

MARK CANADA

Stories of Today

Rebecca Harding Davis' Investigative Fiction

Long before her son, Richard Harding Davis, became a star reporter, Rebecca Harding Davis worked for the Wheeling Intelligencer in her home state of Virginia. Throughout a writing career that spanned five decades and produced hundreds of stories, novels, and articles, she retained an interest in journalism. Beginning with an 1861 story, "Life in the Iron-Mills," she used fiction to report on current events. Later works, such as Put Out of the Way, an exposé of the system for institutionalizing the supposedly insane, and John Andross, a study of the effects of the Whiskey Ring on an individual, constituted a distinctive literary form: investigative fiction. Her work in this genre anticipated the major achievements of several other American writers, including Stephen Crane, Upton Sinclair, Truman Capote, and Tom Wolfe.

For most scholars of journalism history, Rebecca Harding Davis has long been known, if at all, as the mother of Richard Harding Davis, the star reporter who traveled the world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, wrote for the *New York Herald* and the *New York World*, hobnobbed with Theodore Roosevelt, and penned "Gallegher, A Newspaper Story," one of the most famous fictional treatments of journalism. However, some historians may know that she also was an important literary figure, known today primarily for her 1861 short story, "Life in the Iron-Mills," which was a pioneering work of American realism. But what has largely escaped attention is her role in combining journalism and literature in something that she once called the "story of today." In fact, she was a pioneer not only in realism but in a genre that might be called "investigative fiction." In this hybrid of literature and journalism, authors employ the tools of

fiction—characters, plot, dialogue, imagery, and more—to shed light on contemporary events and issues.¹

Davis' remarkably prolific career, which spanned a half-century and produced hundreds of stories, novels, and other works, yielded some striking examples of investigative fiction. For instance, she plumbed the depths of poverty and despair among the working classes in *Margret Howth*, wrote a fictional counterpart to her husband's journalistic exposé of flaws in the system for institutionalizing the supposedly insane in *Put Out of the Way*, and examined the effects of the Whiskey Ring on an individual in *John Andross*. In works such as these, she answered newspapers' ostensibly truthful coverage of the news with a form of fiction that reported on current events but also considered their causes and consequences, especially for human participants. A study of these works, as well as the author and the world that shaped them, sheds light on the question of how best to tell the truth with the written word, a question that fascinated Davis and her nineteenth-century counterparts, just as it has continued to fascinate authors and journalists who have followed from Stephen Crane and Upton Sinclair to Truman Capote and Tom Wolfe to modern producers of "creative nonfiction" and "fake news."

Davis entered the world of American letters at a time of dramatic change. Beginning with the advent of the penny press in the 1830s, editors such as James Gordon Bennett were steering the early course of America's first mass medium. At the same



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time, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Edgar Allan Poe, and their fellow authors were driving a literary revolution that would come to be known as the “American Renaissance.” Journalists and authors alike celebrated the power of the word, particularly its capacity for delivering something they called “truth,” to readers. “Books have had their day—the theatres have had their day—the temple of religion has had its day,” Bennett wrote in his *New York Herald* in 1836. “A newspaper can be made to take the lead of all of these in the great movements of human thought and human civilization.”² In the following year, in “The American Scholar,” Emerson asked, “Who can doubt, that poetry will revive and lead in a new age, as the star in the constellation Harp which now flames in our zenith, astronomers announce, [and] shall one day be the pole-star for a thousand years?”³ Perhaps feeling threatened by the newspaper’s popularity in the literary marketplace, as well as its grip on the minds of Americans, many of the nation’s leading authors attacked journalism, accusing it of everything from incompetence to irrelevance and ultimately arguing that literature was the superior form of truth-telling. Poe and James Fenimore Cooper served up bumbling journalists in their fiction, Harriet Beecher Stowe lamented the press’ approach to slavery, and Henry David Thoreau quipped in *Walden* that he had “never read any memorable news in a newspaper.”⁴

In light of this sibling rivalry, it should come as no surprise that Davis and other authors set out to improve on a genre that had a long history in journalism. From the beginning, the American press had concerned itself with exposing and righting wrongs. As James Aucoin showed in his 2005 history of investigative journalism, journalists ranging from James Franklin in the eighteenth century to Bennett, William Lloyd Garrison, and Joseph Pulitzer in the nineteenth century produced countless exposés and crusades.⁵ And at least as early as the 1840s, authors were beginning to offer investigative fiction as a kind of literary counterpart. In 1842, Poe launched a serialized detective story, “The Mystery of Marie Roget,” which was intended to compete with news accounts of the real-life murder of a New York cigar girl named Mary Rogers. A decade later, Stowe responded to what she perceived as journalism’s inadequate response to slavery by producing a fictional exposé, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

Over the next century and a half, countless American writers, including some who also worked as reporters, produced additional works of investigative fiction. Notable examples included Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*, a fictional counterpart to the muckraking efforts of Lincoln Steffens and others around the turn of the century, and Capote’s *In Cold Blood*, a “nonfiction novel” inspired by a news account of actual murders in Holcomb, Kansas, in 1959. In all of these works, as well as others, authors attempted, like investigative journalists, to expose some hidden reality, sometimes even employing some of the same methods used by journalists. Sinclair, for example, observed the lives of workers in Chicago first hand, living in the area for several weeks, interviewing workers and others, and, like an undercover reporter, visiting the meat packing plants and making observations.⁶ Capote famously interviewed residents of Holcomb, as well as the murderers themselves, before publishing his novel.⁷ As this study of Davis’ contributions to the

genre will show, authors of investigative fiction, since they are not bound by journalistic conventions of brevity and factuality, have been able to examine their subjects with distinctive depth and imagination, exploring motivation and impact in ways journalists often cannot.

Investigative fiction merits attention not only from literary scholars but from journalism historians, since the form constitutes an early form of alternative journalism. In their 2008 book, *Alternative Journalism*, Chris Atton and James F. Hamilton noted that the many media falling under this heading—not only newspapers, radio stations, and other traditional media aimed at particular audiences but fanzines, blogs, and social networking sites—share a common critical view of current approaches to journalism. “Alternative journalism,” they wrote, “proceeds from dissatisfaction not only with the mainstream coverage of certain issues and topics, but also with the epistemology of news.”⁸ In tapping the resources of fiction to give a more human, a more comprehensive, or an otherwise “truer” account of current events, Davis and her fellow authors of investigative fiction pioneered a form of alternative journalism that they felt could provide a new and a better perspective on the realities and problems of the day.

However, writing about contemporary realities comes at a cost. If this hybrid genre enabled Davis and her fellow practitioners to produce distinctively rich and appealing exposes of contemporary realities, it also may have cost them lasting fame, since the focus of investigative fiction inevitably is on timely events and not the timeless truths often considered the hallmark of great literature.

Although her reputation rests primarily on her literary output, Davis had a longstanding interest, as well as substantial professional experience, in journalism. Before she published “Life in the Iron-Mills” in the *Atlantic Monthly*, she contributed poetry and opinion pieces, such as “Women and Politics,” to her hometown newspaper, the *Wheeling* (Va.) *Intelligencer*, in the 1850s.⁹ Sharon M. Harris argued in 1991 that Davis’ newspaper work formed an important part of her “literary apprenticeship.”

It was during these apprenticeship years, when she was exposed to the national and local intricacies of political life, that Rebecca began to recognize her own era as one of tremendous growth and equally rampant friction. Out of this knowledge, she shaped her literary theory of the “commonplace.” She viewed as corrupted history the proclamations of unhindered progress—the “glory” of expansion and the “necessity” of slavery—that filled the pages of American newspapers and the after-dinner conversations of Northerners and Southerners alike.¹⁰

Later, even while she was churning out stories and novels, she worked for nearly forty years as a contributing editor, first for the *New York Daily Tribune* and then for the *New York Independent*. During this time, she published numerous pieces, including “Women in Literature,” “Two Methods with the Negro,” and “Undistinguished Americans.” Most telling, however, was her treatment of journalism in her fiction, where news men and women often miss important stories, objectify their human subjects, neglect to conduct sufficient research, oversimplify complex stories, or leave out crucial details. In short, she used her fiction to critique

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contemporary journalism, effectively arguing that shortcomings in its nature and execution called for an alternative genre, something that could more effectively report the truth, even if it did not always stay close to the facts.

For Davis, perhaps the chief constraint hindering American journalism was the set of news criteria that dictated the content of newspapers. Modern news values, such as timeliness, impact, prominence, and novelty, already were in place in the nineteenth century, as Norma Green showed in 2002.¹¹ It was during this era, in fact, that “human interest,” to the delight of some readers and the chagrin of others, came to the fore, and editors such as Bennett titillated readers with sensational stories of sex and violence.¹² For Davis and other authors, such values meant that newspapers sometimes ignored important stories; journalists were quick to report on people, events, and scenes when they were sensational or picturesque or seemed to have some significant political or financial impact, but they paid less attention to other subjects, such as intangible feelings and the plight of the poor. Davis attacked news values in “Life in the Iron-Mills,” where reporters take an interest in mill worker Hugh Wolfe only when he commits a crime or kills himself.¹³ She returned to her critique of these values in her 1875 short story “The Yares of Black Mountain,” where Miss Cook is a mercenary journalist well acquainted with the values that make a good human-interest story. She has become interested in the North Carolina mountains after seeing an account of the region in a magazine:

It was “almost unexplored, although so near the seaboard cities”; the “haunt of beasts of prey”; the natives were “but little raised above the condition of Digger Indians.” All this had whetted Miss Cook’s appetite. She was tired of New York and New Yorkers, and of the daily grinding them up into newspaper correspondence wherewith to earn her bread.¹⁴

The same characteristics that made this region worthy of mention in a magazine—novelty, the human interest of people apparently living in primitive conditions, perhaps even the threat of conflict with wild animals—have drawn Cook to cover this story. After she arrives, furthermore, she betrays “a gossip’s keen enjoyment in a piece of bad news.”¹⁵

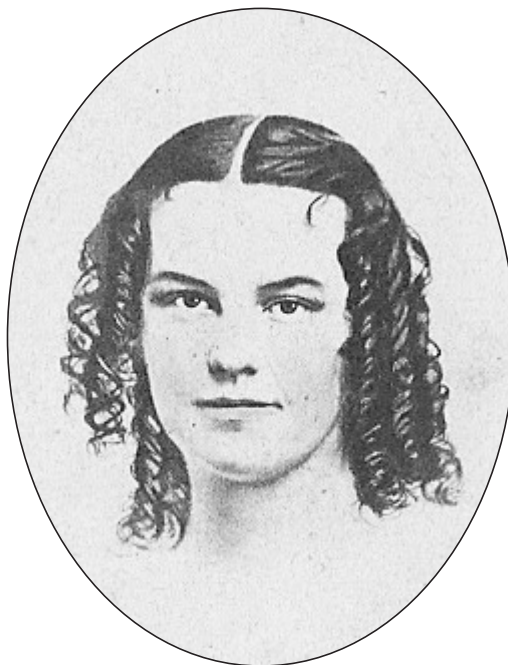
Newspaper content was shaped not only by journalists’ criteria for what made news but by what might be called “packaging constraints.” Within the broad field of journalism, there had developed by the nineteenth century various newspaper genres, such as “hard news” stories, editorials, reviews, and anecdotes. Davis captured the effect of these genres on journalistic content in her 1873-74 novella, *Earthen Pitchers*, in which the painter Niel Goddard tells the journalist Jane Derby, “You may have the subject—nice little essay for the *Atlantic*—humorous, under-vein of pathos—or boil it down into a social-topic editorial.” His

remarks are revealing on two levels. In addition to identifying two ready-made packages for Jane’s material—“nice little essay” and “social-topic editorial”—they refer to features that apparently make her material appealing to an audience; indeed, his shorthand way of describing them—“humorous, under-vein of pathos”—suggests that such features are so widely recognized among minor journalists or other hack writers that they require no explanation. That such packaging constraints, along with the mindset that has internalized them, could limit the content of a newspaper becomes apparent later in the story when Jane observes a scene on the beach:

Despite the chilly salt air, and the pink sky, there was a mysterious ghost-like silence and meaning about her which the moan of the sea did not disturb, and which would not fit into Jane’s patchworked items for the *Review*. It annoyed her, as anything always did which lay outside of her own shrewd comprehension. She was relieved by seeing something human and tangible on the seabeach—a boy catching blue mackerel with a squid. Jane sat down on one of the sand-hills to watch him; the small, black figure coming into bold relief between her and the sky, like a fine sepia drawing. This, at least, she could comprehend; and it was a pretty picturesque sight.¹⁶

Here are at least two possible subjects for writing: “a mysterious ghost-like silence and meaning” and the “picturesque sight” of “something human and tangible.” Only the latter, however, holds promise for a newspaper item. The former “would not fit” in Jane’s journalism, perhaps because there is no place, no existing genre for it, whereas the scene of someone fishing satisfies some basic human interest in the “picturesque” and would probably fit neatly into a feature or travel

article. Even more provocative than these implicit comments on journalistic genres is the suggestion that a journalist tuned into these genres cannot grasp other kinds of material. The intangible, spiritual “meaning” she vaguely senses turns out to be “outside of her own shrewd comprehension.” This journalist, in short, not only cannot find a place to report on the abstract and the spiritual but cannot even understand it. Near the end of the story, journalistic constraints seem to exclude what would seem to be rich material: a near-death experience. Jane finds that she is trapped in quicksand and decides “[e]ven if she were saved she could not use the experience in her newspaper letters,” Davis wrote. “There was something so ridiculous in being swallowed in a quicksand.”¹⁷ That such a thought even crosses Jane’s mind at such a moment might seem ridiculous and may constitute Davis’ critique of the journalist’s mind, which seeks material even at life-changing or potentially life-ending moments. The preoccupation with material, however, is part of the author’s mindset as Ernest Hemingway showed decades later in his 1936 short story, “The Snows of Kilimanjaro,” where a writer continually contemplates observations that he did not capture in words.¹⁸ There is a difference between these two reactions to material, however. Whereas Hemingway’s writer recalls material he could have used



Rebecca Harding Davis
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but did not, Davis' journalist considers material she might use but "could not." In the former case, the limits seem to reside in the writer; in the latter, they seem to reside in her journalistic genre.¹⁹

Even material that journalists judge suitable for their criteria and genres faces limits in the way that they treat it. Even though some of the news stories that appeared in nineteenth-century newspapers were long by modern standards, they often were not as long as short stories and could not be as long as novels. Reporters, in short, generally could not explore circumstances and motivation in the same ways that authors of fiction could. Davis drew attention to this limitation in "Marcia," which appeared in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in 1876. The narrator quoted a brief item that she came across in the newspaper:

Pitiable Case.—A young woman named Burr was arrested yesterday on charge of theft, and taken to the Central Station. About eleven o'clock the other women in the cell where she was confined perceiving that she lay on a bench breathing in a stertorous manner, summoned Lieutenant Parody, who found life to be almost extinct. A physician was called, who discovered that the woman had swallowed some poisonous drug. With her first breath of returning consciousness she protested her innocence of the charge. She appears to have been in an extreme state of want. But little hope is entertained of her recovery. Miss Burr is favorably known, we believe, as a writer of some ability for the daily press.²⁰

Davis did not explicitly remark on the brevity or insufficiency of this item, but the context is significant because this seven-sentence item appears inside the much longer piece of her composition. "Marcia," the longer piece, then, is a more substantial substitute for the pathetically brief newspaper treatment. A similar implicit indictment of brevity in journalism appeared in "Life in the Iron-Mills," where a newspaper item reports on Hugh Wolfe's crime and sentence in five sentence fragments—far less than the substantial treatment Davis provided in her fiction.²¹

In extreme cases, journalists may oversimplify or even falsify a complex story, reducing it to a cliché. Such is the case with a fictional journalist in Davis' 1862 novella *David Gaunt*. Nabbes, "a reporter for one of the New-York papers," apparently has come to a church to cover a meeting. The crowd is divided, and he recognizes the complexity of people's responses to the war. In the end, however, this reporter "tore out a fly-leaf from the big Bible, and jotted down notes of the meeting,—'An outpouring of the loyal heart of West Virginia,'—and yawned, ready for bed, contented with the world, himself, and God."²² His one-line summation demonstrated a journalistic quality noted by a character in *Earthen Pitchers*: "I have always remarked that women who write for the press have that snappy didactic manner. If they tell you what's o'clock, they must needs make an epigram out of it."²³ One can assume that any article that emerged from Nabbes' brief note—if, indeed, the story ever made it into a newspaper—would not be substantial or complex. What is perhaps even more condemning in Davis' characterization of Nabbes is his attitude

about the whole affair. Although he has reduced a complex story to a stereotype, he is "contented" and "ready for bed." Clearly, this is a man not eager to explore the depths of reality; he would rather escape from it by substituting a simplistic epigram for it and going to sleep.

Miss Cook, in "The Yares of Black Mountain," is guilty of another journalistic sin. She may be willing to write a lengthy treatment of a story; indeed, although she is a journalist, she is contemplating a book called *Causes of the Decadence of the South*. When it comes to doing the investigation necessary to determine the truth of what she is covering, however, she falls short. After she announces that she plans to write a chapter called "The Social and Moral Condition of North Carolina," another character says, "You will need so many facts!" Cook replies, condescendingly:

Why, child, I have them all now—got them this morning. Oh, I can evolve the whole state of society from half a dozen items. I have the faculty of generalizing, you see. . . . I've done the mountains and mountaineers. Between slavery and want of railroads, humanity has reached its extremest conditions here. I should not learn that fact any better if I stayed a week.²⁴

Thus, Cook is quick to draw a conclusion from a few details, especially if these details match a stereotype that she brought with her. This approach to reporting on the world, like the packaging constraints and other limitations that nineteenth-century journalism placed on its practitioners, threatened their ability

to deliver truth to the readers.

As these numerous critiques demonstrate, Davis had a keen eye for the criteria and motives that could draw journalists away from truthful accounts of the world. She was, however, more ambivalent than some about core aspects of journalism. Indeed, if a survey of her writing betrays reservations about the capacity of journalism for telling the truth, it also reveals an appreciation for various core tenets of journalism, namely the value of "news," facts, exposure, and reform. This appreciation lay behind her attempt to combine literature and journalism to form works of investigative fiction.

Some of Davis' predecessors questioned the value of news. Poe complained that the "sole legitimate object" of newspapers was "the discussion of ephemeral matters in an ephemeral manner," and Thoreau ridiculed the contemporary obsession with current information. "We are in great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas; but Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing important to communicate. . . . As if the main object were to talk fast and not to talk sensibly."²⁵ Davis, on the other hand, appreciated, even craved, news. In a letter to a friend, Annie Fields, she wrote, "Do write—[tell?] me every thing you have done or thought or said—all the news—new ideas—spirits—books—people—scandal—who and what will be in the next *Atlantic*?" In a later letter, she asked Fields to send "a long letter . . . full of home news."²⁶ She also chose contemporary subject matter for her fiction and even encouraged James Fields to publish it as soon as possible

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while it was still relevant.

Facts were important to Davis as well. In her essay, “Two Methods with the Negro,” which appeared in the *Independent* in 1898, she argued that “facts are facts, and to ignore them fatally weakens any cause.”²⁷ Here again Davis differed from many of her fellow authors. In *Bits of Gossip*, she complained that the conversation of Emerson and other Transcendentalists she knew “left you with a vague, uneasy sense that something was lacking, some back-bone of fact.”²⁸ For Davis, facts were a basis for understanding the world; thus, a writer could serve readers by simply presenting them unadorned. Praising *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans*, a book about average people, Davis said:

In several of these histories we feel this rare and peculiar force of the naked truth. It is the stronger because the editor has refrained from urging the meaning of the individual lives upon us by any comment whatever. He states the facts, and leaves the reader to find out for himself, with whatever wit or insight he may have, the meaning which each of these experiments in living spells out.²⁹

Facts, furthermore, are important to writers if they are to help readers arrive at a sound understanding of the world. In “The House on the Beach,” which she published in *Lippincott’s Magazine* in 1876, Davis noted that meteorology was “searching for general principles, which can only be deduced from countless facts.”³⁰ She applied this same scientific method to the act of writing. In a journalistic piece, “Some Testimony in the Case,” which was published in the *Atlantic* in 1885, she strove to tell the real story of attitudes toward the race issue by quoting actual people. She explained that she had “tried to set down fragments of conversation or letters, which will explain some of these complex relations, giving as closely as possible the literal words of the speakers.”³¹

Finally, Davis valued exposure and reform, both of which had become major points of focus for journalism. In his study of investigative journalism, Aucoin explained: “Beginning in the 1830s, editors of the emerging, commercially oriented penny press . . . embraced the exposure of corruption in government and other American institutions as part of their creed, while editors of abolitionist, women’s rights, and other nonmainstream papers used exposés to further their various causes.”³² Such exposés may or may not have led to reforms, but some journalists, notably Horace Greeley, took the additional step of advocating abolition, labor organization, and other causes.³³ Years after her encounter with the reformer Francis LeMoyné, whom she described in *Bits of Gossip*, Davis used her fiction to expose readers to hidden truths.³⁴ As Harris noted, “Her purpose in developing a fiction of the commonplace was to expose the harsh realities of life and to demand change: change that would require hard work and confrontation with those realities.”³⁵

Davis, then, felt both a dissatisfaction with the shortcomings

of journalism and an appreciation of key aspects of the trade. Ultimately, she resolved her ambivalence by using fiction to “report” on the stories that newspapers may have failed to tell completely or truthfully—or simply to tell at all. This approach is suggested by the title of her first serialized novel, *The Story of To-Day*, which was published serially in the *Atlantic* in 1861–62. As Harris pointed out, Davis’ fiction explored topics “while they were at the forefront of American thought rather than from hindsight. The ‘story of today’ remained central to her literary voice throughout her life.”³⁶ In fact, Davis later urged James Fields to publish another of her works, a Civil War short story, “John Lamar,” while its subject matter was still news, adding that she had “a fancy for writing of today.”³⁷

Davis’ alternative approach to journalism allowed her to report on current issues and expose societal wrongs while remaining free from the constraints that newspaper reporters often faced. For one thing, she could choose to report on people who were not prominent and played no pivotal role in political or business affairs—at least not in the eyes of some conventional editors. Furthermore, she had the luxury of space in a novella or novel to plumb the depths of these people, exposing the motivations behind their actions and their emotional responses to incidents affecting them.

There was still another advantage to reporting news through fiction, however. Edward W. Bok, who edited and published *Ladies’ Home Journal* for three decades, noted “the American woman was not a newspaper reader.”³⁸ He clearly overstated the case, as journals and letters by some women of the nineteenth century revealed a keen interest in newspapers. Stowe, for example, referred to her newspaper reading on more than one occasion, and Emily Dickinson wrote in one of

her letters that she read the *Springfield (Mass.) Republican* “every night.”³⁹ In their 1996 study of thirty collections of family papers from the Boston area, Ronald and Mary Saracino Zboray found substantial evidence showing a familiarity with newspapers among antebellum upper-middle-class women with connections to the Whig party.⁴⁰ *New York Times* editor Henry J. Raymond went so far as to argue that “American women read newspapers as much as their liege lords.”⁴¹ Still, as Zboray and Zboray noted, there was “a paucity of scholarship” on the matter of women’s newspaper reading, leaving modern scholars to speculate on how many American women read newspapers and which parts they read. Thomas C. Leonard, an authority on Americans’ newspaper reading habits, pointed in 1995 to evidence showing that at least some women were reading newspapers, but he also noted journalists believed “newspapers were male discourse.” He explained:

The division of reading by gender was the rationale for allowing things to be said in a news column that could not be said in a magazine or novel. Vernacular language and harsh realities were ruled inappropriate

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for the genteel literature addressed to women. But in the newspaper, supposedly guarded by the male, straight talk about the unfolding of American life, it was allowed.⁴²

Furthermore, in the eyes of the era's journalists, women who read newspapers focused on the parts that did not report the "hard news." One editor, writing in 1842, noted that the female members of households read certain sections—that is, those pertaining to weddings, deaths, fashion, entertainment, and literature.⁴³

While the perceptions of these journalists were not perfectly accurate, they certainly had some foundation—perhaps in reality, perhaps in beliefs, probably in both. Art and fiction from the era depicted men engaged in newspaper reading, even to the exclusion of their families. As Leonard noted, family portraits such as *The Brown Family* (1869) showed men who were "walled off by the news." Poe's "The Mystery of Marie Roget" and "The Man of the Crowd," Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* all showed men reading newspapers, sometimes to the detriment of themselves or those around them. Leonard suggested that the man of the household managed the family newspaper, sometimes reading—and, we can safely surmise, "editing"—stories to their wives.⁴⁴ Davis presented such a scene in "Life in the Iron-Mills," where Doctor May delivers the contents of a news story about Hugh Wolfe to his wife.⁴⁵ If, as this scene suggests, Davis shared the impressions of her fellow journalists that women were not reading "hard news" in newspapers, then we might better understand her decision to package her own stories of today in the form of fiction. In short, her pioneering work in journalistic fiction provided not only more freedom in reporting truths on current issues but also access to more female readers, at least some of whom may have been more likely to read literature than newspapers.

The short stories, novellas, and novels that Davis published in magazines such as the *Atlantic* and *Peterson's Magazine* in the latter half of the nineteenth century included several stories of today. Three notable examples were *Margret Howth: The Story of To-Day* (1862), *Put Out of the Way* (1870), and *John Andross* (1874). Each was a slightly different form of journalistic fiction, showing the various ways she combined journalism and literature to report on the world around her.

From its title onward, Davis frames her first novel as a kind of journalistic fiction that exposed the lives of people ignored by many middle-class Americans. When this novel—titled *The Story of To-Day* when it was serialized in the *Atlantic* and *Margret Howth: A Story of To-Day* when it appeared as a book—was published, Americans were consumed with the Civil War. Oliver Wendell Holmes explained that the "war excitement" created some obsessive newspaper readers, including one who "would read the same telegraphic dispatches over and over again in different papers, as if they were new." Hundreds of correspondents, including as many

as sixty-three working for the *New York Herald*, were employed to feed this appetite for war news.⁴⁶ Against this backdrop, Davis' narrator opens her story with a defense of its subject matter: "Let me tell you a story of To-Day,—very homely and narrow in its scope and aim. Not of the To-Day whose significance in the history of humanity only those shall read who will live when you and I are dead." In this part of the story, the narrator does not explicitly mention newspapers. Davis may have been thinking of their coverage of the war, of short stories or novels that discussed it, or of some combination of journalism and literature. In any case, the narrator makes a case that the news she is about to report, though

largely ignored, is worthy of coverage. She says, "Do not call me a traitor if I dare weakly to hint that there are yet other characters besides that of Patriot in which a man may appear creditably in the great masquerade, and not blush when it is over; or if I tell you a story of To-Day, in which there shall be no bloody glare,—only those homelier, subtler lights which we have overlooked."⁴⁷

Davis' first published novel was, in some respects, a follow-up to "Life in the Iron-Mills," in which her narrator tries to penetrate the "fog" that hides the lives of the working classes and "make it a real thing" to her reader. "This is what I want you to do," this narrator of the earlier story explains. "I want you to hide your disgust, take no heed to your clean clothes, and come right down with me,—here, into the thickest of the fog and mud and foul effluvia. I want you to hear this story."⁴⁸ Employing the same language of exposure, the narrator of *Margret Howth* says of a girl who "drank herself to death,—a most unpicturesque suicide": "I want you to look at her." Later, she

refers to a "subtile light" that, unlike sunlight, illuminates hidden realities; it is the light by which God sees, but the very act of telling her story suggests that literature, too, can illuminate lives hidden by darkness.⁴⁹ As David S. Reynolds noted in 1988, the language of exposure, of "lifting the veil that covers hidden corruption," had been common in journalism.⁵⁰ In both intention and language, then, both "Life in the Iron-Mills" and *Margret Howth* resembled the contemporary journalistic exposé. Because Davis was writing fiction, however, she could choose her subject matter and explore it in far greater depth than would have been possible for a newspaper reporter.

As it had been in "Life in the Iron-Mills," the news she reported in *Margret Howth* had partly to do with contemporary economic conditions. This included the fate of poor, neglected factory workers, whom she describes as "red-faced and pale, whiskey-bloated and heavy-brained, Irish, Dutch, black, with souls half asleep somewhere," workers who endure "slow, heavy work, for, as Pike the manager would have told you, 'three dollars a week,—good wages in these tight times.'"⁵¹ One of the characters describes the impact of the factory work on her mind and body, noting she was "dazed" and "weak allus." She explains, "'T got so that th' noise o' th' looms went on in my head night 'n' day,—allus thud, thud. 'N' hot days, when th' hands was chaffin' 'n' singin',

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Newspapers appear several
times in Margret Howth as
well."***

th' black wheels 'n' rollers was alive, starin' down at me, 'n' th' shadders o' th' looms was like snakes creepin',—creepin' anear all th' time."⁵² Thus, Davis exposed not only the living and working conditions but the emotional lives of working-class people, who, she suggested, yearn for more than their meager wages:

For nothing more? Some other meaning may have fallen from their faces into this girl's subtle intuition in the instant's glance,—cheerfuller, remoter aims, hidden in the most sensual face,—homeliest home-scenes, low climbing ambitions, some delirium of pleasure to come,—whiskey, if nothing better: aims in life like yours differing in degree.⁵³

These penetrations into her characters' interior lives were part of Davis' work as an author of fiction, as Lisa Long noted in 2001.⁵⁴

Here, too, was an exposé of the impact of "trade," which pervaded the town as smoke had covered and infiltrated the community around the iron mills. Davis notes that the "large trading city" possessed "an anxious, harassed look, like a speculator concluding a keen bargain" and "the very dwelling-houses smelt of trade, having shops in the lower stories." The corruptive influence touches even children and animals, as "the boys, playing marbles, . . . played sharply 'for keeps;' the bony old dray-horses, plodding through the dusty crowds, had speculative eyes, that measured their oats at night with a 'you-don't-cheat-me' look."⁵⁵ In her commentary on this novel, Harris argued that Davis presented "the dangers of accepting the marketplace philosophy" and showed "how it has wended its way into the countryside in an attempt to conquer the environment itself."⁵⁶

In "Life in the Iron-Mills," Davis had set up her version of fictional news reporting as a kind of alternative to newspaper journalism by portraying the failures of reporters and editors to provide comprehensive or even adequate coverage of the working classes.⁵⁷ Newspapers appear several times in *Margret Howth* as well. This time, Davis highlighted the faith that readers place—or misplace—in them, noting that one character, Joel, "in company with five thousand other sovereigns, consulted, as definitive oracle, 'The Daily Gazette' of Towbridge." As a "definitive oracle," this newspaper, it would seem, relieves Joel of having to do too much thinking of his own while giving him the comfort of siding with right. Davis writes, "Nero-like, he wished, with the tiger drop of blood that lies hid in everybody's heart, that the few millions who differed with himself and the 'Gazette' had but one neck for their more convenient hanging."⁵⁸ In "Slavery in Massachusetts," Thoreau had noted that the newspaper was America's "Bible."⁵⁹ For Joel, however, the newspaper is even greater, at least when it comes to matters of contemporary concern. Describing a scene in which a character reads from scripture, Davis writes, "As for any immediate connection between the teachings of this book and 'The Daily Gazette,' it was pure blasphemy to think of it. The Lord held those old Jews in His hand, of course; but as for the election next month, that was quite another thing."⁶⁰

Davis' stories of today were not limited to exposés of the suffering and the inner lives of little known Americans. In *Put Out of the Way*, she took aim at a legal abomination that allowed for the institutionalization of perfectly sane Americans. Two years before the first installment of the novel appeared in *Peterson's Magazine* in May 1870, her husband, Clarke Davis, had published a nonfiction exposé of the problem in the *Atlantic*. Clarke's "A Modern Lettre de Cachet," which David Dowling called in 2010 "a

great document in the history of investigative journalism," featured a half-dozen or so accounts of real people who were wrongfully institutionalized along with material collected from the medical literature. Dowling argued that "A Modern Lettre de Cachet" and *Put Out of the Way* constituted a strategic effort by the Davises to bring about reform as each targeted different audiences in the *Atlantic* and *Peterson's*. "While Clarke stirred controversy through his *Atlantic* article among a narrow male elite audience," Dowling said, "Davis would spread it to a very wide popular audience, including significantly more women readers, in her *Peterson's* serial novel."⁶¹ The difference in genre, however, also was significant. Employing a composite approach, the fictional *Put Out of the Way* paints the good nature and prospects of a single character, Dick Wortley, who is a young man engaged to be married. In an effort to get him "out of the way," Colonel Leeds, the father of his rival, has Wortley institutionalized. The advantage of this approach, of course, was that it put a human—albeit fictional—face on the real-life victims of this dishonest and destructive practice. The fictional format also allowed Davis to invent the right quotations to express the impact of this practice on its victims. "I have been taken from my family, leaving them almost penniless," Wortley says. "My business will be ruined by my absence." More poignantly, he later cries, "Buried alive! Buried alive!"⁶²

There is more to be gained from this fictional approach to exposé. Through it, Davis could dramatize the legal and psychological aspects of the issue in a compelling narrative, a conventional form for many female readers. In fact, a comparison of "A Modern Lettre de Cachet" and *Put Out of the Way* reveals that Davis incorporated into her narrative many of the aspects that her husband had treated in his journalistic piece. In that piece, Clarke Davis pointed out that an individual could be institutionalized on the basis of a certificate signed by a doctor with little or no recent knowledge of him or her or perhaps even on the basis of a forged certificate. Similarly, in his wife's investigative fiction, the unscrupulous Dr. Molker makes institutionalization possible by essentially selling the required certificate in a scene that underlines the seedy, mercenary nature of the transaction. After setting the action in a neighborhood that is home to, in one character's words, "the foulest pest-houses in New York," Davis describes a revealing conversation between Molker and Leeds:

"I have a young friend," said the colonel, "whom it is needful to place under restraint for a time—for the safety of his friends—"

"Ah, yeah! For de safety of his friends?" gravely, rubbing his hands.

"It will require your certificate. I understood that you made cases of this kind a specialty?"⁶³

Molker replies that such cases are indeed among his "specialities" and, after tearing a certificate from a book of forms, tells Leeds and his son, "I usually see de patients; but you so very respectable gentlemen dat your word is enough." Later, using a metaphor from Clarke's journalism, Leeds explains to his son:

That printed slip, with our friend Molker's name on it, has all the power of a *lettre-de-cachet* in the worst days of the old regime. I have done my part in procuring it: the law will do the rest. I can call upon the police to assist me in clandestinely arresting Richard Wortley, and in imprisoning him for life if I choose. In a prison, too, from whence no tidings of him shall ever come.⁶⁴

Leeds adds that he did not actually even need a doctor's signature. "I could have written it myself, signed a fictitious name, and added M.D.," he says. "There would have been no questions asked."⁶⁵ Another player is Dr. Harte, a mid-level asylum superintendent who tells Col. Leeds that he can avoid "publicity" by securing a private room for the inmate, an amenity that calls for "the payment of a larger sum."⁶⁶ Here again the fictional story runs parallel to the journalistic piece, which quotes an asylum manager as saying that, "if it was the desire of his [a committed man's] friends, and they were willing to pay for a private room, *he need never be seen by any one but the physician and his private attendant.*"⁶⁷ Later, Davis calls attention to the advantage of this system for a dishonest schemer such as Col. Leeds by noting the lack of legal protection for the accused. "Where else would we have had such facilities as these?" Leeds says. He continues:

If Wortley had committed a murder, he would have had the privilege of counsel and trial, before he could be punished; every particular of the case would have been aired and torn to pieces in the public press; but when you and I want him out of our way, we find a Dr. Molker ready to sign this paper for a consideration: and this paper consigns him to confinement for life, without judge or jury, or a chance to escape.⁶⁸

Leeds's son expresses disbelief that such abuses could be possible in the land of the free. "Nothing is so well guarded in America as personal liberty," he tells his father. "I know nothing of so fatal a flaw in the law as this you talk of." Col. Leeds responds, "No one seems to know of it but those whose interest it is to use it."⁶⁹ Underlining the incongruity of this system with American legal principles, Wortley later notes, "Dr. Harte is judge, and executioner, and public. The law gives its discipline before the eyes of the whole nation; but Harte works his will on us undisturbed, as though we were rats in a hole."⁷⁰ Thus, Davis' investigative fiction serves the same purpose as her husband's investigative journalism, even dramatizing many of the same legal principles. It is, in short, a fictional alternative to journalism, a genre that allowed Davis to employ the tools of fiction to expose and combat a societal wrong.

In her novel *John Andross*, first published in installments in *Hearth and Home*, Davis targeted another wrong, this time using her journalistic fiction to expose the human story behind the Whiskey Ring, a national tax scandal. By the time she published her novel, her own *New York Tribune* already had called attention to the ring. Here again, she exposes the human story behind the system, largely in her portrait of the title character, who becomes a tool of the ring and then has trouble extricating himself. As Harris explained, Andross was based on a real collector named Bailey, who embezzled \$120,000 and later attempted a fix. In the novel, Andross succinctly explains his own situation, as well as the nature of the ring's influence and corruption, in an early conversation with his friend Dr. Braddock:

For years I have been in the hold—not of a man, nor a devil, but of a corporation. That sounds commonplace enough, don't it? You could

easily get out of that halter? Wait one minute, Braddock. The purpose of this club or organization is unmixed evil. As for its power—it has money. Unlimited money. It buys and sells at will the government and interests of the city where it belongs: it controls the press, the pulpit, the courts. The best men are muzzled by it, are forced against their will to serve it.⁷¹

As in *Put Out of the Way*, Davis included details that show how the system works. One character explains that inspectors, when calculating the taxes due on barrels of whiskey, ignore those on which they find dollar bills. Another alludes to the control that the ring exercises over the judicial system, explaining to a ring leader that he can choose how to handle one of the ring's goons: "There will be no difficulty in bringing him through a trial scot free, if you choose the judge and counsel, or would you prefer to have him locked up for a few years?" Explaining another facet of the system, Andross, referring to himself in the third person to protect his identity, speaks of working for the leader of a corporation, "one that needed bills passed at Harrisburgh sometimes, and was able to pay for the passage." He continues, "To do this they must have tools in the Legislature, and to help elect these tools was the business of this young fellow. He was popular with the workmen; he soon found that his duty was to manipulate them; any man who voted against his employers was discharged." Davis shows the lengths to which the ring will go to protect its interests, describing both a scheme to win Andross' vote after it places him in the legislature and a plot to kill an honest tax collector. Again, she contrasts the

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foul system with American ideals, this time the one that links hard work and success. "There's no room for patient, honest effort in a city," Braddock hears from young people. "You must have capital, or influence, or cheek, which is better than either. Money-making is a great game of grab, and a modest man stands no chance."⁷²

Yet another dimension to this work of journalistic fiction was Davis' exploration of the motivations of the characters involved in the ring. Noting the novel's treatment of "human nature and social pressures," Harris called *John Andross* "a graphically realistic study of financial and moral corruption."⁷³ Davis used her fiction to delve into the natures of major and minor characters alike. Of one of the ring's henchmen, Willitts, the narrator says:

But this gigantic sham had given to him and dozens of other young fellows, its architects, not only food and clothes, but all the luxury of the town. He glanced down at the Paris made trousers on his little legs, the blazing solitaire on his white hand. He had no trade nor profession. And there was his mother and sisters to think of—Gertrude unmarried yet.⁷⁴

Even the ring leader, Laird, is presented as a three-dimensional character who admires Andross, whom he calls "Jack," but does not bring himself to act honestly. Davis writes that he "thought

moodily . . . how, if it were not for this money and the constant fight to keep it, he might have been a man whom Jack or his own son could respect.” As the novel’s title suggests, the central figure is Andross, who had once done Laird’s bidding at least partly because of what Laird had done for him. “The man was a careless dog, but not unjust; there was much in this sort of work which disgusted him, but what could he do?” Andross says, talking of himself in the third person. “His benefactor had indulged him like a petted boy, humoured his every whim, nursed expensive and fantastic tastes in him. He loved the man. It was not only for his salary he bent his head until they put the yoke about his neck.” Later, Andross reveals the way that the ring retained him: when he threatened to leave, it blackmailed him with the threat of revealing a supposed forgery committed by his father. If *Put Out of the Way* exposed the way that a corrupt system can make a good man disappear, *John Andross* showed how a different system can make a good man do wrong. As Andross puts it, “There are forces outside of a man nowadays—here, all about him—just as strong to compel him to ill-doing as ever there were in the wilderness or in hell.”⁷⁵

As is often the case in Davis’ fiction, newspapers and newspaper people crop up throughout the story. For example, there are references to men reading and discussing the newspaper, to “news and gum-drop boys” on a train, and to a “poor devil of a newspaper man,” Julius Ware, who eventually becomes a preacher and announces that he is “done with newspapers.”⁷⁶ This character, although a comical figure in the novel, may at least partially speak for Davis when he says, “I thought you knew I had given up the disjointed thinking of journalism, as Dr. Rush called it, and had ranged myself among the moral teachers of mankind.” In the novel, in fact, Davis pointed to a reason why one who wishes to edify humanity might want to abandon journalism. The press, it turns out, is in the pockets of the ring, as well. After a man named John Ford was murdered, one character explains, “the Ring had so bought and paid for judge, jury, and press, that though everybody knew the men who had hired the assassins, they could not be touched; only their tools were punished.” Later, another character remarks, “Even the press will help hush the matter up, when Bowyer disappears.”⁷⁷ As already noted, the press did cover at least some aspects of the Whiskey Ring, but these passages suggest that its coverage was, at least in Davis’ eyes, less than perfect. Perhaps she felt that, as an independent writer of journalistic fiction, she could tell the truth more effectively than her counterparts in conventional journalism.

Given the limitations on journalism, as well as her own determination to uncover the hidden realities of her time, it is no surprise that Davis chose the literary path. Even in stories that did not amount to exposés of sordid working conditions or corrupt systems, she reported on news that, in her view, was not reaching American audiences. In 1875, the year after *John Andross* appeared, she published an essay, “The Middle-Aged Woman,” which appeared in *Scribner’s Monthly Magazine*. In it, she called attention to “the great, decent, religious, unknown majority, never to be

interviewed, or published in any shape, out of whose daily lives grow the modesties, the strength, the virtue of American homes, the safety of our future.”⁷⁸ Like mill workers and the victims of corruptive systems, the American middle-aged woman may have escaped the notice of some journalists—that is, was “never to be interviewed”—but she did not escape the notice of Davis. In the century and more that followed, many other authors, from Sinclair to Capote and beyond, recognized the capacity of fiction to report the news. Davis’ story of today, it seems, was a story of tomorrow.

Why, then, is her name much less familiar to modern Americans than those of Poe, Emerson, Dickinson, or Stowe? Perhaps writing about contemporary realities comes with a cost. *The Jungle*, one of the most famous works of investigative fiction, is little more than a footnote in the canon of American literature—a work mildly interesting for its graphic depictions of the meat packing industry or its impact on Theodore Roosevelt and government regulation, perhaps, but not, in the minds of most literary scholars, a “classic” on par with *The Red Badge of Courage*, *Sister Carrie*, or *The Turn of the Screw*. Even *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* has met with disregard or even disdain among some scholars because it lacks elements that have helped to canonize *Moby-Dick* and *The Scarlet Letter*. The phenomenon is familiar to historians of journalism and to journalists, and it is an important one in journalism history. If Davis’ name is not well known, it at least has enjoyed more staying power than that of her son. Arguably the best-known reporter of his day, Richard Harding Davis, once a national celebrity, is virtually unknown

to everyone but historians today. Other journalists have experienced similar fates. James Franklin, one of the most significant editors of the early eighteenth century, has been eclipsed by his brother, Benjamin, who, among other things, was a prolific and significant author of literature. Who, except for historians of journalism, has heard of William Cobbett, Benjamin Day, Samuel Bowles, Sarah Josepha Hale, Frank Leslie, Henry Villard, or Sylvanus Cadwallader? Who would have heard of Philip Freneau and William Cullen Bryant if they had not penned memorable poems and not “merely” edited some of the important news publications of the nineteenth century?

In literature, scholars and readers value the timeless. Works such as *Oedipus Rex* and *Hamlet*, it is often said, are as “true” today as they were when they were written. On the other hand, investigative fiction is by its nature timely. Writers of this hybrid genre, like their counterparts in journalism, succeed to the degree that they capture contemporary realities truthfully—in facts or in spirit—and convey these realities to readers in faithful, compelling ways. They must collect information, sometimes vast quantities of it, and shape this information in a way that will make sense and, ideally, have an impact. On top of everything else, they always work against some kind of deadline. In the case of reporters, the deadline is usually very near—tomorrow, for example—but even writers of investigative fiction cannot mull over their material for many years,

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as Mark Twain did when he was writing *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. After all, the point is to expose a contemporary reality, not a past or timeless one. As Davis noted in a letter that she wrote to her publisher around 1861, delay in publication could leave one of her Civil War stories “as stale as uncorked champagne.”⁷⁹

In light of these considerations, investigative fiction calls for a different manner of appreciation. In her seminal study of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, literary scholar Jane Tompkins argued in 1985 that scholars should recognize Stowe's famous novel for the kind of “cultural work” it performed.⁸⁰ Scholars might take a similar approach to investigative fiction—and, for that matter, journalism—recognizing a different set of standards for these forms of truth-telling. Judged by standards that celebrate timelessness, imagination, and other considerations, the investigative fiction of Davis and others is not likely to fare well. If, on the other hand, the processes and qualities that make for successful portrayals of contemporary realities are considered, the accomplishments of these writers will be recognized. More importantly, readers stand to gain. The current communications revolution, the most dramatic in half a millennium, is already changing the way information is gathered and conveyed. The possibilities for imagining and telling stories—fictional stories, news stories, hybrid genres, and forms not yet conceived—hold great promise for the future of both literature and journalism. As the special qualities of investigative fiction are appreciated, readers can begin to reward and encourage alternative forms of truth-telling, which may lead us to a richer understanding of contemporary realities.

NOTES

¹ For a discussion of investigative fiction, see Mark Canada, *Literature and Journalism in Antebellum America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), which discussed Davis' breakthrough story, “Life in the Iron-Mills,” as well as works by Poe and Stowe.

² Bennett was quoted in Herbert Altschull, *From Milton to McLuhan: The Ideas Behind American Journalism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 208.

³ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The American Scholar,” in Joseph Slater, ed., *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971-2007), 1:52. For other observations on the role of journalism as an educator and agent of civilization, see Hazel Dicken-Garcia, *Journalistic Standards in Nineteenth-Century America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 138-39, 155, 158; and James Parton, *The Life of Horace Greeley* (1855; reprint, Arno and the New York Times, 1970), 138.

⁴ See Edgar Allan Poe, “The Mystery of Marie Roget,” in *Poetry and Tales* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1984); James Fenimore Cooper, *Home as Found* (New York: Capricorn, 1961); Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, ed. Mary R. Reichardt (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2009), 259; and Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, ed. J. Lyndon Shanley (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), 94. For a study of these and other writers' responses to journalism, see Canada, *Literature and Journalism in Antebellum America*.

⁵ James L. Aucoin, *The Evolution of American Investigative Journalism* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005).

⁶ Upton Sinclair, *The Autobiography of Upton Sinclair* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1962), 109. Sinclair explained, “I sat at night in the homes of the workers, foreign-born and native, and they told me their stories, one after one, and I made notes of everything. In the daytime I would wander about the yards, and my friends would risk their jobs to show me what I wanted to see. I was not much better dressed than the workers, and found that by the simple device of carrying a dinner pail I could go anywhere. So long as I kept moving, no one would heed me. When I wanted to make careful observations, I would pass again and again through the same room.”

⁷ George Plimpton, “The Story Behind a Nonfiction Novel,” *New York Times*, Jan. 16, 1966.

⁸ Chris Atton and James F. Hamilton, *Alternative Journalism* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008). Noting a number of factors, including the challenges to empiricism presented by Freud and others, Atton and Hamilton argued that alternative approaches to journalism are largely a phenomenon of the twentieth century. Capote, Wolfe, Jon Stewart, and other artists indeed have employed alternative means of reporting news; however, as is shown in this article, Davis was using an alternative approach to journalism—namely fiction—a century before any of these writers introduced their innovations. The mixing of news and fiction goes back to an even earlier era as Lennard Davis showed in *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), but Davis' work was noteworthy because it emerged as an alternative to America's first mass medium in the mid-nineteenth century.

⁹ Wheeling was in the state of Virginia until West Virginia became a separate state in 1863.

¹⁰ Sharon M. Harris, *Rebecca Harding Davis and American Realism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 25-27.

¹¹ Norma Green, “Concepts of News,” in W. David Sloan and Lisa Mullikin Parcell, eds., *American Journalism: History, Principles, Practices* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2002), 34-43.

¹² See Helen MacGill Hughes, *News and the Human Interest Story* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1940); and Andie Tucher, *Froth and Scum: Truth, Beauty, Goodness, and the Ax Murder in America's First Mass Medium* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

¹³ Rebecca Harding Davis, “Life in the Iron-Mills,” in *A Rebecca Harding Davis Reader* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 25-26, 32.

¹⁴ Rebecca Harding Davis, “The Yares of Black Mountain,” in *A Rebecca Harding Davis Reader*, 296.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 300.

¹⁶ Rebecca Harding Davis, *Earthen Pitchers*, in *A Rebecca Harding Davis Reader*, 232.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 235, 256.

¹⁸ Ernest Hemingway, “The Snows of Kilimanjaro,” in *The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1998), 53-77.

¹⁹ Jane clearly considers this material unsuitable for use in her journalism, but it is possible that she would have thought it inappropriate for literature as well.

²⁰ Rebecca Harding Davis, “Marcia,” in *A Rebecca Harding Davis Reader*, 315.

²¹ Davis, “Life in the Iron-Mills,” in *A Rebecca Harding Davis Reader*, 25-26.

²² Rebecca Harding Davis, *David Gaunt*, in *A Rebecca Harding Davis Reader*, 78-79.

²³ Davis, *Earthen Pitchers*, in *A Rebecca Harding Davis Reader*, 224.

²⁴ Davis, “The Yares of Black Mountain,” in *A Rebecca Harding Davis Reader*, 299.

²⁵ See Edgar Allan Poe, “Marginalia,” in *Essays and Reviews* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1984), 1415; and Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, ed. Lyndon Shanley (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), 52.

²⁶ See Rebecca Harding Davis to Annie Fields, July 10, [1862?]; and Rebecca Harding Davis to Annie Fields, Oct. 25, 1862. They are both in the Richard Harding Davis papers, MSS 6109, box 1, Barrett Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

²⁷ Rebecca Harding Davis, “Two Methods with the Negro,” in *A Rebecca Harding Davis Reader*, 424.

²⁸ Rebecca Harding Davis, *Bits of Gossip* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1904), 36.

²⁹ Rebecca Harding Davis, “Undistinguished Americans,” in *A Rebecca Harding Davis Reader*, 459.

³⁰ Rebecca Harding Davis, “The House on the Beach,” in *A Rebecca Harding Davis Reader*, 383.

³¹ Rebecca Harding Davis, “Some Testimony in the Case,” in *A Rebecca Harding Davis Reader*, 393-94.

³² Aucoin, *The Evolution of American Investigative Journalism*, 23.

³³ Altschull, *From Milton to McLuhan*, 209-10.

³⁴ Davis, *Bits of Gossip*, 166-68.

³⁵ Harris, *Rebecca Harding Davis and American Realism*, 11.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁷ Rebecca Harding Davis to James Fields, Dec. 30, 1861, Richard Harding Davis papers, MSS 6109, box 1, Barrett Library, University of Virginia. The under-

lining appeared in the original.

³⁸ Bok is quoted in Thomas C. Leonard, *News for All* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 25.

³⁹ See Harriet Beecher Stowe to Henry Ward Beecher in *The Oxford Harriet Beecher Stowe Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 63; E. Bruce Kirkham, *The Building of Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), 36; and Emily Dickinson to Dr. and Mrs. J.G. Holland, Autumn 1853, in Thomas H. Johnson, ed., *The Letters of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1986), 264.

⁴⁰ Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, "Political News and Female Readership in Antebellum Boston and Its Region," *Journalism History* 22 (Spring 1996): 2-14. Zboray and Zboray explained, "Virtually all of nearly thirty collections of Boston-area family papers examined at various repositories contained references to women reading political news or otherwise demonstrating a consciousness of events. Boston and its region was selected because it contained a population of women who were likely to read the news, due to the longstanding Puritan emphasis upon near-universal literacy, the strong legacy of Republican Motherhood there, and the more recent high profile of women in local reform, particularly Garrisonian abolitionism."

⁴¹ Raymond was quoted in Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 304.

⁴² Leonard, *News for All*, 25.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 22-28. Leonard acknowledged there was "some truth to the conventional wisdom that news was safely in male hands" but also said, "It was a myth that women did not see the crime news, political polemics, and local color that enlivened so many American papers." The extent or nature of women's newspaper reading may have changed over the course of the century, as Leonard argued, but there is good reason to think that Davis, whose life spanned a good part of the nineteenth century, recognized a need to reach women through means other than the front page of the newspaper.

⁴⁵ Davis, "Life in the Iron-Mills," in *A Rebecca Harding Davis Reader*, 65.

⁴⁶ See Oliver Wendell Holmes, "Bread and the Newspaper," *Atlantic Monthly*, September 1861, 346-47; and William Huntzicker, *The Popular Press, 1833-1865* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1999), 139-40.

⁴⁷ Rebecca Harding Davis, *Margret Howth*, Wright American Fiction, 1851-1875, electronic resource hosted by Digital Library Program, Indiana University, 3, 5.

⁴⁸ Davis, "Life in the Iron-Mills," in *A Rebecca Harding Davis Reader*, 41.

⁴⁹ Davis, *Margret Howth*, 91, 153.

⁵⁰ David Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 257.

⁵¹ Davis, *Margret Howth*, 16.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 69.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁴ Lisa A. Long, "The Postbellum Reform Writings of Rebecca Harding Davis and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps," in Dale M. Bauer and Philip Gould, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth-Century American Women's Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 274.

⁵⁵ Davis, *Margret Howth*, 17.

⁵⁶ Harris, *Rebecca Harding Davis and American Realism*, 68.

⁵⁷ See Canada, *Literature and Journalism in Antebellum America*, 141-48.

⁵⁸ Davis, *Margret Howth*, 41-42.

⁵⁹ Henry David Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts," in Wendell Glick, ed., *Reform Papers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 99.

⁶⁰ Davis, *Margret Howth*, 49.

⁶¹ See David Dowling, "Davis, Inc.: The Business of Asylum Reform in the Periodical Press," *American Periodicals: A Journal of History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 20 (2010): 23-45; and <http://muse.jhu.edu/> (accessed on March 4, 2011), 30-31.

⁶² [Rebecca Harding Davis], "Put Out of the Way," *Peterson's Magazine*, June 1870, 442-43.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 436.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 437.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 438.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 442.

⁶⁷ Clarke Davis, "A Modern Lettre de Cachet," *Atlantic Monthly*, May 1868, 591. The italics appeared in the original text. While not all of the parallels are enumerated in this study, they are many and include the metaphor of live burial in an institution and the references to "personal liberty" (see "A Modern Lettre de Cachet," 589, and *Put Out of the Way*, 437). Since *Put Out of the Way* appeared in print two years after "A Modern Lettre de Cachet," one might reasonably assume that the novelist was working from her husband's example. It also is possible, however, that the two writers, as husband and wife, collaborated on one or both of the works.

⁶⁸ [Davis], "Put Out of the Way," 437.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁷¹ Rebecca Harding Davis, *John Andross* (New York: Orange Judd, 1874), 52.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 72, 155, 157, 166.

⁷³ Harris, *Rebecca Harding Davis and American Realism*, 185.

⁷⁴ Davis, *John Andross*, 262.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 51, 72-73, 273.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 12, 48, 67, 213, 215, 319.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 215, 257, 262.

⁷⁸ Rebecca Harding Davis, "The Middle-Aged Woman," in *A Rebecca Harding Davis Reader*, 378.

⁷⁹ Rebecca Harding Davis to James Fields, Aug. 9, [1861], Richard Harding Davis papers, MSS 6109, box 1, Barrett Library, University of Virginia.

⁸⁰ Jane P. Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

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