



# Writing News and Telling Stories

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ROBERT DARNTON

## Writing News and Telling Stories

*All the news that fits we print.*

From the graffiti in the pressroom of police headquarters, Manhattan, 1964

THIS ESSAY IS a personal report on the experience of writing news.<sup>1</sup> It resulted from an attempt to circumnavigate the literature on communication theory, diffusion studies, and the sociology of the media, which I undertook in the expectation of finding a new approach to the French Revolution. As a historian of propaganda and radical ideology, I have always held onto the hope that the social sciences will provide a kind of Northwest Passage to the past. I ran aground, however, while reading "Newsmen's Fantasies, Audiences, and Newswriting" by Ithiel de Sola Pool and Irwin Shulman in *Public Opinion Quarterly* (Summer, 1959). That article touched off an analysis of my earlier experience as a reporter, which I offer with the wish that it may point to some fruitful lines of inquiry, despite its subjective character.

### *The Pool-Shulman Study*

Pool and Shulman got newspapermen to conjure up images of their public through a process of free association. They asked thirty-three reporters to name persons who came to mind as they were going over stories they had just completed. Some reporters named persons whom they liked and whom they expected to react warmly to stories conveying good news. Others imagined hostile readers and took a certain pleasure in providing them with bad news. The comparison of the fantasies about "supportive" and "critical" readers suggested that the affective component in a reporter's image of his public might influence the accuracy of his writing. Pool and Shulman tried to test this distortion factor by supplying four groups of thirty-three journalism students each with scrambled facts taken from stories that communicated both good news and bad news. Each student assembled the facts into his own version of the story and then listed persons who came to mind while thinking back over the writing. He then was interviewed to determine the degree of approval or criticism that he attributed to the persons on his list, and his story was checked for accuracy. The experimenters found that writers with supportive "image persons" reported good news more accurately than they reported bad news, and that writers with critical "image persons" reported bad news with more accuracy. Pool and Shulman concluded that accuracy was congruent with a reporter's fantasies about his public.

The experiment suggests how current theories about mass communication may be applied to research on the media. Now that sociologists no longer think of communication as a one-way process of implanting messages in a relatively passive "mass" audience, they can analyze the audience's influence on the communicator. Having become sensitive to the importance of feedback and noise, they can understand how a writer's image of his public shapes his writing. But they sometimes fail to take into consideration another element, which is conspicuously absent from the Pool-Shulman study, namely, the communicator's milieu. Reporters operate in city rooms, not in classrooms. They write for one another as well as for the public. And their way of conceiving and communicating news results from an apprenticeship in their craft. Translated into sociological language, those observations suggest four hypotheses: in order to understand how newspapermen function as communicators, one should analyze (1) the structure of their milieu, the city room; (2) their relation to primary reference groups, i.e., editors, other reporters, and news sources; (3) their occupational socialization, or the way they get "broken in" as reporters; and (4) the cultural determinants of their encoding, or how standardized techniques of telling "stories" influence their writing of "news." By ignoring the milieu of the city room and by dealing with students who had not undergone an apprenticeship, Pool and Shulman neglected the most important elements in newswriting. In order to indicate the importance of the four elements named above, I have tried to analyze my recollections of my brief career as a reporter for the *Newark Star Ledger* and *The New York Times* from 1959 to 1964.

### *The Structure of the Newsroom*

Reporters on *The New York Times* used to believe that their editors expected them to aim their stories at an imaginary twelve-year-old girl. Some thought that she appeared in *The Style Book of The New York Times*, although she only existed in our minds. "Why twelve years old?" I used to ask myself. "Why a girl? What are her opinions on prison reform and the Women's House of Detention?" This mythical creature was the only "audience image" I ever ran across in my newspaper work, and she merely functioned as a reminder that we should keep our copy clear and clean. We really wrote for one another. Our primary reference group was spread around us in the newsroom, or "the snake pit," as some called it. We knew that no one would jump on our stories as quickly as our colleagues; for reporters make the most voracious readers, and they have to win their status anew each day as they expose themselves before their peers in print.

There are structural elements to the status system of the newsroom, as its layout indicates. The managing editor rules from within an office; and lesser editors command clusters of "desks" (foreign desk, national desk, city or "metropolitan" desk) at one end of the room, an end that stands out by the different orientation of the furniture and that is enclosed behind a low fence. At the other end, row upon row of reporters' desks face the editors across the fence. They fall into four sections. First, a few rows of star reporters led by luminaries like Homer Bigart, Peter Kihss, and McCandlish Phillips. Then three rows of rewrite men, who sit to the side of the stars at the front of the room so that they can be near the command posts during deadline periods. Next, a spread of middle-aged veterans, men who have made their names

and can be trusted with any story. And finally, a herd of young men on the make in the back of the room, the youngest generally occupying the remotest positions. Function determines some locations: sports, shipping, "culture," and "society" have their own corners; and copy readers sit accessibly to the side. But to the eye of the initiate, the general lines of the status system stand out as clearly as a banner headline.<sup>2</sup>

The most expert eye in the city room belongs to the city editor. From his point of maximal visibility, he can survey his entire staff and can put each man in his place, for he alone knows the exact standing of everyone. The "staffer" is only aware of occupying an indeterminate position in one of the four sections. He therefore tries to trace the trajectory of his career by watching the key variable in the functioning of the city room: the assignment. A reporter who keeps a string of good assignments going for several weeks is destined to move up to a desk nearer the editor's end of the room, while a man who constantly bungles stories will stagnate in his present position or will be exiled to Brooklyn or "society" or "the West Side shack" (a police beat now extinct and replaced, functionally, by New Jersey). The daily paper shows who has received the best assignments. It is a map, which reporters learn to read and to compare with their mental map of the city room in an attempt to know where they stand and where they are headed.

But once you have learned to read the status system, you must learn to write. How do you know when you have done a good job on a story? When I was a greenhorn on *The Times*, I began one week with a "profile" or man-in-the-news, which won a compliment from the assistant city editor and a coveted out-of-town assignment for the next day. Half the police force of a small town had been arrested for stealing stolen goods, and I found a cop who was willing to talk, so the story made the "second front," the front page of the second section, which attracts a good deal of attention. On the third day, I covered the centenary celebrations at Cornell. They satisfied my ego (I rode back to New York in the private plane that normally served the president of the university) but not my editor: I filed seven hundred and fifty words, which were cut down to five hundred. Next, I went to a two-day convention of city planners at West Point. Once again my ego swelled as the planners scrambled to get their names in *The Times*, but for the life of me I could not find anything interesting to say about them. I filed five hundred words, which did not even make the paper. For the next week I wrote nothing but obituaries.

Assignments, cuts, and the situating or "play" of stories therefore belong to a system of positive and negative reinforcements. By-lines come easily on *The Times*, unlike many papers, so reporters find gratification in getting their stories past the copy desk unchanged and into a desirable location in the paper, that is, close to the front and above the fold. Every day every foreign correspondent gets his reinforcement in the form of "frontings," a cable telling him which stories have made the front page and which have been "insided." Compliments also carry weight, especially if they come from persons with prestige, like the night city editor, the stars, or the most talented reporters in one's own territory. The city editor and managing editor dispense pats on the back, occasional congratulatory notes, and lunches; and every month the publisher awards cash prizes for the best stories. As the reinforcements accrue, one's status evolves. A greenhorn may eventually become a veteran or embark on more exotic channels of upward mobility by winning a national or foreign assignment. The veterans also include a sad collection of men on the decline, foreign cor-

respondents who have been sent home to pasture, or bitter, ambitious men who have failed to get editorships. I often heard it said that reporting was a young man's game, that you passed your prime by forty, and that as you got older all stories began to seem the same.

Reporters naturally write to please the editors manipulating the reward system from the other end of the room, but there is no straightforward way of winning reinforcement by writing the best possible story. In run-of-the-mill assignments, a voice over the public address system—"Jones, city desk"—summons the reporter to the assignment editor, who explains the assignment: "The Kiwanis Club of Brooklyn is holding its annual luncheon, where it will announce the results of this year's charity drive and the winner of its Man of the Year Award. It's probably worth a good half-column, because we haven't done anything on Brooklyn recently, and the drive is a big deal over there." The editor tries to get the best effort from Jones by playing up the importance of the assignment, and he plants a few clues as to what he thinks "the story" is. A potential lead sentence may actually rattle around in Jones's head as he takes the subway to Brooklyn: "This year's charity drive in Brooklyn produced a record-breaking \$ . . . . , the Kiwanis Club announced at its annual luncheon meeting yesterday." Jones arrives, interviews the president of the club, sits through a chicken dinner and several speeches, and learns that the drive produced a disappointing \$300,000 and that the club named a civic-minded florist as its man of the year. "So what's the story?" the night city editor asks him upon his return. Jones knows better than to play up this non-event to the night city editor, but he wants something to show for his day's work; so he explains the unspectacular character of the drive, adding that the florist seemed to be an interesting character. "You'd better lead with the florist, then. Two hundred words," says the night city editor. Jones walks off to the back of the room and begins the story: "Anthony Izzo, a florist who has made trees grow in Brooklyn for a decade, received the annual Man of the Year Award from the Brooklyn Kiwanis Club yesterday for his efforts to beautify the city's streets. The club also announced that its annual charity drive netted \$300,000, a slight drop from last year's total, which the Club's president, Michael Calise, attributed to the high rate of unemployment in the area." The story occupies a mere fourth of a column well back in the second section of the paper. No one mentions it to Jones on the following day. No letters arrive for him from Brooklyn. And he feels rather dissatisfied about the whole experience, especially as Smith, who sits next to him in the remote centerfield section of the city room, made the second front with a colorful story about garbage dumping. But Jones consoles himself with the hope that he might get a better assignment today and with the reflection that the allusion to the tree growing in Brooklyn was a nice touch, which might have been noticed by the city editor and certainly had been appreciated by Smith. But Jones also knows that the story did not make his stock rise with the assignment editor, who had had a different conception of it, or with the night city editor, who had not had time to devote more than two or three minutes' thought to it, nor to the other editors, who must have perceived it as the hack job that it was.

In the case of an important assignment, like a multi-column "take out," the city editor might walk over to Jones' desk and discuss the story with him in a kind of conspiratorial huddle before a sea of eyes. Jones contacts a dozen different sources and writes a story that differs considerably from what the editor had in mind. The editor,

who gets a carbon copy of everything submitted to the copy desk, disapproves of the text and has Jones summoned to him by the public address system. After huddling in alien territory, Jones negotiates his way back to his desk through the sea of eyes and tries again. Eventually he reaches a version that represents a compromise between the editor's preconceptions and his own impressions—but he knows that he would have won more points if his impressions had come closer to the mark imagined by the editor in the first place. And he did not enjoy walking the tightrope between his desk and the city editor before the crowd of reporters waiting for his status to drop.

Like everyone else, reporters vary in their sensitivity to pressure from their peer group, but I doubt that many of them—especially from the ranks of the greenhorns—enjoy being summoned to the city desk. They learn to escape to the bathroom or to crouch behind drinking fountains when the hungry eye of the editor surveys the field. When the fatal call comes over the public address system—"Jones, city desk"—Jones can feel his colleagues thinking as he walks past them, "I hope he gets a lousy assignment or that he gets a good one and blows it." The result will be there for everyone to see in tomorrow's paper. Editors sometimes try to get the best effort out of their men by playing them off against one another and by advocating values like competitiveness and "hustling." "Did you see how Smith handled that garbage story?" the city editor will say to Jones. "That's the kind of work we need from the man who is going to fill the next opening in the Chicago bureau. You should hustle more." Two days later, Jones may have outdone Smith. The immediacy and the irregularity of reinforcement in the assignment-publication process mean that no one, except a few stars, can be sure of his status in the newsroom.

Chronic insecurity breeds resentment. While scrambling over one another for the approval of the editors, the reporters develop great hostility to the men at the other end of the room, and some peer-group solidarity develops as a counter-force to the competitiveness. The reporters feel united by a sentiment of "them" against "us," which they express in horseplay and house jokes. (I remember a clandestine meeting in the men's room, where one reporter gave a parody of urinating techniques among "them.") Many reporters, especially among the embittered veterans, deride the editors, who are mostly former reporters, for selling out to the management and for losing contact with the down-to-earth reality that can only be appreciated by honest "shoe-leather men." This anti-management ideology creates a barrier to the open courting of editors and makes some reporters think that they write only to please themselves and their peers.

The feeling of solidarity against "them" expresses itself most strongly in the reporters' taboo against "piping" or distorting a story so that it fits an editor's preconceptions. Editors apparently think of themselves as "idea men," who put a reporter on the scent of a story and expect him to track it down and bring it back in publishable form. Reporters think of editors as manipulators of both reality and men. To them, an editor is a person who cares mainly about improving his position in his own, separate hierarchy by coming up with bright ideas and getting his staff to write in conformity to them. The power of editor over reporter, like that of publisher over editor, does indeed produce bias in newswriting, as has been emphasized in studies of "social control in the newsroom" (see the bibliographical note at the end of this essay). But the reporters' horror of "piping" acts as a countervailing influence. For example, an assistant city editor on *The Times* once got an inspiration for a pollution

story from his son, who complained that an ice-cream cone had become so filthy as he walked down the street that he had had to throw it into a trash can. The reporter dutifully built the story around the anecdote, adding as an embellishment that the unnamed little boy missed the trash can and walked away. The editor did not delete this last touch. He was delighted with the story, which presumably improved his standing with the other editors and the reporter's standing with him. But it made the reporter's reputation plummet among her peers and served as a deterrent against further "piping" on the other side of the fence.

The peer group's own standards of craftsmanship also pit reporters against copyeditors. Copyeditors tend to be a separate breed among newspapermen. Quiet, intense, perhaps more eccentric and more learned than most reporters, they are cast in the role of being sticklers for language. They go by the book—*The Style Book of The New York Times* on *The Times*—and they have their own hierarchy, which leads from the lowly members of their desk to the "slot man," who apportions the copy among them, to the "bull pen," where the final tailoring of each edition takes place, and ultimately to an assistant managing editor, who in my day was Theodore Bernstein, a man of great power and prestige. Copyeditors apparently think of themselves as second-class citizens in the newsroom: every day, as they see it, they save the reporters from dozens of errors of fact and grammar; yet the reporters revile them. "The game is to sneak some color or interpretation past that line of humorless zombies," one reporter explained to me. Copyeditors seem to view stories as segments in an unremitting flow of "copy," which cries out for standardization, while reporters regard each piece as their own. Personal touches—bright quotations or observations—satisfy the reporter's sense of craftsmanship and provoke the blue-penciling instinct of the copyeditor. Lead sentences produce the worst injuries in the reporter's unending battle with his editors and copyeditors; he may attribute cuts and poor play of his stories to the pressure of circumstances, but a change in his lead is a challenge to his news judgment, the ineffable quality that marks him as a "pro." To reverse the order of a reporter's first two paragraphs is to wound his professional identity. He will even take offense at slight changes of phrasing in his first sentence that he would hardly notice further down in the story. And a really bad lead can damage a man's career. A friend of mine once led a story with a remark about a baby who had been burned "to an almost unrecognizable crisp." It was the "almost" that especially outraged the editors. That lead cost him ten years in the lowliest position of the newsroom, or so we believed.

Reporters are held together by sub-groups, which also mitigate competitiveness and insecurity and influence ways of writing. Clusters of reporters form according to age, life-style, or cultural background (City College vs. Harvard in the early sixties at *The Times*). Some have lunch together, buy each other drinks in certain bars, or exchange family visits. A reporter develops trust in his sub-group. He consults it while working on stories and pays attention to its shop talk. A reporter in my group once had to do a rushed story about a confusing change in the city's incomprehensible welfare programs. Four or five of us went over his material, trying to extract some meaning from it, until one person finally pronounced, "It's a holding operation." That became the lead of the story and the idea around which the entire article was organized. Almost every article develops around a core conception of what constitutes "the story," which may emerge from the reporter's contacts with allies in the city room as

well as from his dialogue with the editors. Just as messages pass through a "two-step" or multi-step communication process on the receiving end, they pass through several stages in their formation. If the communicator is a city reporter, he filters his ideas through reference groups and role sets in the city room before turning them loose on "the public."

The adjustment of writer to milieu is complicated by a final factor: institutional history. Long-term shifts in the power structure of a newspaper affect the way reporters write, even though the rank and file does not know exactly what goes on among editors and executives. Many papers are divided into semi-autonomous dukedoms ruled by the city editor, the foreign editor, and the national editor. Each of these men commands clusters of assistant editors and owes fealty to the managing editor, who in turn shares power with other executives, such as the business manager, and submits to the supreme sovereign of all, the publisher. At *The Times*, each editor dominates a certain proportion of the paper, so that in an issue of  $n$  columns, the city editor can expect to command  $x$  columns, the foreign editor  $y$  columns, and so forth. Of course the proportions vary every day according to the importance of events, but in the long run they are determined by the ability of each potentate to defend and extend his domain. Changes in territoriality often take place at the "four o'clock conference" in the managing editor's office, where the day's paper takes shape. Here each editor summarizes the output of his staff and, day after day, builds up a case for the coverage of his area. A forceful city editor can get more space for city-room reporters and can inspire them with a fresh sense of the newsworthiness of their subjects.

City news underwent such a revival during my period at *The Times*, owing to the influence of a new city editor, A. M. Rosenthal. Before Rosenthal's editorship, New York stories tended to be thorough, reliable, conventional, and dull. Rosenthal wanted snappier, more original copy, and he wanted his men to "hustle." He therefore gave the best assignments to the reporters who conformed most closely to his standards, regardless of their position in the city room. This policy infuriated the veterans, who had learned to write according to the old rules and who believed in the established principle that one earned the right to the best assignments by years of solid service. They complained about trendiness, jazziness, superficiality, and sophomorphism. Some of them resigned, some succeeded in brightening up their copy, and many withdrew into a world of private or peer-group bitterness. Most of the greenhorns responded by exuberant hustling. An alliance grew up between them and Rosenthal, a poor boy from the Bronx and City College, who had hustled his way to the top of *The Times*. The qualities that had made him succeed—talent, drive, enthusiasm—now made for success in the city room. Of course those qualities were recognized under the old seniority system (otherwise Rosenthal himself would never have had such a spectacular career), but the new editor shifted the balance among the norms: the emphasis on hustling at the expense of seniority meant that achievement outweighed ascription in the determination of status.

The institutionalization of this new value system created more confusion and pain than can be conveyed by sociological terminology. In disturbing the established routes of mobility, Rosenthal did not completely cut himself off from the veterans. He did not interfere with the stars, and he did not win over all the greenhorns. Instead, he produced status anxiety everywhere, perhaps even for himself; for he seemed to have

been surprised at the hostility he evoked from men who had been his friends, and he probably had worries about his own standing among the other editors and executives. The first months of his editorship constituted a difficult, transitional period in the city room. While the rules of the game were changing, no one knew where he stood; for standing seemed to fluctuate as erratically as the apportionment of assignments. A reporter might keep a string of good assignments going for a week, while a deadly rain of obituaries fell all around him, but he could also be banished overnight to the obit page or the "caboose" (the last news section of the Sunday paper). Hence the dread character of the summons over the public address system. Eventually, however, a new status system became established according to the new norms. Bolstered by raises and promotions, the bright, aggressive young men set the tone in the newsroom and moved on to more prestigious posts. By now several of them have become stars. Changes also occurred throughout the executive ranks. The paper acquired a new foreign editor, city editor, national editor, Washington bureau chief, and, ultimately, a new managing editor—A. M. Rosenthal. Gossips attributed these changes to personal machinations, but in its brutal, awkward way *The Times* was really rejuvenating itself by putting power into the hands of the generation that was ready and eager to succeed those who had reached their prime during World War II. Institutional evolution—the redistribution of power, the disturbance of role-sets, and the modification of norms—had an important influence on the way we wrote news, even though we were only half aware of the forces at work.

### *Secondary Reference Groups and the Public*

Whatever their subliminal "images" and "fantasies," newspapermen have little contact with the general public and receive almost no feedback from it. Communication through newspapers is far less intimate than through specialized journals, whose writers and readers belong to the same professional group. I have received many more responses from articles in scholarly journals with tiny readerships than from front-page stories in *The Times* that must have been read by half a million persons. Even well-known reporters do not receive more than one or two letters a week from their readers, and very few reporters are really well known. The public rarely reads by-lines and is not apt to know that Smith has taken over the city-hall beat from Jones.

It may be misleading to talk of "the public" as if it were a meaningful entity, just as it is inadequate, according to diffusion studies, to conceive of a "mass" audience of undifferentiated, atomistic individuals. The management of *The Times* assumes that its readers consist of heterogeneous groups: housewives, lawyers, educators, Jews, suburbanites, and so on. It calculates that certain groups will read certain parts of the paper, and not that a hypothetical general reader will read everything. It therefore encourages specialization among reporters. It hires a physician to cover medical news; it sends a future Supreme Court reporter to law school for a year; and it constantly opens up new beats such as advertising, architecture, and folk music. A serious sociology of newswriting ought to trace the evolution of beats and the branching out of specializations. It might also profit from the market research done by newspapers themselves, which hire specialists to devise sophisticated strategies for increasing their circulation.

The tendency toward specialization within newspapers encourages reporters to

write for particular publics. City hall took notice when Smith replaced Jones, and Smith expected city hall to give his stories a careful reading. When Tom Wicker was covering the Kennedy White House, he not only knew that Kennedy read his stories attentively, he also knew exactly when and where Kennedy read them. The Pentagon correspondent, I was told, knew that MacNamara read defense stories between 7:00 and 8:00 A.M. every day while being driven to the office. Those reporters must have had vivid images of Kennedy and MacNamara scowling or smiling at their prose at certain times in certain places, and those images probably had more effect on their writing than any fuzzy view of the general public. For a reporter with a beat, "the morning after" begins to exist, psychologically, in the early afternoon, when he turns in a summary of the story he is about to write; for he knows that he must confront his news sources on the next day and that they can hurt his attempt to cover subsequent stories if he wounds them in writing this one. A reporter on general assignment suffers less from anticipatory retaliation, because he develops fewer stable relationships with the subjects of his stories.

I got the impression that newspapermen were very sensitive to the danger of becoming captives of their informants and of slipping into self-censorship. Conventional news sources, especially in government, struck me as being sophisticated about the give-and-take with reporters. Press spokesmen and public relations men are often former reporters, who adopt a tone of "we are all in this together" and try to seem frank or even irreverent in their off-the-record comments. In this way they can influence the "angle" or the "slant" of a story—the way it is handled and the general impression it creates—rather than its substance, which is often beyond their control. They attempt to influence the reporter during the stage before "the story" has congealed in his mind, when he is casting about for a central, organizing conception. If his lead sentence begins "The decline in unemployment . . ." instead of "The rise in inflation . . .," they have succeeded in their task. Some press spokesmen hoard big stories and dispense them to reporters who write favorably; but that strategy can backfire, because reporters are sensitive to favoritism and, in my experience, tend to be cliquish rather than competitive. Outright manipulation may be less effective than the establishment of a certain amicable familiarity over a long period of daily contact. After a year or so on a single beat, reporters tend insensibly to adopt the viewpoint of the people about whom they write. They develop sympathy for the complexities of the mayor's job, the pressures on the police commissioners, and the lack of room for maneuver in the welfare department. The head of the London bureau of *The Times* when I worked there was vehemently pro-British, while the head of the Paris bureau was pro-French. They wrote against each other, while reporting Britain's negotiations to enter the Common Market. *The Times* is so wary of the tendency among its foreign correspondents to develop a bias in favor of the countries they inhabit that it shifts them around every three years. On a humbler level, the veteran crime reporters who dominate the press rooms in most police headquarters develop a symbiotic relationship with the police. In Newark there were four tough old reporters who had done more time in headquarters than most of the cops. They knew everyone of importance on the force: they drank with cops, played poker with cops, and adopted the cops' view of crime. They never wrote about police brutality.

A sociology of newswriting ought to analyze the symbiosis as well as the antagonisms that grow up between a reporter and his sources, and it ought to take ac-

count of the fact that those sources constitute an important element of his "public." The reporting of news runs in closed circuits: it is written for and about the same people, and it sometimes is written in a private code. After finishing a story by James Reston, which mentions "concern" about the Middle East situation among "the highest sources," the initiate knows that the President has confided his worries to "Scotty" in an interview. It used to be said that the defense correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* wrote in a code that could be understood only by the defense minister and his entourage, while the ostensible message of the articles was intended for the general public. The sense of belonging to a common in-group with the persons who figure in their stories—the tendency toward sympathy and symbiosis—creates a kind of conservatism among reporters. You often hear that newsmen tend to be liberals or Democrats, and as voters they may indeed belong to the Left. But as reporters, they generally struck me as hostile to ideology, suspicious of abstractions, cynical about principles, sensitive to the concrete and the complex, and therefore apt to understand, if not condone, the status quo. They seemed scornful of preachers and professors and quick with pejoratives like "do-gooder" and "egg-head." Until some social psychologist devises a way to make an inventory of their value system, I am inclined to disagree with the common contention that journalism suffers from a liberal or left-wing bias. It does not follow, however, that the press consciously favors "the establishment." The "shoe-leather man" and the "flatfoot," the diplomatic correspondent and the foreign minister are bound together by the nature of their jobs, and inevitably develop some common points of view.

The producer-consumers of news who make up the inner circle of a reporter's public also include reporters from other papers who constitute his wider, occupational reference group. He knows that the competition will give his stories a careful going over, although, paradoxically, nothing could be less competitive than a group of reporters on the same story. The greenhorn may arrive on the scene with his editor's injunction to hustle ringing in his ears, but he soon will learn that the greatest of all sins is to scoop the other side, and that the penalty can be ostracization on the next assignment. If he works from a pressroom outside his paper, he may become totally absorbed in a group of inter-paper peers. "Them" then becomes the city desks of all the papers and news services in town, who invade the repose and security of the men on the beat. Under those conditions, the failure to share information is such a crime that some reporters leak "exclusives" to colleagues on their own paper, so that the story will seem to come from "them" and will not disturb relations in the pressroom. In some pressrooms, one man does all the "leg work" or research, while the others play poker. Once he has collected the facts, he dictates them to the group, and each man writes his own version of the story or phones it in to a rewrite man in his city room. If a man is being pushed by his desk, he may by tacit agreement make extra phone calls to dig up exclusive quotes, "color," and "angles," but he would be condemned for doing this digging on his own initiative. An independent hustler can force hustling upon everyone else and will certainly break up the poker game, which is an important institution in many pressrooms. In the old press shack (now destroyed) behind police headquarters in Manhattan, the pot often came to fifty dollars, and the gamblers gathered around it included an assortment of cops and robbers. At critical moments, a cop who had dropped out of a hand would take calls from city desks. Reporters would suppress stories in order to avoid interrupting the game. The group

was cohesive enough to keep “them” from discovering the news, except in the case of big stories, which threatened every reporter’s security by arousing the appetite for “angles” and “exclusives” among his editors. To protect themselves, the reporters shared leads as well as details of their stories. After a news conference, they would mingle, filtering impressions and sounding one another out as to what the “story” was, until they reached a consensus and were able to file variants on the same lead: “Well, what d’ya think?” “Don’t know.” “Not much new, was there?” “Naw, that bit about weeding out corruption, he’s said that before.” “Maybe the part about civilianizing the force. . . .” “Yeah, civilianizing. . . .”

Competitiveness has also declined as a result of the attrition rate among newspapers. Reporters in one-newspaper cities only need to keep ahead of the wire services and television, which represent different genres of reporting and do not provide real competition. But if they work out of an important bureau, they are bound to be read by reporters who cover the same stories for papers in other towns. They know that the way those colleagues judge their work will determine their position in the status hierarchy of the local press corps. Professional reputation is an end in itself for many reporters, but it also leads to job offers. Recruiting often takes place through reporters who learn to respect one another by working together, just as promotions result from impressions created within a reporter’s paper. *The Times* has a tenure system: once one has “made staff,” he can remain there for life, but many lifers never make it out of the veterans’ ranks in the city room. Professionalism is therefore an important ingredient in reportage: stories establish status, and reporters write to impress their peers.

They also get some feedback from friends and family, who look out for their by-lines and who provide such comments as: “That was a nice piece on Kew Gardens. I was down there last week, and the place really is going to hell”; or “Is Joe Namath really as obnoxious as he sounds?” Such remarks carry less weight than the reaction of fellow professionals, but they give reporters a reassuring sense that the message got through. “Mom” may not be a critical reader, but she is comforting. Without her, publishing a story can be like dropping a stone in a bottomless pit: you wait and wait, but you never hear the splash. Reporters also can expect some reaction from special segments of the public—from some readers in Kew Gardens or from some football players. Much of this kind of feedback tends to be negative, but reporters learn to discount for discontent among special interest groups. What they have difficulty in imagining is the effect of their stories upon the “mass” public, which probably is no mass at all but a heterogeneous collection of groups and individuals.

In short, I think Pool and Shulman err in assuming that newswriting is determined by a reporter’s image of the general public. Newspapermen may have some such image, though I doubt it, but they write with a whole series of reference groups in mind: their copyreaders, their various editors, their different sets of colleagues in the city room, the sources and subjects of their articles, reporters on other papers, their friends and family, and special interest groups. Which of these readers takes precedence may vary from writer to writer and from story to story. They can make competing and contradictory demands upon a reporter. He may even find it impossible to reconcile the conception of “the story” that he gets from the assignment editor, the city editor, the night city editor, the copy reader, and his colleagues. Most of the time he tries to minimize “noise” and muddle through.

*Occupational Socialization*

Although some reporters may learn to write in journalism schools, where Pool and Shulman selected the subjects for the student group in their experiment, most of them (including many journalism-school graduates) pick up newswriting in the course of an apprenticeship. They acquire attitudes, values, and a professional ethos while serving as copy boys in the city room; and they learn to perceive news and to communicate it while being “broken in” as rookie reporters.

By watching the smoke rise from Homer Bigart’s typewriter near deadline time, by carrying his hot copy to the editors, and by reading it in cold print on the next day, the copy boy internalizes the norms of the craft. He acquires the tone of the newsroom by listening. Slowly he learns to sound more like a New Yorker, to speak more loudly, to use reporter’s slang, and to increase the proportion of swear words in his speech. These techniques ease communication with colleagues and with news sources. It is difficult, for example, to get much out of a telephone conversation with a police lieutenant unless you know how to place your mouth close to the receiver and shout obscenities. While mastering these mannerisms, the copy boy insensibly stocks his mind with values. I remember vividly the disgust on a copy reader’s face when he read a dispatch from a correspondent in the Congo that contained some hysterical phrases about bullets whizzing through the hotel room. It did not do to lose one’s cool. Another correspondent, who had seen some rough fighting during the Algerian revolution, impressed me with a story about a lizard that got caught in the fan of his cooling unit in the Algiers bureau. He did not mention the slaughter of Algerians, but he had a great deal to say about the difficulty of writing while being sprayed with chopped lizard. One does not have to eavesdrop very hard to get the gist of reporters’ talk. They talk about themselves, not the personages of their stories—just as history professors talk about history professors, not Frederick II. It takes only a few weeks of carrying copy to learn how Mike Berger interviewed Clare Booth Luce, how Abe Rosenthal anatomized Poland, and how Dave Halberstam scored against the Diems in South Vietnam. In fact, the talk of *The Times* is institutionalized and appears as *Times Talk*, a house publication in which reporters describe their work. So even if you feel timid about approaching Tom Wicker, you may still read his own version of how he covered the assassination of President Kennedy.

Like other crafts, newspapering has its own mythology. Many times have I heard the tale of how Jamie MacDonald covered a raid over Germany from the turret of an R.A.F. bomber and how his wife Kitty, the greatest telephone operator of all time, put Mike Berger, the greatest city reporter, in touch with the governor of New York by establishing a radio link-up to a yacht in the middle of the Atlantic, where the governor was trying to remain incommunicado. The newsroom will not soon forget the day that Edwin L. James took up his duties as managing editor. He arrived in his fabled fur coat, sat down at the poker game that was always under way behind the rewrite desks, cleaned everybody out, and then joined “them” at the other end of the room, where he reigned thenceforth with supreme authority. Reporters sense an obligation to “measure up” to standards set in the past, though they know that they must look small in comparison with their mythical titans. It does not matter that Gay Talese can never write about New York as well as Mike Berger or that Abe Rosenthal can never command the managing editorship with the intelligence and flair of Edwin L. James.

The cult of the dead gives life to the quick. We wrote for Berger and James as well as for the living members of the city room.

Reporters' talk also concerns the conditions of their work: the problems of telephone and telegraph communication in under-developed countries, the censorship in Israel and the U.S.S.R., expense accounts. (I was so obtuse about filing for expenses in London that I did not even get the point of the classic stories about the Canadian correspondent who put in for a dogsled, or the African correspondent who invited reporters to spend week-ends in his villa and then presented them with fake hotel bills to be filed with their expense accounts. I had to be told that my paltry expenses were lowering the living standard of the whole bureau.) One city room reporter told me that his proudest moment came when he was sent to cover a fire, discovered it was a false alarm, and returned with a story about false alarms. He felt he had transformed the humdrum into "news" by finding a new "angle." Another reporter said that he felt he had crossed the line dividing greenhorns and veterans one day when he was covering the civil war in the Congo. He got an open line to London at an unexpectedly early moment, when he had hardly finished reading over his notes. Knowing that he could not postpone communication and that every minute was terribly expensive, he wrote the story at great speed directly on the teletype machine. Some reporters remarked that they did not feel fully professional until they had completed a year on night rewrite, an assignment that requires great speed and clarity in writing. Others said that they gained complete confidence after successfully covering a big story that broke right on deadline.

Reporters gradually develop a sense of mastery over their craft—of being able to write a column in an hour on anything, no matter how difficult the conditions. The staff in London had great respect for Drew Middleton's ability to dictate a new lead to a story immediately after being awakened in the middle of the night and informed of a major new development. Failure to make a deadline is considered unspeakably unprofessional. One man near me in the city room had missed several deadlines. At about 4:00 P.M. when he had a big story, he would furtively gulp down a Dixie Cup full of bourbon from a bottle that he hid in the bottom drawer of his desk. The copy boys knew all about him. In one sweep of the eye, they could take in the deadline agonies of dozens of men. Their job virtually forces anticipatory socialization upon them, for they have no fixed position but rove all over the city room, working with editors and copyreaders as well as reporters. They quickly learn to read the status system and have no difficulty in choosing positive and negative identity models. By listening to shop talk and observing behavior patterns, they assimilate an ethos: unflappability, accuracy, speed, shrewdness, toughness, earthiness, and hustle. Reporters seem somewhat cynical about the subjects of their stories and sentimental about themselves. They speak of the "shoe-leather man" as if he were the only honest and intelligent person in a world of rogues and fools. While everyone about him manipulates and falsifies reality, he stands aside and records it. I remember how one reporter introduced the figure of the newspaperman into an anecdote about politicians, ad men, and p.r. men: ". . . and then there was this guy in a trench coat." I never saw a trenchcoat anywhere in *The Times*. The reporters tended to outfit themselves at Brooks Brothers, which may have been a sign of ambivalence about an "establishment" that they pretended to despise. But they had a trench-coat image of themselves. In fact, they had a whole repertory of stylized

images, which shaped the way they reported the news, and they acquired this peculiar mental set through their on-the-job training.

### *Standardizing and Stereotyping*

Although the copy boy may become a reporter through different rites of passage, he normally undergoes a training period at police headquarters. After this “probation,” as it is known at *The Times*, he is supposed to be able to handle anything; for the police story passes as an archetypical form of “news,” and he is ready for the White House if he has survived headquarters—a parallel, incidentally, that suggests something of the spirit in which reporters approach their material.

I was inducted at the police headquarters of Newark, New Jersey, in the summer of 1959, when I worked for the *Newark Star Ledger*. On my first day of work, a veteran reporter gave me a tour of the place, which came to a climax in the photographic section. Since a police photographer takes a picture of every corpse that is found in Newark, the police have developed a remarkable collection of pictures of ripped-open and decomposed cadavers (the corpses of drowned persons are the most impressive), and they enjoy showing it off to greenhorns from the press. Press photographers build up their own collections, sometimes with help from the police, who get arrested prostitutes to pose for them. When I returned to the pressroom, a photographer from the *Mirror* gave me one of his obscene mug shots and showed me his homemade pin-up collection, which featured his fiancée. A woman reporter then asked me whether I was a virgin, which produced a round of laughs from the men at the poker game. She was leaning back in her chair with her feet on the desk and her skirt around her hips, and my face changed instantly from green to red. Once the initiation was over, the poker game resumed, and I was left to do the “leg work” for everyone. That meant collecting the “squeal sheets,” or summary reports of every action by the police, from an office upstairs. The reporters depended on the police radio and on tips from friends on the force to inform them of big stories, but they used the squeal sheets to check out the odd, man-bites-dog occurrence that has potential news value. Every hour or so I would bring a batch of squeal sheets down to the pressroom and would read them aloud to the poker game, announcing anything that struck me as a potential story. I soon discovered that I was not born with a nose for news; for when I smelled something newsworthy, the veterans usually told me that it was not a story, while they frequently picked up items that seemed unimportant to me. I knew, of course, that no news is good news and that only something awful could make a really “good” story. But it took some time before I learned not to get excited at a “d.o.a.” (dead on arrival—a notation that often refers to heart attacks) or a “cutting” (a stabbing, usually connected with minor thefts or family quabbles that were too numerous to be newsworthy). Once I thought I had found such a spectacular squeal sheet—I think it included murder, rape, and incest—that I went directly to the homicide squad to check it out. After reading the sheet, the detective looked up at me in disgust, “Can’t you see that it’s ‘black,’ kid? That’s no story.” A capital “B” followed the names of the victim and the suspect. I had not known that atrocities among black persons did not constitute “news.”

The higher the victim’s status, the bigger the story: that principle became clear when Newark was lucky enough to get the biggest crime story of the summer. A

beautiful, wealthy debutante disappeared mysteriously from the Newark airport, and immediately the pressroom filled with hot-shot reporters from all over the East, who filed such stories as NEWARK HUNTS THE MISSING DEB, FIANCEE DISAPPEARS IN BROAD DAYLIGHT, and FATHER GRIEVES KIDNAPPED HEIRESS. We had not been able to get our desks to take more than a paragraph on the best muggings and rapes, but they would accept anything about the missing deb. A colleague and I filed a long report on HER LAST STEPS, which was nothing more than a description of the airport's floor plan with some speculation as to where the girl could have gone, but it turned out that "side bars" (stories devoted to secondary aspects of an event) about last steps often accompany stories about kidnappings and vanishings. We simply drew on the traditional repertory of genres. It was like making cookies from an antique cookie cutter.

Big stories develop in special patterns and have an archaic flavor, as if they were metamorphoses of *Ur*-stories that have been lost in the depths of time. The first thing a city-room reporter does after receiving an assignment is to search for relevant material among earlier stories filed in the "morgue." The dead hand of the past therefore shapes his perception of the present. Once he has been through the morgue, he will make a few phone calls and perhaps do some interviewing or observing outside the office. (I found that reporters consumed little shoe leather and ran up enormous telephone bills.) But the new information he acquires must fit into categories that he has inherited from his predecessors. Thus many stories are remarkably similar in form, whether they concern "hard news" or more stylized "features." Historians of American journalism—with the exception of Helen MacGill Hughes, a sociologist—seem to have overlooked the long-term cultural determinants of "news." French historians, however, have observed some remarkable cases of continuity in their own journalistic tradition. One story concerns a case of mistaken identity in which a father and mother murder their own son. It first was published in a primitive Parisian news-sheet of 1618. Then it went through a series of reincarnations, appearing in Toulouse in 1848, in Angoulême in 1881, and finally in a modern Algerian newspaper, where Albert Camus picked it up and reworked it in existentialist style for *L'Étranger* and *Malentendu*.<sup>3</sup> Although the names, dates, and places vary, the form of the story is unmistakably the same throughout those three centuries.

Of course it would be absurd to suggest that newsmen's fantasies are haunted by primitive myths of the sort imagined by Jung and Lévi-Strauss, but newswriting is heavily influenced by stereotypes and by preconceptions of what "the story" should be. Without pre-established categories of what constitutes "news," it is impossible to sort out experience. There is an epistemology of the *fait divers*. To turn a squeak sheet into an article requires training in perception and in the manipulation of standardized images, clichés, "angles," "slants," and scenarios, which will call forth a conventional response in the minds of editors and readers. A clever writer imposes an old form on new matter in a way that creates some tension—will the subject fit the predicate?—and then resolves it by falling back on the familiar. Hence Jones's satisfaction with his lead sentence. Jones began by summoning up a standard image, the tree growing in Brooklyn, and just when the reader began to feel uneasy about where it might be going, Jones snapped it on the "peg" or the event of the day: the man-of-the-year award. "A florist gets a prize for making trees grow in Brooklyn," the reader thinks. "That's neat." It is the neatness of the fit that produces the sense of

satisfaction, like the comfort that follows the struggle to force one's foot into a tight boot. The trick will not work if the writer deviates too far from the conceptual repertory that he shares with his public and from the techniques of tapping it that he has learned from his predecessors.

The tendency toward stereotyping did not mean that the half-dozen reporters in Newark police headquarters wrote exactly the same thing, though our copy was very similar and we shared all our information. Some reporters favored certain slants. One of the two women regulars in the pressroom frequently phoned around district police stations asking, "Any teen-age sex parties lately?" As the acknowledged expert in her field, she filed stories on teen-age sex that the rest of us would not touch. Similarly, a fire-buff among the Manhattan reporters—a strange man with a wooden leg, who wore a revolver around his chest—reported more fires than anyone else. To remain as a "regular" in a police pressroom probably calls for some congruity in temperament and subject matter, and also for a certain callousness. I learned to be fairly casual about "cuttings" and even "jumpers" (suicides who leap off buildings), but I never got over my amazement at the reporters' ability to get "reaction" stories by informing parents of their childrens' death: "'He was always such a good boy,' exclaimed Mrs. MacNaughton, her body heaving with sobs." When I needed such quotes, I used to make them up, as did some of the others—a tendency that also contributed toward standardization, for we knew what "the bereaved mother" and "the mourning father" should have said and possibly even heard them speak what was in our minds rather than what was on theirs. "Color" or feature stories left more room for improvisation but they, too, fell into conventional patterns. Animal stories, for example, went over very well with the city desk. I did one on policeman's horses and learned after its publication that my paper had carried the same story, more or less, at least twice during the previous ten years.

By the end of my summer in Newark, I had written a great many stories but had not received a by-line. One day, when I had nothing better to do, I checked out a squeal sheet about a boy who had been robbed of his bicycle in a park. I knew that my desk would not take it, but I produced four paragraphs on it anyway, in order to practice writing, and I showed it to one of the regulars during a lull in the poker game. You can't write that kind of a story straight as if it were a press release, he explained. And in a minute or so he typed out an entirely different version, making up details as he needed them. It went something like this:

Every week Billy put his twenty-five-cent allowance in his piggy bank. He wanted to buy a bike. Finally, the big day came. He chose a shiny red Schwinn, and took it out for a spin in the park. Every day for a week he rode proudly around the same route. But yesterday three toughs jumped him in the middle of the park. They knocked him from the bike and ran off with it. Battered and bleeding, Billy trudged home to his father, George F. Wagner of 43 Elm Street. "Never mind son," his dad said. "I'll buy you a new bike, and you can use it on a paper route to earn the money to pay me back." Billy hopes to begin work soon. But he'll never ride through the park again.

I got back on the phone to Mr. Wagner with a new set of questions: Did Billy get an allowance? Did he save it in a piggy bank? What was the color of the bicycle? What did Mr. Wagner say to him after the robbery? Soon I had enough details to fit the new pattern of the story. I rewrote it in the new style, and it appeared the next day in a special box, above the fold, on the front page, and with a by-line. The story

produced quite a response, especially on Elm Street, where the Wagners' neighbors took up a collection for a new bicycle, as Mr. Wagner told me later. The commissioner of parks was upset and telephoned to explain how well the parks were patrolled, and how new measures were being taken to protect citizens in the Elm Street area. I was astonished to discover that I had struck several chords by manipulating stock sentiments and figures: the boy and his bike, piggy-bank saving, heartless bullies, the comforting father. The story sounded strangely old-fashioned. Except for the bicycle, it might have come out of the mid-nineteenth century.

Several years later, when I did some research on popular culture in early modern France and England, I came across tales that bore a striking resemblance to the stories that we had written from the pressroom of police headquarters in Newark. English chapbooks, broadside ballads, and penny dreadfuls, French *canards*, *images d'Epinal*, and the *bibliothèque bleue* all purvey the same motifs, which also appear in children's literature and probably derive from ancient oral traditions. A nursery rhyme or an illustration from Mother Goose may have hovered in some semi-conscious corner of my mind while I wrote the tale of Billy and the bullies.

I had a little moppet [a doll]  
I kept it in my pocket  
And fed it on corn and hay;  
Then came a proud beggar  
And said he would have her,  
And stole my little moppet away.

In their original version, nursery rhymes were often intended for adults. When journalists began to address their stories to a "popular" audience, they wrote as if they were communicating with children, or "le peuple, ce grand enfant," as the French say. Thus the condescending, sentimental, and moralistic character of popular journalism. It would be misleading, however, to conceive of cultural diffusion exclusively as a "trickle-down" process, for currents move up from the common people as well as down from the élite. The *Tales* of Perrault, *The Magic Flute* by Mozart, and Courbet's *Burial at Ornans* illustrate the dialectical play between "high" and "low" culture in three genres during three centuries. Of course we did not suspect that cultural determinants were shaping the way we wrote about crimes in Newark, but we did not sit down at our typewriters with our minds a *tabula rasa*. Because of our tendency to see immediate events rather than long-term processes, we were blind to the archaic element in journalism. But our very conception of "news" resulted from ancient ways of telling "stories."

Tabloid stories and crime reporting may be more stylized than the writing that goes into *The New York Times*, but I found a great deal of standardization and stereotyping in the stories of *The Times*' London bureau, when I worked there in 1963-64. Having spent more time in England than the other correspondents in the bureau, I thought I could give a truer picture of the country; but my copy was as stylized as theirs. We had to work within the conventions of the craft. When we covered diplomatic stories, the press spokesman for the Foreign Office would provide an official statement, an off-the-record explanation, and a background analysis for anything we needed to know. The information came so carefully packaged that it was difficult to unwrap it and to put it together in another way; as a result, diplomatic stories all sounded very much alike. In writing "color" stories, it was almost impossi-

ble to escape American clichés about England. The foreign desk devoured everything about the royal family, Sir Winston Churchill, cockneys, pubs, Ascot, and Oxford. When Churchill was ailing, I wrote a story about the crowds that gathered outside his window and quoted one man who had caught a glimpse of him as saying, "Blimey he's beautiful." The cockney-Churchill combination could not be resisted. *The Times* put it on the front page, and it was picked up by dozens of other papers, wire services, and news magazines. Few foreign correspondents speak the language of the country they cover. But that handicap does not hurt them because, if they have a nose for news, they do not need a tongue or ears; they bring more to the events they cover than they take away from them. Consequently, we wrote about the England of Dickens, and our colleagues in Paris portrayed the France of Victor Hugo, with some Maurice Chevalier thrown in.

After leaving London, I returned to the newsroom of *The Times*. One of my first stories concerned a "homicidal maniac" who had scattered his victims' limbs under various doorsteps of the West Side. I wrote it up as if I were composing an ancient *canard*: "Un homme de 60 ans coupé en morceaux. . . . Détails horribles!!!"<sup>4</sup> When I had finished the story, I noticed one of the graffiti scribbled on the walls of the pressroom in the headquarters of the Manhattan police: "All the news that fits we print." The writer meant that one can only get articles into the paper if there is enough space for them, but he might have been expressing a deeper truth: newspaper stories must fit cultural preconceptions of news. Yet eight million people live out their lives every day in New York City, and I felt overwhelmed by the disparity between their experience, whatever it was, and the tales that they read in *The Times*.

### Conclusion

One man's encounter with two newspapers hardly provides enough material to construct a sociology of newswriting. I would not presume to pronounce on the meaning of other reporters' experience, because I never got beyond the green-horn stage and because I did not work on papers that typify either "yellow" or "quality" journalism. Styles of reporting vary according to time, place, and the character of each newspaper. The American way of writing news differs from the European and has differed throughout American history. Benjamin Franklin probably did not worry about an occupational ethos when he wrote the copy, set the type, pulled the sheets, distributed the issues, and collected the revenue of *The Pennsylvania Gazette*. But since Franklin's time, newspapermen have become increasingly enmeshed in complex professional relationships, in the newsroom, in the bureau, and on the beat. With specialization and professionalization, they have responded increasingly to the influence of their professional peer group, which far exceeds that of any images they may have of a general public.

In emphasizing this influence, I do not mean to discount others. Sociologists, political scientists, and experts on communication have produced a large literature on the effects of economic interests and political biases on journalism. It seems to me, however, that they have failed to understand the way reporters work. The context of work shapes the content of news, and stories also take form under the influence of inherited techniques of story-telling. Those two elements of newswriting may

seem to be contradictory, but they come together during a reporter's "breaking in," when he is most vulnerable and most malleable. As he passes through this formative phase, he familiarizes himself with news, both as a commodity that is manufactured in the newsroom and as a way of seeing the world that somehow reached *The New York Times* from *Mother Goose*.

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> This paper was conceived in discussions with Robert Merton, Giddings Professor of Sociology at Columbia University. It owes a great deal to his ideas and criticism and also to the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford, California, which made us fellow Fellows in 1973-74 and gave us the opportunity to wander outside our disciplines. My brother John Darnton, a reporter on *The New York Times*, gave the paper a very helpful, critical reading, although he should not be held responsible for anything in it.

<sup>2</sup> The layout and personnel of the newsroom have changed somewhat since I left *The Times*, and of course much of this description would not fit other newspapers, which have their own organization and ethos.

<sup>3</sup> J. P. Seguin, *Nouvelles à sensation: Canards du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1959), pp. 187-90.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

As this essay is not intended to be a formal sociological study, I have not included a bibliography. In fact, I wrote it before reading the sociological literature on journalism; and later while going over that literature, I found that several scholars had made thorough and intelligent studies of some issues I had tried to understand by introspection. Much of their work, however, concerns the problem of how reporters, who are committed to an occupational ethos of objectivity, cope with the political biases of their newspapers. Thus the line of analysis leading from the classic study of Warren Breed, "Social Control in the Newsroom: A Functional Analysis," *Social Forces*, 33 (May, 1955), 326-335, to more recent work: Walter Gieber, "Two Communicators of the News: A Study of the Roles of Sources and Reporters," *Social Forces*, 39 (October, 1960), 76-83, and "News Is What Newspapermen Make It" in L. A. Dexter and D. M. White, eds., *People, Society, and Mass Communication* (New York, 1964), pp. 173-180; R. W. Stark, "Policy and the Pros: An Organizational Analysis of a Metropolitan Newspaper," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 7 (1962), 11-31; D. R. Bowers, "A Report on Activity by Publishers in Directing Newsroom Decisions," *Journalism Quarterly*, 44 (Spring, 1967), 43-52; R. C. Flegel and S. H. Chaffee, "Influence of Editors, Readers, and Personal Opinions on Reporters," *Journalism Quarterly*, 48 (Winter, 1971), 645-51; Gaye Tuchman, "Objectivity as Strategic Ritual: An Examination of Newsmen's Notions of Objectivity," *American Journal of Sociology*, 77 (January, 1972), 660-679, and "Making News by Doing Work: Routinizing the Unexpected," *American Journal of Sociology*, 79 (July, 1973), 110-131; and Lee Sigelman, "Reporting the News: An Organizational Analysis," *American Journal of Sociology*, 79 (July, 1973), 132-149. Important as it is, the problem of political bias does not impinge directly on most newswriting, except in the case of reporters with political beats; yet general reporting touches on crucial aspects of society and culture. I found little analysis of the socio-cultural aspects of newswriting, and it seemed to me that further studies might profit from continuing the broader, more historically minded approach that was developed by Helen MacGill Hughes in *News and the Human Interest Story* (Chicago, 1940).

The sociology of newswriting could make use of the ideas and techniques developed in the sociology of work. I found the studies inspired by Robert E. Park, a newspaperman turned sociologist, and Everett C. Hughes, a successor of Park in the "Chicago school" of sociology, to be most helpful in analyzing my own experience. See especially Everett C. Hughes, *Men and Their Work* (Glencoe, Illinois, 1958) and *The Sociological Eye: Selected Papers* (Chicago and New York, 1971); the issue of *The American Journal of Sociology* devoted to "The Sociology of Work," vol. 57, no. 5 (March, 1952), Robert Merton, George Reader, and Patricia Kendall, eds., *The Student-Physician; Introductory Studies in the Sociology of Medical Education*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), and John Van Maanen, "Observations on the Making of Policemen," *Human Organization*, 32 (Winter, 1973), 407-419.

The works in the burgeoning literature on popular culture to which I feel especially indebted are: Robert Mandrou, *De la Culture populaire aux 17<sup>e</sup> et 18<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris, 1964); J. P. Seguin, *Nouvelles à sensation: Canards du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1959); Marc Soriano, *Les Contes de Perrault, culture savante et tradition populaire* (Paris, 1968); E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (2nd ed., New York, 1966); and Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public* (Chicago, 1957). For examples of scholarship on nursery rhymes and folklore, see Iona and Peter Opie, *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* (Oxford, 1966) and Paul Delarue, *The Borzoi Book of French Folk Tales* (New York, 1956), which include primitive versions of "children's" stories. I especially recommend "Where are you going my pretty maid?" and "Little Red Riding Hood."