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# From Page to Screen: Television and the Decline of Fiction in Magazines

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# From Page to Screen: Television and the Decline of Fiction in Magazines

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at  
Syracuse University

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and Renée Crown University Honors

May/2009

Honors Capstone Project in magazine journalism

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**Abstract:**

My Capstone project explores how the rise of television contributed to the decline of fiction in magazines and the decline of general interest magazines in America. I argue that television appealed more to advertisers as a mass-market medium than general interest magazines. Magazines had to find a new way to appeal to advertisers, and they did so by becoming niche publications that could offer advertisers a specific type of audience, rather than just a huge amount of readers. Fiction had been used in magazines as a form of mass-market entertainment; with magazines become geared towards specialized interests, fiction fell by the wayside.

To make my argument I studied *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The New Yorker*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Collier's Weekly*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Esquire*. I looked at the history of literary tradition in each magazine. I researched why the magazines that are now closed shut down and what changes they made before they closed. For the still-open magazines I compared the amount of fiction each used to run versus the amount they still do and looked at what kind of content had replaced fiction.

Magazines used to give emerging writers a place to make a name for themselves and for established writers to test-drive new stories or novel ideas. My paper examines how the American reader has changed since the rise of television, and how the role of the American magazine has had to adapt.

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## Introduction

This paper will examine the decline of fiction in American magazines. My main focus will be on how the rise of television in America as a mass medium affected magazines, causing magazines to change content and drop fiction. I include the histories of six magazines – *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Collier's Weekly*, *The New Yorker*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Esquire* – to illustrate the changes magazines made to retain readers after television had taken away their general-interest audience.

Magazines have been around for centuries. The first magazine is widely believed to be *The Gentleman's Magazine*, founded in 1731. It was published by Edward Cave (under the pseudonym Sylvanus Urban) in London. The first magazine published in America was Andrew Bradford's *American Magazine* in 1741, which preceded Benjamin Franklin's *General Magazine* by three days. Franklin's magazine did, however, last longer than *American Magazine's* three-month lifespan. (Mott, 22)

These early magazines were text-heavy and had poor-quality illustrations, if any. They began as a

vehicle for publishers to express their ideas. Leisure time wasn't plentiful in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, so magazines were seen more as news publications than as forms of entertainment. Magazines relied solely on subscription costs for their revenue, and publishers spent their own money to keep magazines going. They were expensive because printing and shipping them was expensive, and therefore they were aimed at those wealthy enough to afford the magazine and well-educated enough to read it.

But slowly, as the U.S. Post Office lowered the shipping costs of magazines and newspapers and better, more advanced forms of printing and photography came into being, magazines began to look more like those we pick up at newsstands today. Toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the establishment of brand names and the arrival of mass consumer products, publishers began to realize that magazines could be used as a vehicle to advertise merchandise rather than just promote the ideas of the publishers. (Mott, 57) This is when they began to invest more heavily in magazines, and when they became more aware of what we now call an audience. They kept track of subscriptions so they

could show shop and business owners why it would be valuable for them to advertise in their magazine.

Newspapers and books were the main competitors of magazines at this time. Newspapers were very wordy and expected their readers to be up-to-date with current events. Books, especially, were competition, because magazines were trying to serve more as entertainers than as informers and people still had relatively limited leisure time.

(Dimmick, 112)

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were children's magazines, women's magazines and men's magazines, but the real giants in the magazine industry were general-interest magazines. The Americans wanted to read magazines for entertainment, to relax. There was no television, no iPods or Internet, not even radio. So to suit their readers' needs magazines ran longer articles, more editorials and more pieces of fiction or serials from novels.

### **Pulps (cited from Smith, 2000)**

There were also magazines called "pulp," cheaply produced and containing mostly short fiction with colorful, sometimes garish covers.

Librarians, in fact, often refused to order pulps, which appealed mostly to readers who were young, immigrant, poor, uneducated and/or working-class immigrants. The opposite of pulps were slicks or glossies like the *Saturday Evening Post*, which were published on more expensive, glossy paper. The glossies published a mix of nonfiction and fiction, while the pulps concentrated only on fiction. Pulp magazines began in the 1890s and flourished most dramatically between the wars; an estimated 200 titles were in circulation at any point during the Great Pulp Era. They were small, about 7-by-10 inches, appealed to a wide audience, and cost only about a dime. They were printed on poor-quality paper, made of wood pulp (which was so cheap that printers used to joke about finding wood splinters on the pages of pulps).

The pulps offered to a wide range of fiction. The late 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century pulps (like Frank Munsey's *Argosy*, published in December 1882 and believed to be America's first pulp) published general fiction, but soon more specialized titles arose, carrying fiction of nearly every genre imaginable: sci-fi, westerns, romance, sports, costumed, crime-fighting heroes, sailors, fantasy,

horror, etc. Romance titles were generally targeted at women readers and adventure magazines went after men, but readers crossed over, as did authors. By far the most popular genre was crime and mystery. Influential crime writers like Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, Erle Stanley Gardner and John D. MacDonald all got their start in pulp magazines. The pulps picked up characters, writers and readers from the older dime novels that provided early competition with magazines.

Ultimately, pulps lost their readers to television, paperbacks and comic books, and most were gone by the mid-1950s. By the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the exception of the small-press magazines, fiction was a rarity in most magazines.

**Film (cited from Dixon and Foster, 2008)**

Film arrived in mainstream America in the early 1900s, but the cinema initially had little effect on magazines. While going to the movie theater did take up people's time and it was a source of entertainment, magazines in the 1930s prospered from the cinema trend, as shown by the huge surge of magazines devoted to the lives, loves and even the homes of film stars.

Also, the only money films were making at the time came from ticket sales. It wasn't until much later that cinemas thought to use advertising before the movie, realizing the value of a captive audience. With no videocassette recorders at the time, movie-lovers couldn't bring the cinema experience home with them, so magazines continued to reign as the source of in-home entertainment.

### **Radio**

In the 1890s and 1910s, magazines were the only national medium, a huge attraction to advertisers who wanted to reach as many people as possible, but, at the end of the 1920s, magazines encountered radio as national competition.

(Dunning, 63)

The first radio station with commercial advertising and programming went to air toward the end of the 1920s in Pittsburgh. David Sarnoff's NBC and William Paley's CBS both went on the air at this time, and *Billboard* magazine released its first charts in 1928. By the year 1934 the radio had become a fixture in many households. (Dunning, 67-8) As a commercial medium, radio relied from the beginning on consumer attention and revenue from

advertising sponsors. Radio grew in popularity relatively quickly and networks began forming, with the first appearing in 1926. (Dunning, 68) As radio's popularity continued to rise, the threat to magazines grew, especially since radio, like film, gave advertisers a captive audience in homes where most people read magazines.

Radio also offered advertisers complete control over the placement of each ad: they could choose the program on which they wanted their ad to appear. So a candy company could chose a children's program, for example. This was really the start of niche advertising. (Dimmick, 133) Radio had another advantage as well. In many early magazines, advertisers could only send only text and illustrations for publication, but the magazine placed and sized the ads any way it needed to. With radio, advertisers had much more control. Besides that, advertisers were learning to "hide" their advertising from the increasingly aware consumer by using, or attempting to use, product placement on the radio (such as Little Orphan Annie's radio show's partnership with Ovaltine in the 1950s). (Bogart, 406)

Magazine publishers became so concerned with their loss of business that they began to seek advice wherever they could find it. They decided to improve the quality of their magazines and offer more of an editorial focus so they could attract a clear audience that would be more attractive to advertisers. Magazines also began investing more money in illustrations and photographs to compete with radio, knowing that radio was a purely auditory medium and could never give its audience pictures.

General-interest magazines and picture magazines kept the magazine industry prosperous until the 1960s, especially as ever-improving printing technology let magazines capitalize on a new, pictorial focus. Magazines like *Look* and *Life* offered examples of some of the world's best photography (in September 1952, the beloved *Life* magazine ran Ernest Hemingway's *Old Man and the Sea* for the first time in print). These magazines gave their readers a real look at things they normally would never be able to see. This visual, graphic movement in the magazine industry came as a direct response to radio. National magazines became extremely important to any advertiser's strategy

for a brand-name client or product and these magazines often had circulations in the millions.

### **Television**

Initially, most magazines weren't overly concerned with television as a competitor. The televisions of the 1930s were black-and-white sets that were relatively expensive. Magazines were still the only ones offering color pictures and advertising. In 1936 there were only about 200 television sets in use worldwide, although the technology did exist. Television would have blossomed in the 1940s had it not been for World War II, when television technology went toward war efforts, instead.

Eventually, however, TV technology improved and the government began to impose television and new broadcast regulations. The cost of television sets went down and, so did the magazine ad revenues. From 1950 to 1960 the share of households in the U.S. with television rose from 9% to 87%. (Nielsen, tvb.org) Television penetration skyrocketed to 97% of American homes by 1960. Conversely, by 1956 magazine advertising's market share had dropped to 8% (van Zuilen, 1977, 148).

Readers spent more time with their eyes on the screen than on the page. In *Stay Tuned*, Sterling and Kittross say, "Television, it must be remembered, had captured the entertainment function of the mass media almost completely by 1960... Magazines felt the full brunt of television in the 1960s" (Sterling & Kittross, 475).

Advertisers saw this, and made the decision to move their campaigns from magazines and to television. General-interest national advertising moved out of the magazine field and into television, making the publication of mass-circulation national magazines far less profitable. The market power of large magazine producers declined and the magazine industry became more and more fragmented. The dominance of general-interest and pictorial magazines was over. Between 1969 and 1972 three of the most widely read magazines in the country – *Saturday Evening Post*, *Life* and *Look* – all folded. (Van Zuilen, 201) Each of these magazines had huge circulations, maintained by keeping subscription and newsstand prices low, and they made their profit from advertisers. But the advertisers went over to television.

With the rise of television in the 1950s came the general-interest magazines' realization that they would be unable to compete effectively for audience or for advertising dollars. Most of the pulps died out. But rather than disappearing, the magazine industry as a whole experienced a revitalization and, "began to move toward greater specialization in their targeting and their editorial content" (Katz, 2003, 83).

By the early 1970s, special-interest (or niche) magazine began to prosper. Plenty of readers were interested in detailed information and specialized knowledge, things not available through national, mass media like radio and television. The rise of television marked the death of the giant general-interest magazines, but the market for these smaller magazines that carried specialized content boomed in the 1960s-70s. Advertisers were interested in niche markets that they knew would be interested in their product, rather than a general, unspecified audience, which generated more wasted views. (Dimmick, 135)

Kelly Jane Torrance said in "Short of Glorious," a 2004 article published on Doublethink Online, "Today short fiction is confined to an

elegant ghetto: the *New Yorker*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and *Harper's*. There still exist many literary magazines, but these publish seldom and have few subscribers" (Torrance, *par.* 6). Where is short fiction's place in mass media today? Many literary magazines originate on college and university campuses and serve mostly as a vehicle for students and professors. While quarterlies, like *McSweeney's* have been able to sustain their publishing company solely on the sale of short fiction (and some illustrations), they are few and far between. Niche publications today lack the room for fiction. And large magazines have no interest — *Cosmo* is too busy telling readers how to please their men to fit in fiction, and how could poetry or a short story work its way into *People* or *Us Weekly*?

Some magazine experts point to the 1950s and 1960s as a changing point for readers themselves, rather than just the changing face of media and communications. Hinds argues, however, that "surely the more important change was in the magazine industry, not in the magazine audience. Readers accepted the standardized formulas of the mass magazines as a compromise between preference and

price... it merely did not offend" (Hinds, et al., 221). In this point of view general-interest magazines, when they were popular, only placated readers. When television came along and offered something better, readers were quick to leave – because of the general-interest formula itself.

The advertisers deserted magazines even before the readers. This gave way to a huge change in the magazine format. Magazines aimed at young women, sports fans or nature lovers could succeed because they attracted specialized advertising. New magazines in the 1960s provided a "high profile alternative for advertisers who did not want, or could not afford, the national marketing campaigns that were the domain of network TV" (Croteau & Hoynes, 61). Magazines like *TV Guide* that succeeded by focusing on television itself.

Another explanation for the continuing decline of fiction in magazines is that, as Quinn Dalton said in his [mediabistro.com](http://mediabistro.com) article, "they're short. Just as some writers make the mistake of thinking they're easier to write, perhaps some readers think they're not long enough to offer a return on what they demand: more concentration and less guaranteed payoff than nonfiction in all of

its forms" (Dalton, 2005). The readers would rather watch a half-hour sitcom than devote an hour to reading a short fiction piece. Is it possible that, without a steady dose of fiction in our lives, our taste for the short story has atrophied? Or did readers' tastes change first, followed by their disappearance?

### **Newspapers, Cable, and Videocassette**

During this time, newspapers still retained some of their role as major local-news providers, but growing competition for advertisers and a growing suburban population made urban newspapers change. In fact, beginning in the 1950s, the number of suburban-based newspapers increased while more and more urban papers closed. To gain circulation, many newspapers began to aim more at a middle- and upper-middle-class readership in an attempt to attract more advertisers. The number of advertising-friendly sections (like "Weekend") only increased into the 1980s-90s. (Bogart, 97)

Later, magazines used the birth of cable television and VHS technology to generate more interest in their niche publications. They did so by using marketing tools such as promotional giveaways (giving away a free videocassette with every subscription, for example). The magazines could also use cable networks to extend brands by offering instructional tapes to go along with the magazine or a TV series catering specifically for the magazine's audience, such as *National Geographic Magazine's* television specials.

#### **The Atlantic Monthly (TAM)**

At an 1857 meeting between Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Harriet Beecher Stowe, James Russell Lowell and Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. the idea for a magazine with Lowell as the editor was formed. He named it *The Atlantic Monthly*. TAM's first issue came out in November, 1857 as a "Journal of literature, politics, science, and the arts." It was an immediate success.

Soon the Continental Railroad would cross North America, linking the East and the West. *Origins of Species* by Darwin wouldn't be published for another two years, but science was already

beginning to challenge religion. The largest wave of immigration yet was coming into the Eastern cities that bordered the Atlantic Ocean. The North and South were at odds, and people already believed that secession was on the horizons. Educated people were debating the morality of slavery, and discussing how to create the American Idea. *TAM* emerged in this environment, indeed as a literary and cultural commentary magazine. The magazine dealt with what it considered to be fundamental subjects of the American experience: war vs. peace, science vs. religion, the race issue, what form women's role in society should take, a struggle to preserve the environment, the strengths and weaknesses of politics, America's place in the world, etc.

*TAM* provided a forum for both young and established American talent. Within two years, *TAM's* circulation rose to more than 30,000 within two years. Today, operating as a general editorial magazine, it has 460,000 total paid subscribers, 50,000 newsstand purchasers, and a readership of 1.2 million. (Murphy, par. 5)

The first issue of *TAM* printed a Declaration of Purpose:

In politics, *The Atlantic Monthly* will be the organ of no party or clique, but will honestly endeavor to be the exponent of what its conductors believe to be the American Idea. It will deal frankly with persons and with parties, endeavoring always to keep in view that moral element which transcends all persons and parties, and which alone makes the basis of a true and lasting prosperity. It will not rank itself with any sect of anties: but with that body of men which is in favor of Freedom, National Progress, and Honor, whether public or private. (Murphy, par. 6)

As evidence of this Declaration, an editor at *TAM* kept a letter on his wall postmarked Nanking, 1937. It said that the Chiangs would be moving again, and the family was requesting a change of address to Shanghai. (Murphy, par. 8) The letter didn't mention the change of address was due to the Japanese armies that were chasing the Nationalist Chinese government from one provisional capital to another.

*TAM* printed the first stories of Mark Twain, Henry James, Louise Erdrich, Sue Miller and Bobbie Ann Mason. James Dickey first published *Deliverance*

in *TAM*. The magazine also published important essays by Woodrow Wilson, Theodore Roosevelt and W.E.B. DuBois. It published Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail" in 1963. In 1981 the magazine published William Greider's interviews with David Stockman, rattling the federal government enough to prompt President Reagan to "take the budget director to the woodshed" (Murphy, par. 12). Articles by Al Smith assured the country of a Catholic's ability to be President.

*TAM* is also credited for changing war reporting. Rather than simply reporting stories, the magazine tried to paint a picture for its readers, to put them in the action. The magazine "made [war reporting] into an art" (Murphy, par. 13). In the 1870s Anna Leonowens published in the magazine chronicles of her life as tutor to the son of the king of Siam. It published the famed Civil War dispatches by Nathaniel Hawthorne. *TAM* ran John Muir's "The American Forest" on the Yosemite National Park Bill, and published Jason Riis's photo-essays of American slums. *TAM* published speculative articles that inspired development of entirely new technologies: Vannevar Bush's essay

"As We May Think," published in the magazine in July 1945, inspired Douglas Engelbart, then Ted Nelson, to develop the modern workstation and hypertext technology. (Murphy, par. 13)

For all but its recent existence, *TAM* has been known as a distinctively New England, literary magazine. By *TAM*'s third year of publication the famous Boston publishing house Ticknor and Fields (now part of Houghton Mifflin) purchased the magazine. In 1980, Mortimer Zuckerman, founder of Boston Properties, bought the magazine and became its chairman. In September 1999, Zuckerman transferred his ownership to David G. Bradley, owner of the National Journal Group. In April 2005, the magazine moved from Boston to Washington, D.C. (due to Boston's high real estate prices). Few of the Boston staff would relocate, leading to an open search for a new editorial staff. (Scocca, 2005)

In the same month and year as the move, *TAM*'s editorial staff, despite the magazine's illustrious literary history, decided to stop publishing fiction regularly in the magazine; instead, the magazine would feature an annual, newsstand-only fiction issue. In its May 1901 issue, nine of the fifteen articles *TAM* ran were fiction; the issue

carried 92 fiction pages, nearly 65% of the magazine's 143 editorial pages. Today *TAM*, which is now published ten times a year, features articles in the realm of political science and foreign affairs, and book reviews. As Quinn Dalton reported in a mediabistro.com article,

The conventional wisdom is that magazines are bowing to the realities of necessary advertising revenues, which put pressure on sections that don't perform based on reader feedback. As a result, the inclusion of fiction in commercial magazines has become an exception to standard procedure. The number of available outlets for short fiction has been steadily shrinking, from *The Saturday Evening Post* to *Redbook* to *Mademoiselle*, which ceased publication in 2001. More recently, *Seventeen* dropped regular stories in 2003, and *Jane* discontinued fiction during its redesign in 2004, though both run an annual fiction contest. (Dalton, par. 2)

This pressure (and, oftentimes, inability) to justify the market value of fiction in magazines is nothing new. As television took away magazines' advertisers, magazines had to find and rate the

commercial value of fiction, and change how and how often they incorporated fiction. *TAM* released a letter to the readers in the May 2005 issue explaining the decision to use less fiction. The letter said that the loss of short fiction in their magazine:

Reflects a larger challenge – that that we have long needed to confront. The challenge is ‘real estate’ – space in the magazine – at a time when in-depth narrative reporting from around the country and the world has become more important than ever. *The Atlantic* has never been exactly the same from generation to generation... the magazine’s components have varied according to the needs of the time.

(The Editors, par. 4)

The magazine believes that the “needs of the time” rest mostly on the kind of long-form narrative reporting that first appeared in *TAM* during the Civil War. The letter says, “Today, there is an urgent need, and a corresponding hunger, for this kind of writing... That reporting consumes a lot of space” (The Editors, par. 5). To combat this space problem, *TAM* pushed its fiction into the annual issue. Now its fiction issues are typically its top

newsstand sellers for the year (likewise for *The New Yorker's* annual fiction issue).

Fiction editor Deborah Treisman said in Dalton's article, "When the potential magazine market for stories is reduced, so is the writer's desire to write them" (Dalton, par. 10), citing the publishing industry's eagerness to persuade writers to produce novels rather than short-fiction collections, which are harder to market and sell, as part of the reason for this loss of market. "The more outlets there are for short stories, the more short stories get written... *The Atlantic* may be struggling with the fact that fewer great short stories are being written now than a few decades ago" (Dalton, par. 10).

*TAM* has had such an illustrious literary history that it is nearly impossible to picture the magazine totally without fiction. The editors, however, have cut fiction back time and time again since the arrival of television in American homes. The magazine was able to stay relevant to readers by focusing on news and commentaries and cutting fiction.

**The New Yorker (TNY)**

*The New Yorker* debuted on February 17, 1925. It was founded by Harold Ross and his wife Jane Grant, and was meant to be a sophisticated humor magazine. *TNY* soon established itself as a preeminent forum for serious journalism and fiction. Today it is probably the best-known magazine that carries fiction.

*TNY* has published works by Ann Beattie, John Cheever, Alice Munro, Haruki Murakami and Richard Yates. The magazine was the first to publish Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery." After World War II, John Hershey's article "Hiroshima" filled the entire magazine. In comparison, today, in *TNY*'s "special" fiction issue, only 46 of the 196 pages in the magazine were actually fiction. (Yardley, 1994)

*The Washington Post's "The New Yorker and Fiction, A Sad Story,"* by John Yardley, published in 1994, said that:

Ross and Shawn [Ross's successor as *TNY* editor] are dead, dead, dead. Their day is done. So too is the heyday of fiction and the magazine to which they devoted their working

lives. This has something to do with the age in which we live and something to do with the people who now run the magazine. Literary fiction is dying, the victim of mass indifference that is scarcely alleviated by its own narrow solipsism. As for the editors, they are apostles of the "new" journalism; apart from design and typography, most of what now appears in *The New Yorker* would be equally at home in *Esquire* or *Rolling Stone* or *Vanity Fair* or any other chic organ of that genre. In such a climate a fiction "special" is more a hollow gesture to the past than a genuine celebration. (Yardley, 1994)

*TNY* was and is well known for its commentaries on popular culture and eccentric Americana but the early magazine paid more attention to fiction, and included short stories and literary reviews. The magazine contained profiles of Hemingway, Luce, Brando, Romanoff, Ricky Jay and David and Gregory Chudnovsky. Still, *TNY* is renowned for its journalism about world politics and social issues, its famous cartoons and its rigorous fact-checking and copyediting.

Early on *TNY* published two or three short stories a week, but now the average is closer to one per issue. The shocking lack of fiction in its annual fiction issue is a testament to the huge drop in the availability of short stories and poetry. Speaking at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications in 2008, *TNY* editor David Remnick said that there was no place for the short story in modern-day magazines. Is the standard piece of fiction in each issue just a nod to the past, then, more symbolic than anything? If fiction was removed from the magazine there would surely be a public outcry – but would it only be because fiction is such a long-standing tradition for *TNY*, rather than anger over the loss of the fiction itself?

In 2008 *TNY* fiction editor Deborah Treisman said, “I find that writers tend to produce less during depressing or politically difficult times. After 9/11, for instance, the flood of manuscripts slowed to a trickle. Sometimes, the brute force of fact outweighs the pleasures of invention. But fiction serves multiple roles: it entertains, educates, expands horizons, allows one to see and empathize with the unfamiliar (a quality that was

especially crucial after 9/11), among other things” (Treisman, 2008).

*TNY*, then, is careful to follow the trends. “I (and most people I know) find it possible to both read and to enjoy film and TV, and to feel an impact on my life from all three,” said Treisman. “People are always announcing the demise of literature, and yet literature somehow keeps on going, and the support systems for producing it – writing workshops, MFA programs, etc. – keep expanding. My guess is that self-expression will go on being a need in our culture... we’ll only be richer for the diversity” (Treisman, par. 30).

Fiction in *TNY* has become almost a symbolic presence. Without it, the magazine wouldn’t feel complete. But, at the same time, by doing things like putting only 46 pages of fiction in a 196-page fiction issue, the magazine clearly is placing little importance on fiction. Once, the magazine used fiction because it *needed* it to intrigue readers. Now the magazine’s non-fiction articles on current events and social commentary do more to attract readers than the fiction.

*TNY* is a unique case. Fiction is still an integral part of the image of the magazine; readers

now, however, buy the *TNY* for image of its fiction, rather than because they actual enjoy reading short stories or keeping up with the famous authors of the time. Were authors then simply more looked up to then, better known than authors today? Did they have more pull than the celebrities of today with readers then? Or did *TNY* begin to cut back fiction at the will of advertisers? When speaking at Newhouse, Remnick said that good short fiction is hard to find, and that writers have moved on to novels and longer fiction to make money. Perhaps *TNY*, by trying to keep short fiction in the magazine, is just fighting a losing fight.

### **Saturday Evening Post (SEP)**

The *Saturday Evening Post* was launched in America in 1821 as a four-page newspaper, and it quickly became the best-known paper in the country. It gained prominence as a magazine under George Horace Lorimer in 1869-1937. The magazine published current events, editorials, human-interest pieces, humor, illustrations, letters, poetry (it accepted reader submissions), single-panel cartoons and short stories by leading writers of the time. *SEP* became renowned for its lavish illustrations - on

the cover, embedded in the magazine, and used in advertising - and for its original works of fiction. Each issue of the magazine featured several original short stories, and often included an installment of a serial in a few consecutive issues, most written for mainstream tastes by popular writers, and some literary writers.

While it always maintained a sophisticated and upscale tone, the magazine remained accessible to the middle class. It was also a forum for lesser-known writers. *SEP* both launched careers and helped established artists and writers stay afloat. The opening pages of the stories featured paintings by leading magazine illustrators, such as Norman Rockwell.

*SEP* featured fiction by Ray Bradbury, Kay Boyle, Agatha Christie, Brian Cleeve, William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, C.S. Forester, Paul Gallico, Hammond Innes, Louis L'Amour, C.S. Lewis, Joseph C. Lincoln, John P. Marguand, Sax Rohmer, William Saroyan, John Steinbeck, Rex Stout... the list goes on and on. Throughout 1916 and 1917 Clarence Budington Kelland wrote pieces for *SEP* about the comic characters Efficiency Edgar and Scattergood Baines. The characters were brought

back as a steady presence in the magazine throughout 1922 and 1961. William Hazlett Upson wrote a series about Earthworm Tractors salesman Alexander Botts. P.G. Wodehouse wrote that "The wolf was always at the door" until *SEP* gave him his "first break" in 1915 by serializing "Something New." (Wodehouse, 20)

In 1924, *SEP* published 21 serialized novels, 11 novelettes, and more than 200 short stories. (Janello & Jones, 96) Much of this fiction wasn't highbrow, trying to appeal to more desirable demographic in order to get more advertisers. Instead, it was

truly popular, the way a song is when it sweeps the nation... The *Saturday Evening Post's* weekly editorial package of features, fiction, service, humor, and reportage, in fact, very much resembled the format (or formula) for a week of network programming. The *Post* represented perhaps the first example of what came to be known as mass culture. (Janello & Jones, 96)

In many ways, even the type of fiction *SEP* ran can be likened to the types of television shows that run today - not overly artsy or "smart," but silly

sitcoms (cartoons and funny short stories) or overly dramatic action/adventure shows (detective/adventure stories), meant to appeal to a huge audience, secure in the knowledge that the advertisers would support them because they had nowhere else to go.

In the 1950s and 1960s, readership of the magazine began to decline as *SEP*, a classic general-interest magazine, lost the fight against television for advertisers' and readers' attention. The *SEP* just couldn't retain its readers - the public's taste in fiction was changing, and *SEP*'s conservative politics and values remained controversial. Content by popular writers became harder to obtain as prominent authors drifted to newer magazines, ones that had already made the switch to more specialized content and, since they had more advertising revenue, could offer the writers more money and prestige. Jonathan Yardley of the *Washington Post* believes that the rise of television and the disappearance of what he calls the "big middlebrow magazines, like the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Collier's*" is a major reason for the state of contemporary literary fiction. He also blames creative writing schools, which "encourage

the self-absorbed, mannered fiction" (Yardley, par. 7).

In the 1960s the *SEP*, trying to stay afloat, published more articles on current events and cut costs by replacing its famed illustrations with photographs on covers and in advertisements. But even so the magazine stopped being published after Curtis Publishing Co. lost a famous defamation suit (*Curtis v. Butts*) that resulted in the company paying \$3,060,000 in damages. Otto Friedrich, the magazine's last managing editor, blamed the death of the *SEP* on this suit, and said that corporate management was unsupportive and debilitating in *SEP*'s last years (1962-1969). Friedrich acknowledges that *SEP* faced challenges because the tastes of American readers changed throughout the 1960s with the rise of television. Still, Friedrich insisted that the magazine maintained a standard of quality and was thoroughly appreciated, saying that *SEP*'s lifespan was tragically cut short. (Friedrich, 1970)

In *Stay Tuned*, Sterling and Kittross write, "Many people said that television had stolen the audience for the mixture of fiction and fact that had made the *Post* a popular giant for over four

decades... The circulation was still there nearly till the end, but advertisers had lost confidence in national general circulation magazines and thought that television would do them more good at less cost" (Sterling & Kittross, 475).

*SEP's* story makes particularly clear the affect one mass medium can have on another. The readers didn't seem to have a choice but stop reading magazines and start watching more television because, even as they read their favorite magazines, those magazines began to disappear. Advertisers made this decision for the magazines and the readers.

### **Cosmopolitan (Cosmo)**

*Cosmopolitan* began in 1886 as a family magazine. It was started by Schlicht & Field and was marketed as a "first-class family magazine... with articles on fashions, on household decoration, on cooking, and the care and management of children, etc.: also a department... for the younger members of the family" (Endres & Lueck, 49).

Circulation reached 25,000 that year, but by March 1888 Schlicht & Field were out of business. Joseph Newton Hallock, publisher of *Christian at Work*, briefly became the publisher of *Cosmo*, and was the man "who introduced serialized fiction and book reviews to the magazine" (Endres & Lueck, 50). By the end of the year, however, circulation had dropped to 20,000. The magazine was close to folding. Hallock sold the magazine in 1889 to John Brisben Walker, who appointed E.D. Walker (who had formerly been with *Harper's Monthly*) as the new editor. Walker, who was to be the editor for the next 16 years, introduced color illustrations, serials and book reviews to the magazine, and expanded the magazine's circulation to 400,000.

*Cosmo* became a leading market for fiction, featuring the work of Annie Besant, Ambrose Bierce, Theodore Dreiser, Rudyard Kipling, Jack London, Willa Cather and Edith Wharton. Circulation climbed to 75,000 by 1892. At the end of that year the magazine was one of the country's leading illustrated magazines. "It was illustrated with halftones and woodcuts throughout the magazine and continued to publish art reproductions in the back of the magazine" (Endres & Lueck, 50). Through

unflagging promotion Walker built circulation, increasing subscription rates "to \$3 and advertising rates from \$60 to \$200 a page" (Endres & Lueck, 51).

In July 1893, Walker slashed the cover price of the magazine to 12.5 cents, trying to compete with other quality magazines with moderate circulations. Two years later *Cosmo* settled on a ten-cent price, after a brief experiment with 15 cents. Walker declared that,

*The Cosmopolitan* inaugurated the low-priced magazine... demonstrating to the world that a magazine of the highest quality could be made at this low figure... To-day in even the humblest home you find at least one magazine... In the leisure hour, when, worn out with the day's work, the woman or man seeks a comfortable chair, the almost invariable companion in the magazine. (Endres & Lueck, 52)

Walker wanted his magazine to be a soothing presence after a long day, so he included fiction to relax readers and educational articles to inform them.

In 1905 William Randolph Hearst bought the magazine for \$400,000, and brought in journalist Charles Edward Russell, who contributed a series of investigative articles. Other contributors included Alfred Henry Lewis, Sinclair Lewis, A.J. Cronin, David Graham Phillips, George Bernard Shaw, Upton Sinclair and the famous muckraker Ida Tarbell. Some of *Cosmo's* illustrators included Francis Attwood, Dean Cornwell, James Montgomery Flagg and Harrison Fisher. (Endres & Lueck, 52)

In the 1930s, the circulation hit 1,700,000. Throughout the 1940s *Cosmo* continued to emphasize fiction. It was subtitled "The Four-Book Magazine" since the first section included one novelette, six or eight short stories, two serials, six to eight articles, and eight or nine special features. The other three sections featured two novels and a digest of current nonfiction books. (Nourie & Nourie, 80)

During World War II, the magazine's sales peaked at 2,000,000. *Cosmo* was sold nationally, mostly to middle-aged and older women. In the 1950s, as pictorials became more and more popular, the circulation began to fall. The magazine, hoping to combat this, began to run less fiction. Its

circulation dropped to just over one million in 1955, a time when magazines were being overshadowed by paperbacks and television. (Nourie & Nourie, 82) The Golden Age of magazines as mass marketers came to an end and general-interest publications began to give way to niche magazines targeting specialized audiences.

Then Helen Gurley Brown arrived in 1965, and completely remodeled and revitalized *Cosmo* (it was briefly renamed *New Cosmpolitan*, a decision that was reversed within two years). Brown's magazine survived the rise of television, and reversed the loss of advertisers and readers. While the magazine still dealt with romanticism, it was a new kind. The magazine's audience changed from older, married homemakers to single women. *Cosmo* became the "bible of the single girl. The magazine promoted an image of which the chains of sexual repression had been thrown off and personal fulfillment was found through a prosperous and independent lifestyle" (Osgerby, 171).

By the middle of the 1970s *Cosmo* was the largest-selling women's magazine on college campuses. Brown didn't completely do away with fiction; each issue included at least one romance

story, which, while it was often poorly written, was always sexy and titillating. *Cosmo's* editors felt that they could incorporate a certain type of fiction into the niche magazine - almost like inserting a pulp magazine devoted to romance stories into a glossy.

In his book *Feminist Phoenix*, Jerome L. Rodnitzky describes the romance fiction in women's magazines as "usually simplistic in plot and sentimental in style. Whereas the leading men's magazines such as *Esquire* and *Playboy* often featured famous fiction writers such as Gore Vidal and James Dickey, most women's magazine fiction writers were mere hacks" (Rodnitzky, 159). Ellen Barker, well-known feminist critic, suggested that most of the stories in women's magazines like *Cosmo* "culminate in a passionate union between lovers" (Rodnitzky, 159).

In Brown's early years as editor, the magazine received much criticism from old-time readers who were shocked at the anything-goes sexual message of the one-time literary magazine. Brown ignored these complaints, instead working on making sure *Cosmo* stayed relevant in American culture. In April 1972, the magazine ran a near-naked centerfold of Burt

Reynolds, at the time still a lesser-known actor. (Braithewaite & Barrell, 55) The scandalous move propelled *Cosmo* and Reynolds to the forefront of American popular culture. Now *Cosmo* discusses topics such as sex, health, fitness and fashion with a small, more recent, focus on men's issues as well ("Cosmo for your guy"). Fiction has fallen by the wayside, but the magazine has managed to not only stay afloat but to prosper throughout the years.

**Collier's Weekly (CW) (history cited from Mott, 453-74)**

*Collier's Weekly* was founded by Peter Fenelon Collier, originally from Ireland, who had been a Catholic-book salesman until he established his own publishing company, P.F. Collier and Son, in 1875. It later expanded to be the largest subscription house in America with sales of 30 million books from 1900 to 1910. In April 1888, Collier started *Collier's Once a Week*, a magazine devoted to "fiction, fact, sensation, wit, humor, news."

By 1892 *CW's* circulation had climbed past the 250,000 mark, making it one of the highest selling magazines in the nation. In 1895 Collier changed

the magazine's name to *Collier's Weekly: An Illustrated Journal*, putting an emphasis on news (later, in 1914, it was again renamed to *Collier's: The National Weekly*). Though it stressed its news reporting, *CW* continued to carry and promote fictional.

The magazine quickly became a leading exponent of the halftone news prints/pictures. Collier recruited James H. Hare, a pioneer in the photojournalism field. In 1898, Collier (who had made his son, Robert Collier, a full partner of the company that same year) sent Hare to Cuba with writer Stephen Crane to cover the war. Hare's photographs were a substantial part of *CW's* success as the beginning of the twentieth century.

Norman Hapgood became the editor of *CW* in 1903; he attracted many leading writers during his stay nine-year stay. He also made an effort to bring in more pictures and photographers, knowing that, as photographic and film technology became more advanced and widespread, readers wanted to be shown more, have more visuals. In May 1906, Collier commissioned Jack London to cover the San Francisco earthquake. Accompanying the article were 16 pages of photographs. In 1903, Charles Dana Gibson signed

a \$100,000 contract in which he agreed to deliver 100 pictures (at \$1,000 each) to the magazine over the next four years, a huge amount of money in those days. Between the years 1904 and 1910, Maxfield Parris was under an exclusive contract with *CW*; the magazine published his famed "Arabian Nights" paintings in 1906-1907.

*CW* also began publishing the work of investigative journalists like Samuel Hopkins Adams, Ray Stannard Baker, C.P. Connolly and Ida Tarbell. They were called "muckrakers," and this approach to journalism resulted in tangible changes such as the reform of child-labor laws, women's suffrage, and slum clearance, and even to the creation of the FDA. The magazine pioneered investigative journalism, and established a reputation as a proponent of social reform. When companies *CW* attacked tried to sue *CW* and failed, other publications began following suit and featuring more investigative journalism, causing Theodore Roosevelt, a harsh critic, to describe it as "muckraking journalism."

In April 1905, *CW* published "Is Chicago Meat Clean?" an investigative article by Upton Sinclair that persuaded the Senate to pass the 1906 Meat

Inspection Act. Perhaps the most famous example of muckraking is Samuel Hopkins Adams' "The Great American Fraud," an eleven-part *CW* series (the first segment appeared on October 7, 1905). The series analyzed the contents of popular patent medications, and showed that the companies producing these medications were making false claims about their products. The article also described the health hazards some of these medications posed. It had a powerful impact on both the general public and government officials, and laid the groundwork for the enactment of the first Pure Food and Drug Act (1906). The American Medical Association reprinted the entire series in a book called *The Great American Fraud*, and the book sold 500,000 copies at 50 cents each.

Hapgood's huge influence on public opinion through *CW* led to the circulation of the magazine doubling between 1909 and 1912, from a half-million to one million readers. Robert Collier replaced Hapgood when he left in 1912, for a few years.

Collier died in 1909, and his son Robert died soon after in 1918. Robert's will left the magazine to three of his friends, Samuel Dunn, Harry Payne Whitney and Francis Patrick Garvan. In 1919 they

sold the magazine to Cromwell Publishing Co. (renamed Cromwell-Collier Publishing Company in 1939). The magazine went through a rough patch and appeared ready to die during the early 1920s. As early as July 1916 *CW* readers were voicing doubts about the magazine. In one letter to the editor of *The Publishers Weekly* Edward J. O'Brien said that, "During 1915, *Collier's Weekly* published 142 stories, of which I found 46 distinctive... 32% of the stories published... On a percentage basis *Collier's Weekly* ranks ninth in order of merit among American magazines of fiction" (O'Brien, 380).

*CW* had shrunk to around 20 pages and, in some cases, even less. The public had lost its taste for investigative journalism and there seemed little left to investigate. The readers' loss of interest was partly due to World War I - during wartime, readers lost their taste for articles criticizing their own country. Then two new editors were brought in, Richard Walsh and Loren Palmer, who introduced new features to *CW* and first began running the short-short story in the magazine.

*CW's* real revitalization, however, came in 1925 with William Ludlow Chenery's editorship. He

made Charles Colebaugh his managing editor and together they published a magazine that included some features but left much of the muckraking behind. They packed the magazine with fiction, illustrations and some of the most famous and respected cartoons in magazine history. Under Chenery the magazine enjoyed its greatest success, rivaling the *Saturday Evening Post* as most popular publication in the mass market throughout Chenery's tenure, which ended in 1931. "The magazine evolved its stable and staple editorial formula consisting of a balance of politics, economics, amusement, sports, serials, and short stories" (Peterson, 137).

To fight in the circulation battle with radio, CW created "The Collier Hour," a radio show broadcast on the NBC Blue Network from 1927-1932. This was radio's first major dramatic anthology, adapting stories and serials from the magazine (it first aired on Wednesdays but this was before the weekly publication came out; the show then switched to Sundays to avoid spoilers). In 1929, in addition to the dramatizations, the show began to offer music, news, sports and comedy. (Dunning, 141)

The magazine also started serializing novels during the late 1920s. It paid contributors and spent around 8% of its total budget paying for features, short stories and serials. Early on the magazine was about two-thirds fiction. The remainder was usually one or two special articles and a handful of regular features. Each issue had two photo spreads. *CW* sometimes simultaneously ran two, 10-part novels. Nonfiction was also serialized. (Janello & Jones, 119) Between 1913 and 1949 Sax Rohmer's *Fu Manchu* serials, illustrated by Joseph Clement Coll and others, were extremely popular. The first three *Fu Manchu* novels by Rohmer were actually compilations of 29 short stories that Rohmer wrote for the magazine. *The Mask of Fu Manchu*, adapted into a 1932 film and 1951 Wally Wood comic book, was first published as a 12-part *Collier's* serial, running from May 7 to July 23, 1932. (Janello & Jones, 113) The May 7 issue featured memorable cover illustration by famed maskmaker Wladyslaw Benda; his mask design for that cover was repeated by many other illustrators in subsequent adaptations and reprints.

Other writers who contributed to the magazine were Martha Gellhorn, Ernest Hemingway (who

reported on the Spanish Civil War), Winston Churchill (who wrote an account of the First World War and regularly contributed to *CW* during the 1930s - ending only in 1938 when he became the British Prime Minister), Willa Cather, Zane Grey, Ring Lardner, Sinclair Lewis, E. Phillips Oppenheim, Carl Fick, Cornelius Ryan, Ruth Burr Sanborn, Kurt Vonnegut, Albert Payson Terhune and H.C. Witwer. Arthur H. Vandenberg (who later became a prominent Senator) was briefly a *CW* editor during the 1900s.

Some leading *CW* illustrators and cartoonists included Charles Addams, Carl Anderson, Stan and Jan Berenstain, Sam Berman, Howard Chandler Christy, Sam Cobean, A.B. Frost, Dave Gerard, Jay Irving, Crockett Johnson, E.W. Kemble, Hank Ketcham, Percy Leason, George Litchty, David Low, J.C. Leyendecker, Bill Mauldin, Frederick Remington, Mischa Richter, John Sloan, Frederic Dorr Steele, William Steig, Charles Henry "Bill" Sykes, Richard Taylor, and Rowland B. Wilson. The magazine was especially famous for Kate Osann's "Tizzy" cartoons about a redheaded American girl who wore horn-rimmed glasses with triangular lenses. After *CW* folded the NEA syndicated the

cartoon; although all cartoons appeared in color in *CW* (one of the few magazines that did this), in the syndication/paperback reprints "Tizzy" is always black and white.

After World War II, Harry Devlin became the top editorial cartoonist at the magazine. During the 1940s Gurney Williams was its cartoon editor (as well as the cartoon editor for *American Magazine* and *Woman's Home Companion*). The magazine paid \$40-150 for each cartoon it ran. It received a staggering 200 submissions a week, leaving it up to Williams to make the weekly selection of 30 to 50 cartoons. ("This Little Gag Went...", par. 6)

During WWII, *CW's* circulation reached 2.5 million. In the October 14, 1944 issue, the magazine published one of the first articles written about concentration camps, Jan Karski's "Polish Death Camp," about his visit to Belzac. The article was an excerpt from Karski's book, *Story of a Secret State*, a month and a half before the book's publication by Houghton Mifflin. The book became a bestseller with 400,000 copies sold from 1944 to 1945. The selection *CW* took was reprinted with Robert Abzug's *American Views on the Holocaust: 1933-1945*.

After World War II, the magazine had a circulation of 2,846,052. Walter Davenport took over as editor in 1946. This kept in the tradition of *CW*: Ring Lardner had started the magazine's tradition of war coverage from the front lines in the First World War. (Tebbel & Zuckerman, 213)

After World War II, however, the magazine began to lose readers. But *CW* didn't lose all of its influence over the nation: in the early 1950s the magazine ran a groundbreaking series of articles about space flight that made the general public seriously consider the possibility of a trip to the moon for the first time. The series, called "Man Will Conquer Space Soon!", detailed Wernher von Braun's spaceflight plans. The pieces were edited by Cornelius Ryan and written by various authors, such as Willy Ley and Heinz Haber. (Collier's 1952) The series was later compiled (and expanded) in three books. (Van Riper, 138)

In August 1953, *CW* changed from a weekly to a biweekly, but it was still losing money. While its circulation was over 4 million at the time of its demise, the popularity of television cut too deeply into *CW*'s ad revenues and the magazine could no

longer cover its production and distribution costs.  
(Tebbel & Zuckerman, 221)

**Esquire (history cited from Gingrich, 1-328)**

*Esquire* was initially published in October 1933 as a racy publication for men, published by David A. Smart and Arnold Gingrich. Soon, however, it transformed itself into a more refined magazine. It emphasized men's fashion and began an illustrious literary history with contributions from the likes of Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald. C.F. Peters, a Scandinavian fashion artist, had told Smart and Gingrich (who then worked for a trade paper called *Apparel Arts* with William H. Weintraub, who later became *Esquire's* art director) that a magazine that could be given away or even sold to clothing customers would do well. A year later *Esquire*, a magazine that combined fashion illustration and advice with cultural writing, was born.

Within five hours the 5,000 copies of the first quarterly issue of *Esquire* that were reserved for newsstand sales sold out. The magazine's staff hurriedly recalled 95,000 of the 100,000 copies presold to menswear stores so they could be shipped

to newsstands and sold, rather than given away with purchase at these stores. Smart, Weintraub and Gingrich were so surprised by the success of the magazine that they quickly decided it should be a monthly rather than a quarterly magazine. Its monthly incarnation began in January 1934 with an issue that sold over 60,000 copies. By the end of that year, sales were over 135,000. By 1938, sales of *Esquire* rose to more than 700,000 copies.

Gingrich, as the magazine's editor, marketed *Esquire* as a guidebook to the leisurely lifestyle for middle-class men who, thanks to new technological developments, were beginning to experience more leisure time. The magazine featured fashion, food, and leisure advice, not to mention pin-up drawings of scantily clad women, full-page cartoons and stories by some of the best American fiction writers of the time. Dashiell Hammett, Ring Lardner, John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway and others all had work featured in *Esquire's* first issue.

Hemingway allegedly only contributed to the magazine because, after Gingrich hounded him for long enough, Hemingway challenged the editor, saying he would write for the magazine if Gingrich

could shoot more beer cans than Hemingway could. Gingrich won (saying "I guess he was drunker than I was") and Hemingway became a regular contributor. He also introduced Gingrich to other prominent writers (like Lardner and Dos Passos), leading to *Esquire's* reputation for publishing the period's best writers (including William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Sinclair Lewis). Harold Hayes, editor-in-chief of the magazine from 1961 to 1973, was hugely important to the magazine. He hired many "New Journalists" and under his leadership, *Esquire's* voice became as distinctive as its oversized pages (the magazine switched to the normal 8.5" by 11" size in 1971).

Starting in the late 1950s Dorothy Parker wrote book reviews for *Esquire*. In her interview in *The New York Times*, Alden Whitman says,

Her notices were written with a chatty trenchancy, as though she were talking informally to the reader; but she could (and did) impale authors who displeased her, either by synopsising a pompous plot in all its ludicrousness or by pulverizing the book with a phrase.

She reduced A.A. Milne's sugary "The House at Pooh Corner" to water by remarking that "Tonstant Weader Fwowed up" after reading one too many of the word "tummy." (Whiteman, pars. 36-37)

The 1960s saw the magazine pioneering the New Journalism trend and publishing writers like Norman Mailer, Truman Capote, Tim O'Brien, Nora Ephron, John Sack, Gay Talese and Tim Wolfe. Hayes encouraged fiction writers like Capote and Mailer to delve into nonfiction writing, and their work became a part of the New Journalism movement.

From 1969 to 1976, Gordon Lish was *Esquire's* fiction editor. Because of his influence on the lives of the authors he worked with, Lish became known as Captain Fiction. By publishing Raymond Carver's short stories in the magazine (often over Hayes' objection) Lish established Carver's career. Lish also encouraged publishing Richard Ford's short stories in the magazine, not to mention the work of T. Coraghessan Boyle, Barry Hannah, Cynthia Ozick, Reynolds Price and more. (Howard, 2007) As *Esquire's* fiction editor, Lish was less concerned with finding big-name, popular writers to fill the magazine with reader-friendly fluff. Rather, he

hoped the influential cultural magazine would become a vehicle to introduce *new* fiction and *new* fiction writers.

In February 1977, *Esquire* published "For Rupert-with no promises" as an unsigned work of fiction, the first time it had published any sort of work in the magazine without identifying the author, leading some readers to speculate as to whether it was the work of the reclusive J.D. Salinger. *The Wall Street Journal* later revealed in a front-page story that the author was Lish, though he did admit to trying to imitate Salinger's voice and tone. "And I tried to use those things to elaborate on certain circumstances and events in his fiction to deepen them and add complexity" (Hamilton, 190).

Other authors who contributed to the magazine included William F. Buckley, Murray Kempton, Malcolm Muggeridge, Ron Rosenbaum, Andrew Vachss and Garry Wills. *Esquire* never gave up on its mission of nurturing young writing talent, continuing with Elizabeth Gilbert (with an *Esquire* debut in 1993) and more recent writers such as Chris Adrian, Nathan Englander, Benjamin Percy and Patrick Somerville. The work of Stephen King, Ralph

Lombreglia and James Lee Burke has also appeared in the magazine or on its website recently.

The magazine has also always been well known for its design. *Esquire* has been a canvas for such artists and illustrators as Abner Dean, Santiago Martinez Delgado, George Petty, TY Mahon and John Groth. Jean-Paul Goude, Paul Rand, Roger Black and Samuel Antupit have all been art directors. During the 1960s George Lois, a legendary ad-man, used the techniques of print advertising to design *Esquire* covers - Lois was in a class by himself, and his covers were unmatched. Examples of Lois' covers include Sonny Liston as black Santa Claus and Andy Warhol drowning in a can of Campbell's tomato soup (to illustrate the death of the avant-garde). Lois' covers helped raise the magazine's circulation from 500,000 to two million in just ten years and earned Lois a spot in the Art Directors Hall of Fame. (Stableford, 2008)

The magazine had great influence on the development of future magazines because the success of *Esquire* proved that there was such a thing as a male market, and after World War II magazines such as *Sports Illustrated* and *Playboy* began to appear. *Esquire* proved that magazines didn't have to be

devoted to hunting or sports in order to attract men; a general-interest or lifestyle magazine could be appealing as well.

*Esquire* began to lose advertisers in the mid-1970s, and Clay Felker bought the magazine in 1977. He attempted to rebuild *Esquire* but failed, and he sold it two years later to the 13-30 Corporation, a Tennessee publishing company run by Phillip Moffitt and Chris Whittle. The young owners turned the magazine around by returning it to Gingrich's original plan. Whittle and Moffitt split up in 1986 and sold the magazine to Hearst at the end of the same year, making a huge profit from the sale. (Polsgrove, 287)

David Granger was named editor-in-chief of the magazine in 1997. Since then, the magazine has won numerous awards. The October 2008 issue is the first magazine ever to incorporate an animated cover with e-ink electronic paper, and the February 2009 issue was charged by many with having crossed edit-ad separation by including a Discovery Channel ad on a pull-out cover flap.

*Esquire* was able to survive the 1950s without having to do a major reevaluation of its editorial plan even though the magazine had a strong literary

emphasis. In the year 1943, for example, *Esquire* ran more than 75 pieces of fiction. In the May issue of that year (a 172-page issue with an edit/ad ratio of about 60/40) fiction made up almost 15% of the editorial content in the magazine. *Esquire's* July 1959 issue (120 pages, 55%/45% edit/ad ratio) ran 17 total pages of fiction, which made up nearly 26% of the issue's editorial content. *Esquire* could afford to keep fiction because the magazine was always a cultural magazine, and therefore had a responsibility to follow the trends going out throughout the country and worldwide. This put the magazine in an easier position than some to fight television. The magazine's emphasis on the new, the undiscovered, the exciting gave it an advantage throughout the turbulent times of the television era.

Also fortunate for *Esquire* was the popularity it gained in the 1940s through its pin-up girl drawings. Its skyrocketing to popularity after the Second World War at the end of the 1940s meant that *Esquire*, at least, had a leg up when the market began to fall and advertisers began to retreat. The magazine's editors were easily able to focus more editorial on women and fashion and a bit less on

fiction, ensuring the survival of their magazine while others were driven into the ground. By the early sixties, however, fiction had a much smaller place in *Esquire*. In the year 1963, the magazine published only 34 pieces of fiction, a decrease of over 50% in two decades. The May 1963 issue of *Esquire* ran 172 pages with an editorial/advertising ratio of roughly 55/45% - the two pages of fiction the magazine ran that month amounted to 6½ pages, less than 7% of the issue's editorial content.

*Esquire* clearly plans on keeping up its role of intuitive and innovative design; on the October 2008, 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary's issue cover was a battery-powered screen built in, making it the "world's first e-ink cover." The words "The 21<sup>st</sup> century begins now →" points to a curl of binary code printed on the overlay. (Elliott, 2009)

In 2007, the magazine began its Napkin Fiction Project. *Esquire* mailed 250 cocktail napkins to writers all over the country "some with a half dozen books to their name, others just finishing their first" ("Napkin Fiction," 2007) and asked the authors to write stories on the napkins. The magazine received around 100 stories back, including work from Rick Moody, Jonathan Ames, Bret

Anthony Johnston, Joshua Ferris, Yiyun Li, Peter Ho Davies, Aimee Bender and ZZ Packer.

### **Today**

As you can see from these histories, magazines like *The New Yorker* and *Vanity Fair* (in its 1913-1936 version) defined a niche more sophisticated than any old how-to magazine but less esoteric than that of literary journals, most of which are run out of universities and function mainly as a platform for students and professors to publish their own work. By the early 21<sup>st</sup> century nearly all new magazines were aimed at increasingly specialized markets. These niche publications were organized around a demographically defined audience or specific consumer interests, so magazine founders could attract advertisers.

For example, magazines for brides, an attractive readership for advertisers selling household goods as well as wedding and honeymoon accoutrements, include not only *Bride's* magazine (founded in 1935), but the more specialized *Destination Weddings and Honeymoons*, *Latina Bride*, *Christian Bride*, *Houston Bride*, *Manhattan Bride*, and *Mother of*

*the Bride*, all of which started in 2000.

(Kutler, 194)

The desire to appeal to advertisers aimed at a specific audience spawned such ideas as airlines' in-flight magazines (an ideal example of the "captive audience"). New forms of periodical publishing created new fusions of advertising/marketing and editorial content, such as in *CML: Camel Quarterly*, a periodical produced by magazine-publishing conglomerates on special order for cigarette companies.

This kind of specialization simply did not have to exist before the arrival of television. Magazines were aiming for the highest circulation number and, intuitively, this meant they tried to sell their magazine to the widest cross-section of people across the nation. Magazines then competed with paperback books, another form of cheap entertainment. But there were few other competitors, until television threatened to usurp the national audience. Advertisers wisely saw the appeal of television over magazines - they could get more viewers with television; television gave you more of a "captive audience"; television had a live, moving picture and sound; and television

offered more content control, enabling advertisers to embed their ads in the program they chose, something they couldn't do in magazines.

The fact is that magazines simply did not stand up to television as a national, general-interest medium. Whether it was the advertisers or the readers that were the first to leave magazines for television doesn't matter as much as the fact that when one was gone, so was the other.

The appeal of pictorial magazines like *Life* and *Look* also quickly wore off with the appearance of television. Photographs were a relatively dated invention by this point, and no matter how advanced the color photograph technology became, the color video-picture technology stayed in stride.

Magazines had no choice- they had to adapt in some way. Though magazines' primary responsibility was to the reader, most of their problems were coming from the advertisers. So publishers decided to reevaluate their medium through the advertisers' eyes. How would the magazines be able to recapture the audience's attention?

As you can see from the histories of the magazines that were able to stay open, the only way to get this attention was to be able to more

narrowly define an audience. This way the advertisers could be sure that they were spending their money on an ad that only interested consumers would be looking at – no more wasted views! General-interest media couldn't offer a narrowly tailored audience with specialized interests. These niche publications were able to show their advertisers who they were paying for – in terms of age, gender, household income, interests, etc. Magazines' appeal to advertisers was based upon demographics, not raw numbers as it had been through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Interestingly, in 2004 *Glamour* announced that it would be adding fiction after a 12-year dry spell. Daryl Chen, the magazine's fiction and book editor, said in an interview with Quinn Dalton for [mediabistro.com](http://mediabistro.com), "Though we don't expect fiction to help sell the magazine – we don't put it on the cover, for example – we do see commercial value in including it because it adds to a well-rounded feel" (Dalton, par. 14). Chen said that a mix of fashion, reporting on women's health issues and, now, the occasional piece of great fiction, was an unbeatable combination. He pointed to the fact that women were buying more books than ever, as well as

the popularity of book clubs among *Glamour* readers as evidence that fiction would do well in the magazine. Two stories ran in 2004, and the magazine projected adding two to four stories to the magazine per year, as a "treat." "Having it monthly takes away from that surprise" (Dalton, par. 15), said Chen in the interview.

Unfortunately, Chen might have done better to look at what kind of books women were buying and reading in their book clubs. There has been an increase in the popularity of nonfiction books, especially memoirs, over the last few years. Besides that, short fiction and full novels are completely different species. A woman curling up with the latest *Times* bestseller may have no desire to read a short story or poem.

And, apparently, *Glamour* readers didn't, since today *Glamour* contains no fiction, either in the magazine or on the web. Clearly, short fiction in otherwise specialized publications doesn't work either. Readers' tastes have changed since the Golden Era of the general-interest magazine, and they look elsewhere – to the television and the Internet – for the type of entertainment they once found in the magazine fiction.

## **Internet**

I haven't yet discussed the affects of the Internet on magazines because this is such a wide-ranging and ever-changing topic. I wouldn't be able to even scratch the surface of how the Internet is changing the mass media landscape yet again.

It would be impossible, however, to deny the significant role the Internet has played in the way magazines are run and marketed today. One reason for the decline of fiction in magazines is that authors no longer rely on being published in magazines to jump-start their careers. Self-publishing is easier today than it was in the heyday of magazine fiction, meaning fewer writers need a way to break into the publishing world. Similarly, the Internet has given every user the ability to be published through blogs and interactive webpages. Rather than having favorite columnists, young men and women today have favorite blogs (many of which can be started and produced for free), bloggers or favorite websites, some of which bear the names of magazines (like Cosmo.com and Esquire.com).

The authors who would once seek out magazines as a forum in which to have their work published, to see their names in print, can now get this same joy by opening a blog. Additionally, with a blog, the author is able to control his or her content, when he/she posts and how much he/she writes. While is little to no money is involved, there is the freedom of being able to write anything you'd like (and, always, the hope a publisher will see it and offer a book deal, as has happened with a handful of blogs, e.g. [www.StuffWhitePeopleLike.com](http://www.StuffWhitePeopleLike.com)). It will be interesting to see whether the ease with which one can open a blog will affect the number of freelance writers available to magazines.

What's more, the new Internet generation has a different timetable than magazines are used to. Daily newspapers, once the timeliest way for Americans to get their dose of current events and local news, are now obsolete before they hit one's doorstep in the morning. And while magazines don't have the same mission as newspapers, it's easy to see how a bimonthly, a monthly, and even a weekly publication will have to struggle to keep its content interesting and fresh given millions of

websites that open each week, each one spouting at least some kind of information.

Perhaps, however, the Internet will force magazines back into publishing fewer how-to pieces, since any question a reader has can easily be answered on Google, and more longer essays, narratives or works of fiction. Or maybe it will go in the opposite direction and magazines will try to adopt a tone and design more like a web page, with shorter articles, more bright visuals, more sidebars and graphics. Surely, magazines will be putting extra effort into making their content interesting, vital and relevant.

The majority of magazines are at least in the process of starting an editorial web component, if they haven't already had one for a few years. Some are trying to make money from their web pages by seeking advertising and asking for a subscription fee for access to the magazine's online archives or certain editorial content. Others give access to all Web features to their print subscribers. The next step would seem to be offering a website-subscription fee that would include a free subscription to the print magazine (or vice versa),

in the manner of magazines offering free videocassettes with a subscription.

Other magazines are closing but keeping their web pages open. While former readers of the magazine often believe that the print side closing means that the web page will be updated rarely, if at all, recently more and more magazines (such as *Elle Girl*) are taking that step as yearly budgets are cut further and further.

The Internet, however, still hasn't posed a real threat to most print magazines, though it has to newsweeklies and celebrity news magazines like *People* and *US Weekly*, because these magazines' news-y content (like that of newspapers) can be published in a much timelier manner on the Internet, making these magazines obsolete before they even hit newsstands each week. When television became a commercial household product, magazines were faced with a devastating loss of advertising revenue, from which many never recovered. The magazines simply could not find a way to win back enough advertisers to keep the magazine open at a reasonable enough subscription/newsstand rate that readers would still buy it. And advertisers have

not been able to find a way to make money off of Internet websites.

*The New York Times* tried to charge people for a premium service "Times Select," but was unable to get enough paying subscribers to make the service worthwhile. *Cosmopolitan* offers full access to its website for free, while *Nylon* will give web-readers a small taste of its current or archived magazine (complete with page-turning sound graphics) before asking the user to subscribe to its premium access option. *The New Yorker's* website, like many, makes full use of multi-media options: it has a podcast (available on iTunes and the website), blogs, an animated video and audio- all linked to from the home page. Archives, illustrations and editorial content are also squeezed in.

Which illustrates another point: just because a magazine has a web component it doesn't mean that component is much good. *Cosmo's* web page is an explosion of pink and exclamation points. The bottom half of *Esquire's* web page is an organized chart of different editorial, audio and visual content, while the top half is a confusing mish-mash of boxes, links and revealing photos (of women, of course). The content is eclectic, as

well. The magazines don't know when it's okay to post editorial from their most current issue for fear it will prevent readers from buying the magazine on newsstand. The magazines don't know how much of the editorial on the web should come from the print magazine (again, fearing people will stop buying the magazine because they know that if they wait a few weeks they'll get the same information on the Internet) and how much should be entirely new. Then, what sort of new information will they be looking for? *Yankee Magazine* focuses on inputting data on events and locations into its database so it can become something of a search engine for all things New England. Other magazines, like *Gourmet*, load their Web pages with all sorts of extras (video tutorials, blogs, blurbs, etc.), hoping to tide their readers over until the next issue of the magazine comes out.

Until magazines are able to definitively say what their readers want to see on their Web pages they won't be able to attract advertisers. But once the magazines can draw people to the web (if they can), there are a million ways of tracking their activity on the page — how they got to it, what links they clicked while on it, how long they spent

on it, etc. This means the magazines will be able to give advertisers more data, making the Internet pages appealing – at least, as long as advertisers have, by then, found profitable and effective way of advertising on the Internet.

### **Conclusion**

When I began this project, I wanted to show that the decrease of magazine fiction stemmed from a change in the American reader, and how the rise of television reflected this change. As I conducted my research, however, my project really became a study of how one medium (television) affected another (magazines). Within this seemingly simple, cause-effect relationship were dozens of other factors – whether the reader himself was changing, whether everyone was tired of the short story, the role advertising companies played in the descent of general-interest magazines. By studying their past, one comes away with a greater appreciation for what magazines are now, how adaptable and innovative they are.

It is impossible to pinpoint one factor in the decline of short fiction in magazines. My research

has shown that magazines stopped carrying fiction or decreased the amount of fiction they carried mostly in response to outside influences – advertisers insisting on more specific audiences, television usurping their general-interest, mass market role, readers no longer viewing magazines as purely entertainment.

My Capstone project shows how much different media can affect one another and how important it can be to adapt to new media. The effect of the rise of television and the subsequent decline in general-interest publications was widespread- it changed the role and format of magazines forever, it changed the way American people thought about entertainment and how they spent their free time, and it changed the way advertisers looked at and targeted audiences.

As shown in the various histories I presented in this paper, until they lost their spot as a mass-market medium, magazines were extremely powerful and had a huge influence on the American public. They had the ability to make or break a Presidential candidate, to instigate wide-reaching public reforms, to draw attention to social wrongs – magazines had the time, space, and reach to set

the public agenda. The rise of television largely took over this agenda-setting role when it became the widest-reaching medium in the nation. Magazines had to carve out a new role for themselves, and catering to niches and specialized interests was the best way for them to do so. Fiction, purely for entertainment, couldn't fit into these niche publications – after all, how could a magazine like *Golf Weekly* come up with even one golf-centered short story for each issue? The new magazines couldn't justify keeping pages and pages of fiction to advertisers, who were interested in demographic statistics.

This topic is especially relevant today as we see newspapers and magazines struggling yet again to stay open in a world that's becoming increasingly digitized. Magazines and advertisers alike try to see how they can fit onto the Internet or, if they don't, how debilitating the Internet will be for them. It will be interesting to see how magazines continue to adapt to the Internet, and whether any of their adaptations will further mirror the ones magazines made to combat television.

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### **Capstone Written Summary**

My Capstone project examines television's role in the decline of fiction in U.S. magazines. I argue that the rise of television forced magazines to abandon fiction, forcing the magazines to search for other ways to make themselves indispensable to readers. A major contributor for this battle for readers was the advertisers most of whom pulled away from magazines as television's popularity grew. Major magazines like the *Saturday Evening Post* still had extremely high circulations when they were forced to shut down due to the lack of advertising revenue.

Magazines- before radio, film, television and the Internet- were entertainment for the masses. Most magazines were defined as general interest publications, meaning they covered a wide variety of topics that could appeal to a huge amount of people. They had virtually no competition for readers or for advertisers. Advertisers liked magazines because their ads could print in color and the advertising companies had a fair degree of control over the content of the ad. Even radio,

being picture-less and often used merely as background noise, couldn't pose a threat.

Television, however, changed all that. It seamlessly integrated itself into American households- within no time at all the majority of families nationwide owned a television set. Advertisers saw tremendous potential in television as a marketing tool and television networks were able to show advertisers how many people their ads were reaching. And this number was high- higher than even the best magazines with the highest circulations couldn't match. Advertisers, then, took the money they had been putting into general interest magazines and put it into television, leaving magazines high and dry.

This forced magazines to make drastic changes to keep advertising revenue. Magazines had to make themselves relevant to advertisers, so they began narrowing their market so they would be able to appeal to advertisers another way. Perhaps magazines were no longer the furthest-reaching form of media, but magazines could appeal to extremely specialized interests, something television wouldn't be capable of until the advent of cable stations. So, as the golden age of general interest

magazines came to an end, that of the niche magazine was just beginning. By offering content that appeals to readers with specific interests, magazines could target advertisers. Rather than just reaching many people, these magazines could show advertisers that they were reaching the exact audience the advertiser was trying to reach, with no wasted views. Today most of the magazines that open are niche publications.

During this switch from general interest to niche, however, fiction in magazines fell by the wayside. For the purposes of my project, I chose to examine six major magazines, two of which are no longer in circulation (*Collier's Weekly* and *Saturday Evening Post*), four that are (*Cosmopolitan*, *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic Monthly* and *Esquire*). I study the history of each magazine—when it began, what kind of content it included, whom its contributors were, etc.—paying special attention to the literary legacies left by each. I pay special attention to changes these magazines started making in the 1950s, accompanying the television's rise in popularity as household entertainment.

Much of my research was historical in nature- I had to look into the pasts of the magazines and find their literary histories. For the magazines that are still open today I contrasted their past with their present literary tradition. I focused especially on the late 1940s to the early 1960s in order to span the rise of television. During this period I looked for changes in the content of the magazines I studied that would show how the magazine was adapting to television and the loss of readers/advertisers. Was there, for example, a rise in short, service pieces? Many magazines used more/better quality pictures to compete with the pictorial aspect of television. How long did these changes stay in place- did one particular method (like drastically cutting newsstand prices) fail and was therefore quickly stopped? Is one now a staple of American magazines? I also compared the number of fiction pieces the magazines ran before television's popularity skyrocketed to the amount they ran afterwards.

Much of my research had to do with the American reader, not just the producers of magazines. A question that came up in the course of my research was whether the readers' tastes in

entertainment and short fiction changed first, veering away from general interest magazines as television filled the general interest role, thereby driving advertisers away from magazines and towards television. The alternative is that the advertisers left magazines first, causing many major general-interest magazines to fail even before the readers had stopped reading them. To answer this question I had to look deeper into the relationships between all these forms of media-advertisers, television and magazines- and their consumers.

I also researched the present state of magazines- both the ones I studied extensively (those that are still open) and others that have recently made a change in their fiction content (such as *Gourmet*, which is 2004 promised to start running fiction- and never did). I tried to answer questions such as: what is the purpose of magazines now? How are magazines dealing with competition from the Internet (are they using any of the same techniques editors used during the rise of television)? Looking at magazines today helped me describe the lasting changes that television caused.

I chose my Capstone project topic because it combined a few of my favorite interests- writing, reading and magazines. As I have researched it, however, it has become more significant to me. My project really became a study of how one medium affected another, but within that seemingly simple cause-effect relationship were dozens of other factors- whether the reader himself was changing, whether everyone was tired of the short story, the role advertising companies played in the descent of general interest magazines. By studying their past, one comes away with a greater appreciation for what magazines are now, how adaptable and innovative they are.

I also wanted to study the changing role of fiction in today's society. In bookstores collections of short stories do significantly worse than novels, which, in turn, do worse than non-fiction books like memoirs. Before the rise of television magazines didn't just offer "light fiction" like detective and romance stories to please a wide audience- they gave emerging writers a platform for publishing their work and attracting a book deal, or at least more writing work. I wanted to find out where fiction and fiction

writers had turned- whether they had found another platform (such as self-publication) and "grown out" of magazines or if, without magazines, readers had just lost taste for short fiction and stopped demanding it.

My Capstone project shows how greatly different media can affect each other and how important it can be to adapt to new media. The effect of the rise of television and the subsequent decline in general-interest publications was widespread- it changed the role and format of magazines forever, it changed the way our nation thought about entertainment and how they spent their free time, it changed the way advertisers looked at and targeted audiences.

The topic is especially relevant today as we see newspapers and magazines struggling yet again to stay open in a world that's becoming increasingly digitized. Magazines and advertisers alike try to see how they can fit onto the Internet or, if they don't, how debilitating the Internet will be for them. It will be interesting to see how magazines continue to adapt to the Internet, and whether any of their adaptations will further

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