in 1866 and telegraphed dispatches then became an accepted part of a more internationalized news-gathering operation, meaning that 'henceforth daily journalism operated within a new tense ... of the instantaneous present' (Smith, 1978: 167). In fact it was the increasingly efficient exploitation of the telegraph in combination with the newly created category of the sub-editor that signalled the only substantive improvement of these years through the extinction of the old 'penny-a-liner', 'a very inferior race of reporters' (Lee, 1976: 112) who provided cheap copy to make up pages, often copied from secondary sources and with little journalistic merit. A sub-editor was employed to shape, reduce and revise reports to fit within the spaces left by advertisements and bolder headlines while matching the identity of the particular paper.

By the 1880s, a combination of stylistic experiments, technological innovations, political advances such as the extension of the franchise to enable a larger proportion of the working population to vote, and improved economic conditions after the recessionary 1870s were to transform the ambition and content of journalism and orientate it irretrievably to mass audiences via the New Journalism. The Foster Education Act of 1870 which made education compulsory and freely available to primary-aged children also helped to fuel a new level of literacy which would soon translate into increased sales of popular publications. The introduction of the telegraph, telephone, typewriter, high-speed rotary press and half-tone photographic block began to change the look of printed material as journalism became a more visualized practice. After 1875, there was a reconstruction of the newspaper industry following a more economically integrated pattern, which encouraged a more considered and methodical capital investment in technology and more attention being paid to circulation figures and advertising revenue. The technological advances which promised a more attractive and profitable product for a wider audience brought new commercial entrepreneurs into an industry which offered increasing returns on their investment through wider distribution and a more astute harnessing of advertising. Above all else, it was

the broadening of the franchise through the Third Reform Act in 1884 which meant that this New Journalism was able to address the people as having a stake in public affairs like never before, meaning that '... the New Journalism acquired a political resonance which had been largely lacking in press discourse during the previous 50 years' (Jones, 1996: 132).

Newnes – Preparing the Ground for Mass Market Papers

George Newnes was the first to draw together these strands, testing and creating new territories for journalism in a wide range of journals including *Tit-Bits* (1881), *The Strand Magazine* (1891), *The Million* (1892), *The Westminster Gazette* (1893), *The World Wide Magazine* (1898), *The Ladies' Field* (1898) and *The Captain* (1899). Of these, it was the first, *Tit-Bits*, which was to become the model that would have the most profound influence on the daily press.

Tit-bits from all the interesting Books, Periodicals, and Newspapers of the World was launched as a penny weekly on 22 October 1881, with competitions, statistics, historical facts, bits of news, editorials, correspondence columns, fiction, anecdotes, jokes, legal general knowledge, competitions and lots of adverts. Portraits of and interviews with celebrities were also a prominent inclusion in each edition. It was a triumph of promotion, formatting and editorial flair and soon boasted 400,000 to 600,000 in weekly sales, leading Jackson to claim that: '... far from lowering the standards of popular journalism, it undoubtedly raised them' (2001: 55). It was widely imitated because of its success, most notably by *Answers to Correspondents* from Harmsworth, who had learned his trade on Newnes' paper, and by *Pearson's Weekly* which was published by the future proprietor of the *Daily Express*, both of which were aimed at the same market and towards securing similar sales figures, demonstrating the potential for this type of journal. Most importantly, Newnes developed a popular community within his paper through a 'sympathetic intimacy' (Jackson, 2000: 13) with his readers which anticipated much of popular journalism's subsequent rhetorical appeal. He even found ways of extending that projection of community into other areas of his readers' lives and he embarked upon an astute commercial branding of his product that went beyond simply selling papers. In May 1885, for example, he used the paper to launch a life insurance scheme for anyone found dead with a copy of *Tit-Bits* on them in a railway accident and in 1889 at the Paris Exhibition he set up a pavilion and enquiry office in an extension of the textual space of his paper. Some however have been less than appreciative of Newnes' achievements:

Newnes became aware that the new schooling was creating a class of potential readers – people who had been taught to decipher print without learning much else, and for whom the existing newspapers, with their long articles, long

paragraphs, and all-round demands on the intelligence and imagination, were quite unsuited. To give them what he felt they wanted, he started Tit-Bits. (Ensor, 1968: 311)

Stead – Pioneering the Popular Campaign

As economic forces were taking a larger role in the development of journalism, it was no coincidence that what became known as the New Journalism became crystalized in the practices of the London evening papers in their search for new readers. Competition in London had intensified as cheaper evening newspapers, such as the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *St James's Gazette*, reduced their prices from two pence to a penny in 1882, and it was in these papers, most notably the former, that the newer styles of journalism were introduced as a further commercial ploy to distinguish them from their more sedate morning relations. The genius of the *Pall Mall Gazette* (launched in 1865 by Greenwood) had been to bring the scope and variety of the more popular periodical reviews of magazines into daily journalism. It has been observed that 'Greenwood brought lightness, polish and intellectual alertness into daily journalism at a time when the morning papers had become heavy and tradition-bound' (Herd, 1952: 226).

The driving force behind this kind of journalism, which sought social commitment through a wider readership and aimed for an influence on matters of public concern, was the non-conformist and politically radical W.T. Stead. As early as 1880, writing on the Liberal Party's political programme, he had stressed both the 'political education' of the electorate and the 'prophetic character of the journalists' vocation' (Baylen, 1972: 373). He was a pioneer of investigative journalism being pursued for moral ends and saw the editor, as expressed in his article 'Government by Journalism', as 'the uncrowned king of an educated democracy' (1886). For him, journalism had to simply aim to change the world. Some commentators have located him within a longer tradition of radical journalism:

Stead's mercurial, hellfire temperament was that of the great pamphleteers. In his boldness and versatility, in his passionate belief in the constructive power of the pen, in so many of his opinions, even in his championship of women, he resembled Daniel Defoe and Jonathan Swift. (Boston, 1990: 101)

It was as editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* from 1883 to 1889 that he reached the pinnacle of his national prominence. During his tenure he brought cross-headings to the paper, together with popular developments such as scoops and a flair for self-publicity which drew attention to his newspaper; the development of investigative, campaigning journalism in the pursuit of socially progressive causes and the use of emotive and colourful writing. The cross-head was a presentational development that he copied from American newspaper practice. In contrast to the dense columns of the morning newspapers, the *Pall Mall Gazette* could be henceforth scanned at

speed. He included the illustrations and line drawings that would further break up the monotony of the traditional printed page. He also employed specialist commentators to popularize knowledge of contemporary affairs and in his 'Character Sketch' he blended the interview, word picture and personality analysis. The social implications of these changes were clear, making '... the page accessible to less resolute reading at the end of the day and possibly by the family at home' (Brake, 1988: 19).

The development of the interview was again an American import, but Stead deployed it with aplomb in broadening the popular reach of his journalism. One major coup was his interview with General Gordon in January 1884 before he embarked for the Sudan. As if to underline the growing importance of women to this newly personalized style of journalism, Stead employed Hulda Friederich as the chief interviewer for his paper.

His most famous exposé was the 'Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon' story, which exposed Victorian hypocrisy on child prostitution in a series of articles from 6 July 1885. This synthesized all the ambition contained within Stead's journalism and campaigning fervour. It was a sensation, boosting sales to 100,000, and its notoriety led him to be imprisoned for three months for the alleged procurement of the 13-year-old girl, Lisa Armstrong, who was used as the bait in the sting which exposed the realities of under-age sexual exploitation in his undercover investigation. Stead's goal was both a moral and a political one. His passionate opposition to the wrongs of society was in keeping with much of the tradition of the 'old corruption' (Hollis, 1970), as it seemed to imply that there was nothing fundamentally wrong with the status quo that could not be resolved by the actions of good men and women. The 'old corruption' analysis tends to foreground individual failings and neglect deeper systemic issues, and critics such as Hollis maintain that it lacks any sustained political conviction. Onto his confidence in the reforming potential of the Victorian governing classes Stead grafted a moral purpose and wrapped this within a well-developed commercial pragmatism. He was a forerunner of a more personalized variety of what we might call today a 'journalism of attachment' from a deeply religious perspective. There are those however who are more cautious about his sensationalizing of sexual mores and its implications for journalism:

'Sex' had long been a journalistic staple. Stead not only brought it into a 'respectable' middle-class paper. He made it central to journalism as political intervention. (Beetham, 1996: 125)

At the time, there were also some critics who were concerned about its substance. In a journal article in 1887, Arnold named the new phenomenon which was becoming such a prominent issue in public debate the 'New Journalism':

We have had opportunities of observing a new journalism which a clever and energetic man has lately invented. It has much to recommend it; it is full of ability, novelty, variety, sensation, sympathy, generous instincts; its one great fault is that it is feather-brained. (1887: 638-9)

The success of Stead's paper encouraged a proliferation of penny newspapers in London, all of which attempted to exploit the market for the sort of journalism he had pioneered, and their success in turn undermined the circulation of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. This suffered a further blow when much of its revenue was lost because advertisers were anxious about being associated with the scandalous reputation it had acquired. However, his significance for modern journalism goes beyond the technical details of his paper's innovations and the moral mission which informed his work. His 'government by journalism' (Stead, 1886) meant that the civic responsibilities of the journalist and increasingly of the editor were forced to the forefront of the agenda. Stead was particularly prominent in this, using his imprisonment as a campaigning weapon to have the issues raised by the 'Maiden Tribute' story aired in public meetings up and down the country and to bring well-known figures to contribute to the debate he had started. The editor in the most melodramatic way had become the news.

The Extension of the New Journalism

The New Journalism was a combination of already existing features but these had been made more commercially attractive for a wider readership. In vehement opposition to the crusading conviction of Stead, Arnold believed that his New Journalism was the very antithesis of a medium which stimulated and elevated the masses (Baylen, 1972: 367) and was committed instead to the idea that it was commercially driven to find the basest tastes and opinions of the largest possible readership. In the way that the moment of its definition provided a fresh impetus to both the self-rationalization and the resulting critiques of journalism, it could be argued that the New Journalism was a discursive moment in the history of journalism. The clearest expression of its motivations were from Stead himself, spectacularly championing his own cause from prison and claiming the function of government by journalism as 'anybody paying a penny could cast a "vote" for a particular paper' (Stead, 1886: 655). Yet others saw the New Journalism as the natural extension of the traditions of the Fourth Estate:

... the newspaper press is the only strong means of keeping in check that prodigious evil, the decomposition of political probity ... its natural position of complete independency. (Greenwood, 1890: 118)

Much of the concern encapsulated in Arnold's article represented a kind of middle-class 'moral panic' that this sort of populist writing would incite the newly extended electorate, and this continued to reverberate into the new century. It was claimed that a shift in emphasis in the newspapers had meant that 'Instead of being the instructors of the people, many of our newspapers have become mere ministers to the passions of the people' (Adams, 1903: 584), while Perkin has commented retrospectively that it consisted of: