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WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT *The New Yorker*



Trysh Travis

“ ‘He didn’t love me the way you love me. I’m not saying that. But he loved me. You can grant me that, can’t you?’ ”
—Raymond Carver, “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love”¹

In 1956, Mrs. Mary Stewart of Humboldt, Nebraska, sat down to write a letter to *The New Yorker*: “Since we have been subscribing since 1926 or ’27, I feel I can address you as a close friend. I just want to thank you for the February 25th [anniversary issue] cover. The sight of Eustace Tilley cheered me, so unchanged in a chaotic world (from a doctor’s wife in Albany to a widow in Nebraska). The cover that Stew and I always looked forward to as a sort of milestone in your life and ours warmed my heart. Please don’t change, ever.”² Mrs. Stewart’s letter, and dozens of others like it, testify to the community that cohered around *The New Yorker* during William Shawn’s tenure as editor from 1952 to 1987. Among the organizing principles of this community were intellectual acumen and good taste, but both of these were subordinate to a sense of emotional connectedness, of mutual respect and trust, and love. When he left the magazine, Shawn defined the bonds that had knit this little world together and invited writers and readers to transcend their proscribed roles within the impersonal economic structure of the modern literary culture industry:³

Whatever our individual roles at *The New Yorker* . . . we have built something quite wonderful together. Love has been the controlling

emotion, and love is the essential word. We have done our work with honesty and love. *The New Yorker*, as a reader once said, has been the gentlest of magazines. Perhaps it has also been the greatest, but that matters far less. What matters most is that you and I, working together, taking strength from the inspiration that our first editor, Harold Ross, gave us, have tried constantly to find and say what is true. I must speak of love once more. I love you all, and will love you as long as I live.⁴

Together, Mr. Shawn and Mrs. Stewart defined the principles by which the *New Yorker* community operated from the early 1950s through the late 1980s: within it, the inspiration and constancy of history helped to ward off the encroachments of a dubious present, and the reward of that struggle was an intimate, loving connection across the impersonal vastness of time and space. That sense of constancy and connection and, above all, the wonder of its uniqueness in the modern world, is what we talk about when we talk about *The New Yorker*.

Given our understanding of the self-interested nature of for-profit literary production, it seems counterintuitive and almost absurd to talk about a magazine and its readers being joined together through bonds of “love” or “inspiration.” This is particularly the case since so many twentieth-century magazines aimed at the middle classes have depended on ersatz affective appeals to win their readers’ confidence and thus bolster their own selling power.⁵ Does this tendency within magazines to manipulate emotion mean that they cannot ever generate real emotion? Does their success in winning consumers for the market mean that they can never offer a point of resistance to it? In other words, given what we know about the nature of for-profit twentieth-century magazines and their relationships with their anxious middle-class readers, can we ever see Mrs. Stewart’s “love” for *The New Yorker* as anything other than a compensatory fantasy meant to gloss over or to deny the realities of producer-consumer relationships within the modern culture industry? Can we ever see Mr. Shawn’s “love” for the magazine and its readers as more than a calculated strategy to increase reader loyalty by flattering his audience’s craving for cultural distinction? If we hope ever to attain an adequately nuanced understanding of the way that sophisticated popular literary culture works in the lives of upper-middle-class men and women—an understanding of what, for lack of a better term, we might call high middlebrow culture—our answer to these questions must be yes.⁶

But how to do this? In this essay I look at the history of *The New Yorker*, and at the kinds of criticisms levied at it during that history, to try and understand the critical relationship the magazine believed itself to have (and

to offer to its readers) with the other literary culture industries that surrounded it. The fact that this relationship was critical, as opposed to complicit, and the precise nature of its criticism, have been obscured by the passing of time and the accumulation of myths around the magazine's first two editors, Harold Ross and William Shawn. By demystifying Ross and Shawn, I hope to reveal the nature of the critical biases that argue against the notion that the upper middle class can enjoy a genuine, affective, affirming connection with the pieces of literary mass culture marketed to them. Present in both popular and academic criticism, these biases privilege a narrow ideal of cultural agency, articulated either as autonomous artistic production or heroically subversive consumption.⁷ Until we are willing to elide the stark divisions between those categories, and to broaden the cramped idea of what counts as "resistance" that arises from them, we will be unable to come to terms with the complex realities of how upper-middle-class men and women make meaning within mass culture.

In 1952, *The New Yorker* was a thriving weekly magazine, the design and editorial principles of which had been laid out in 1925 by Harold Ross. *The New Yorker's* beginnings had been ambitious and straightforward. Its prospectus promised it would be "a reflection in word and picture of metropolitan life," and as such its contents and layout catered to the tastes of a young, well-heeled urban audience, "providing an ever-ready answer to the prevalent query, 'What shall we do this evening?'"⁸ It reflected its target audience to themselves with cartoons and humor, reviews, service columns and tasteful ads, all set in clean, spare type. Its success in doing so was considerable; after a rocky start, *The New Yorker* grew in circulation and advertising pages in every year but the worst of the Depression. In 1943 the management launched an overseas Pony Edition distributed free to servicemen, in part to prove *The New Yorker's* "essentiality" to the war effort and thus increase its paper ration. The Pony Edition vastly enlarged the magazine's audience; circulation among servicemen jumped from 20,000 in 1943 to 150,000 in 1944.⁹ At the same time, the war intensified the magazine's commitment to first-person reportage, "the story behind the story," culminating with the 1948 publication of John Hersey's *Hiroshima*. The ensuing accolades further increased the magazine's national visibility.¹⁰ The result of these innovations was palpable: between 1941 and 1951, subscriptions nearly doubled, from 171,000 to 325,000.¹¹

In the decades after the war, *The New Yorker* continued to expand, taking advantage of demographic shifts that produced more and better-educated readers with an interest in increasing their cultural capital as well as the earning power to do so. As early as 1929, more than half of the magazine's subscribers had lived outside the New York metropolitan area. As

historian of the magazine Mary Corey has pointed out, by the late 1940s, 15 percent lived in the northern Midwest, 13 percent on the West Coast, eleven percent in the South, and ten percent in foreign countries; twenty percent resided in communities with populations of fewer than ten thousand. The magazine remained solidly, but not monolithically, upper middle class: most subscribers had attended college, more than half owned their own homes, and 75 percent had annual family incomes of over \$5,000. Nearly half of the subscribers were employed in business; 26 percent listed their occupation as "housewife." It is important to note, Corey argues, that "fewer clergymen subscribed than farmers, and close to 6% of those polled described themselves as clerical workers or secretaries . . . 13% of those who subscribed had not attended college at all, and 25% of subscribers had family incomes of less than \$5,000 per year."¹²

By the middle of the 1950s, the magazine ranked seventy-second in the nation for circulation, but third in the annual tally of advertising sales, pulling in more than four thousand pages a year. In 1958, its 10 percent profit margin was double that of Time, Inc., its nearest competitor, and dwarfed the industry average of 2.7 percent Dividend payments to stockholders in F-R publishing, *The New Yorker's* parent company, increased from \$1.50 per share a year in the early 1940s to \$10.93 in 1966. In 1965, the magazine had almost 470,000 subscribers, 80 percent of whom lived outside the New York metropolitan area. Their subscription renewal rate was more than 80 percent and the magazine led the industry in number of ad pages, selling 6,092 in 1965, the year after William Shawn decided to discontinue cigarette advertisements.¹³

At the same time that it experienced this enormous financial growth, the magazine expanded its intellectual mission. Building on the foundation of topicality and whimsy laid down in the 1920s, it published long pieces of complex, often controversial journalism and fiction by, among others, Vladimir Nabokov, Mary McCarthy, Hannah Arendt, and J. D. Salinger. During this period, editorial and business staffers, and industry professionals and readers alike generally agreed that the magazine's success resulted in part from editor William Shawn's talent, but also from his close adherence to the unique "formula" founder Harold Ross had devised in the mid-1920s.¹⁴

Ross's innovations within the world of smart magazines had been considerable.¹⁵ Capitalizing on the changing demographic trends of the 1920s, he originated the idea of a metropolitan weekly for the upper middle classes. He admired *Smart Set* and *Vanity Fair* but believed that, as national-circulation monthlies, they missed a golden advertising opportunity, since "Why would an upscale New York department store want to reach readers in Duluth or Denver?"¹⁶ The timely, local focus of his *New Yorker* would make

it topical enough to appeal to a sophisticated young crowd and thereby attract local advertising. In addition to toying with advertising strategies, Ross revolutionized both the art and the prose formulas of *Life* and *Judge*, the leading humor magazines of the day. He introduced the discussion of specific products and brand names into *The New Yorker's* service columns (On and Off the Avenue, Tables for Two, When Nights Were Bold), and pushed traditional magazine biography to new limits in the Profile.¹⁷ His background as a reporter led him to establish the complex fact-checking system that hallmarked *New Yorker* writing.¹⁸ He assembled under him the formidable roster of editorial and artistic talent—not only William Shawn, but also Katharine Angell, E. B. White, James Thurber, Rea Irvin, and Carmine Peppe—that gave the magazine its distinctive look and feel over several generations. And, most important, he demanded and won from publisher Raoul Fleischmann an absolute separation of business and editorial offices, a guarantee that the magazine's journalistic mission would not be compromised by its need for advertising revenue.

Ross's innovations in this area deserve special mention. Beginning with the rise of the ten-cent national magazines (*Ladies Home Journal*, *Munsey's*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, etc.) in the 1880s, a cozy relationship between business and editorial offices had become the norm. Advertising copy and editorial content needed to work together to attract and hold the attention of the millions of readers who allowed publishers to keep subscription costs down and advertising rates high.¹⁹ Ross's famous pronouncement in *The New Yorker's* prospectus, that the magazine would not be "for the old lady in Dubuque," alludes to this financial structure. In the next sentence, he goes on to explain that as "a magazine avowedly published for a metropolitan audience," *The New Yorker* "will escape an influence which hampers most national publications." The pointed image of the old lady in Dubuque has ensured that Ross's statement has typically been read as a dismissal of mid-American Babbittry (or, perhaps more accurately, Carol Kennicotttry). Taken in the context of the evolving culture industries, however, it is clear that the "influence" Ross sought to escape was the business and editorial synergy that had come to define the nature of magazine publishing. To ensure *The New Yorker's* "escape," he replaced the typical permeable membrane between editor and publisher with a veritable firewall. Equal parts spatial arrangement, formal policy, and heated rhetoric, the divide between business and editorial agendas at the magazine was, for Ross, a matter of life or death.²⁰ He believed that if the rank miasma of financial concerns were ever to infect the vulnerable creative heart of the magazine, the latter would "freeze up, cease to be creatively productive, and become useless."²¹

Ross's editorial brilliance and his journalistic integrity cast long shadows, and his garrulous personality also contributed to the popular tendency to

equate him with his magazine. He did not shrink from constructing himself as a historical subject in life or in death; his name and antics appeared frequently in the New York gossip columns, and he left behind a rich, pleasurable archive of carefully collected minutiae, including phone messages and cocktail napkins.²² Born in Aspen in 1892, schooled as a “tramp” reporter on the waterfronts of San Francisco and New Orleans, gone AWOL during World War I so he could get to Paris to join the staff of *Stars and Stripes*, and much given to practical jokes, gambling, profanity, and a benedictory “God bless” when leaving a room, Ross’s public persona titillated and baffled both observers and his would-be intimates.²³ Despite much wishful thinking about other publishing venues—including a trade journal of the shipping news and a glossy detective magazine—he devoted his entire attention to *The New Yorker*, overseeing hiring, approving story ideas, and editing art, copy, and advertising. Both his biography and the story of his dedication to the magazine are representative of his class and generation; a boy from the hinterlands thrilling to the possibilities of the big city, he was an exemplary member of what Malcolm Cowley described as the “proletariat of the arts” that enlivened New York’s literary scene in the 1920s.²⁴

It should come as no surprise, then, to learn that even after his death Ross, in the public mind, was *The New Yorker*. His story satisfies at many levels: it is rich in vivid and funny details, it neatly encapsulates cultural change, and the irony at its heart (how could a man who has to ask, “Is Moby Dick the whale or the man?” be the editor of *The New Yorker*?) is unresolvable without recourse to the tantalizing mysteries of “genius.”²⁵ Ross’s own gift for aphorism has played into the public and scholarly tendency to flatten him into this pleasing stereotype. His excoriation of one flagging staffer, “We’re not making Ford automobiles!” is easily read as a sign of his commitment to an individualized, artisanal mode of literary production.²⁶ The old lady in Dubuque herself can be seen as a further elaboration on that commitment, one that codes it as reassuringly male. And the hagiographic tendency in the popular mind has been compounded by Ross’s insistence on the division of loyalties between business and editorial departments: staff writers moved to regurgitate their memories of the magazine found themselves quite gorged on Ross, and rarely sought supplements from the business side of the menu. Finally, when he chose William Shawn as his successor, Ross appointed a man whose reverence for the idea of *The New Yorker* and its history (coupled with a personal mildness and unwavering self-effacement) would ensure that his own voice would resonate from beyond the grave.

By the mid-1960s, with such larger-than-life memories of Ross looming over it, *The New Yorker* had begun to seem a victim of its own successes.

As changes in the political landscape and in the profession of journalism became more pronounced, “the Rock that Ross built” was taken to task by a new generation of journalists and critics who believed the press’s relationship to established norms of government, reportage, and consumption was inherently adversarial.²⁷ Evaluations of the magazine in its present incarnation were polite, but generally considered it to have declined from its brilliant—Ross’s brilliant—past. Writing in 1958, *The New Yorker*’s own James Thurber noted that “we have gotten into a thing that Ross dreaded all his life,” and went on to complain about the magazine’s “matronly girth.” *Time* noted two years later that while Shawn was a talented editor, he was not a genius like Ross; under Shawn’s regime, “the magazine had become afflicted with middle-aged spread.” Similarly, a *Newsweek* article on the magazine’s fortieth anniversary remarked on its “stuffiness,” and its “tendency to be timid and sometimes even prissy.”²⁸

Criticisms of the Shawn-era *New Yorker* suggest that the magazine’s success was inseparable from Ross and, more subtly, from some essential masculine virtue that he embodied. To mainstream critics, *The New Yorker*’s inability adequately to address the contemporary scene reflected a stylistic timidity coded as feminine, the result somehow of an improper relationship between the magazine’s advertising content and its journalistic mission. Reifying Ross’s journalistic style, and even more important, his separation of the business and editorial spheres of the magazine, these critics subtly reconfirmed the masculinist ideal of artistic production often associated with literary high modernism, an ideal that (almost oxymoronically) Ross’s boisterous public persona had suggested.²⁹ Obliquely, this fixation on Ross as a heroic, masculine cultural producer suggested that William Shawn’s editorial policies had somehow feminized and thus degraded the magazine.

As the New Journalists of the mid-1960s sought to make a place for themselves in the literary scene, these polite criticisms, and the casual gendered metaphors through which they were articulated, became more elaborate. Writing in the *Village Voice*, Seymour Krim eulogized Ross as a hardboiled proto-hipster, “a ’20s toughie cynicized by Menckenism but possessed of enough confident moxie to editorially transcend politics in the sparkling play of the Manhattan world he loved so much.” Krim saw Ross’s editorial genius as unabashedly physical—the magazine came from “the gleam in Harold Ross’s dry eye” and “the unappeasable sniffer of a great newshound”; no one was “immune to its salty taste.” By contrast, the contemporary *New Yorker* was churned out by “punctuation castratos who have gone to bed with commas for a quarter of a century.” Its critical acumen had collapsed “as ungracefully as every real power does when the true gism [sic] gives out,” and its “effete advocacy of justice which can get wet over the death of Mrs. Roosevelt and small dogs” could no longer assuage

its “impotence in the face of [current] reality.” While many mainstream critics and readers had seen *The New Yorker’s* publication of James Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time* as a sign of the magazine’s deep commitment to the social issues of the day, Krim read that nod to the civil rights movement as merely the magazine’s move to “spread its legs and offer its body” in unconscious acknowledgment of its need for a “force that could buoy it up and inseminate its jellied blood with meaning.” To Krim’s eyes, however, even that bid for cultural potency was empty, and *The New Yorker* remained “the passive well-coiffed little queen of rough-trade cultural forces” that surrounded it.³⁰

Krim was not the only New Journalist to link Ross to a masculine ideal of cultural production (an ideal to which the New Journalists themselves, of course, aspired). Tom Wolfe, writing in the *New York Herald Tribune* magazine, lambasted the difference between the manly Ross- and the effete Shawn-era *New Yorkers* through an elaborate comparison of jazz styles. Under Shawn, Wolfe argued, the magazine had declined into “ambrosial org-lit” and “bourgeois sentimentality,” evidenced in its innumerable stories of “inchoate longing Young Homemakers [and] unrequited flirtation . . . [that] add up to the perfect magazine fiction for suburban women.” The bulk of Wolfe’s two-part screed was dedicated to lambasting Shawn as “the museum curator, the mummifier, the preserver-in-amber, the smiling embalmer . . . for Harold Ross’s *New Yorker* magazine.” In his hyperbolic conclusion, Wolfe lampooned Shawn’s predilection for Dixieland jazz, representing it as passive, regressive, and feminine: “Patting the arm of his beautifully, not obscenely, beautifully stuffed chair in his fifth Avenue apartment, pat pat pat pat pat pat pat. Pat, he can keep time with one of these . . . so fine! . . . Dixieland records here on the hi-fi. He could sink into the stuffing . . . we were all very hippy along the Mississippi in naughty naughty oughty oughty-eight.”

By contrast, Wolfe linked Ross to the hot swing jazz of the 1930s, specifically to trumpeter Bix Beiderbecke. Both were represented as authentic and vital masters who had suffered the ultimate ignominy of history; not even lost to memory, they were instead constantly recycled as debased pop forms: “Bix hits that incredibly high one the one he died on, popping a vessel in his temporal fossa, bleeding into his squash, drowning on the bandstand, like Caruso. That was the music of Harold Ross’s lifetime, the palmy days, the motion of life. Don’t talk to one about heat, hot music, the heat of the soul, it was Harold Ross’s lifetime, and here on the phonograph, those days are preserved!”³¹

Elaborating on the mainstream press’s criticisms of *The New Yorker*, Wolfe and Krim interpreted its current state of debased cultural consumption and emasculated cultural production as the betrayal of a rich past.

Echoing high modernism's dismissal of "Mass Culture as Woman," as well as the Frankfurt School's scholarly criticisms of mass culture, the New Journalists used the Ross-era *New Yorker* to metonymically represent a lost literary golden age to which they were the rightful heirs.³² In that fond utopia, men produced literary texts encumbered by neither contemporary industrial relations of production nor by traditional feminizing habits of consumption. Authentic art was beyond the taint of the marketplace and, by extension, the gendered roles the marketplace implied; those who recognized and appreciated that art achieved a similar transcendence.

There can be no doubt that Ross championed a traditional, autonomous masculine ideal of reporting and editing, that he believed that "if an editor edited for himself first, readers would follow."³³ He had laid out this position in the magazine's prospectus, not only with the coded reference to the old lady in Dubuque and "the influence that hampers most national publications," but in the flat assertion that *The New Yorker* "will hate bunk." But in their rush to establish Ross as a heroic precursor to their own antiestablishment publishing practices, the New Journalists and their supporters vastly oversimplified his relationship to the culture industry of his day. Their idea of Ross derived exclusively from the most accessible parts of his legacy. Their celebration of his pot-boiling confrontations with the literary culture industry missed the subtle ways that he worked within it. In point of fact, Ross's masculinist producer sensibilities coexisted alongside an abiding interest in the pleasures of consumption. He championed certain aspects of consumer culture and, more important, was a sly innovator when it came to creating consumers through magazines. Because the history of his friction with the culture industry is so rich and gratifying, however, it has been easy to overlook the ways in which he sympathized with and shared mainstream magazine journalism's aims. But hidden in Ross's history as a "tramp" reporter and as the editor of the *Stars and Stripes* is a distinct record of a wily, self-serving engagement with the evolving culture industry; it is that history that would determine the shape *The New Yorker* would take in the 1920s.

The critics who valorized Ross as a great newspaper man cathected onto an image of the "journalist as hero" that had first become popular around the turn of the century. Literary historian Christopher Wilson has pointed out that, during the Gilded Age, the journalist figured in the popular mind as "the high priest of 'experience,' the expert on 'real life.'" His freedom to roam the city and make his own sense of it gave him both personal autonomy and useful specialized knowledge. Ironically, this image arose just as reporting was becoming increasingly routinized and professionalized. The pleasurable self-determination that the public attributed to the reporter-as-cultural-hero in fact starkly contrasted with journalistic reality, in which

newsrooms were being reshaped by machine technology and “market anticipation.”³⁴

Ross, however, did not work within the confines of a typical newsroom. Between 1908 and 1917 he was a “tramp” reporter, employed by at least two dozen papers around the country and in Mexico and Panama. His biographer, Thomas Kunkel, describes the tramp as “a freelance reporter who, in the early years of the century, more or less rode an erratic circuit, not unlike an itinerant preacher. He worked at one paper for a few weeks or months, until he was no longer needed or himself felt the urge to move on.”³⁵ As a tramp, Ross escaped the routinization of professional journalism that Wilson describes. He exchanged the profession’s financial security and cultural legitimacy for autonomy and self-determination in his work, the very qualities that the public attributed to the reporter-as-cultural-hero. If his biography can be trusted, he lived in *fact* what Wilson describes as a compensatory *fantasy*: a utopian reporting life as an “active participant[s] in the life of the city, knowledgeable about business and politics, deep in the muck of American life.”³⁶

The loose organizational hierarchies at the small papers where he worked meant that a staffer like Ross did a variety of writing and editing jobs in addition to straight reporting. Clearly his time as a tramp provided him with a set of skills that would later play into the development of *The New Yorker*. But the way the tramp experience enacted a skeptical attitude toward the professionalized journalistic market—the literary culture industry—was just as important in the magazine’s development. By taking off as a tramp, Ross snubbed the prevailing notion that individual journalistic success was achieved through the reporter’s careful integration into an organization. Instead he worked alongside, but not fully within, the confines of legitimate, for-profit, straight news reporting. In doing so, he found a way to inhabit what Wilson calls the “autonomy and undifferentiated roles” of the preculture industry local daily while rising through the professional ranks.³⁷ This partial rejection and partial embrace of the organizational and economic structures of the modern literary marketplace would be crucial to the formation of *The New Yorker*.

His tramp days provided Ross with a working model of a productive relationship between individual and culture industry; they also taught him how consumer culture can function in the lives of urban individuals. The cities and towns where Ross worked as a tramp not only supported daily papers that resisted the ever-expanding reach of the culture industry, but also, during these years, fostered a cultural life that remained largely local, regionally and ethnically inflected, public and democratic. These cities—Denver, San Francisco, Sacramento, Panama City, New Orleans, and Atlanta, for example—still boasted thriving outposts of what William R.

Taylor, writing on turn-of-the-century New York, has called “commercial culture.”

True to its name, commercial culture consisted of mass-produced goods and performances traded in the marketplace. But unlike both the genteel culture of the Victorian parlor and the sanitized mass culture of the post-World War II shopping center, commercial culture was distinctly public, participatory, and urban. It found its expression not only in ward politics and local civic groups, but on waterfronts and at racetracks, in saloons and brothels, gambling houses, theaters, nickelodeons, restaurants, and bars. A culture of the streets, it provided working men and women with a release from the increasingly organized and disciplined labor they performed in industrial cities. The goods, texts, and activities that comprised commercial culture performed a distinctive combination of cultural and aesthetic work. According to Taylor, “Each new genre compressed a representation of city life into its format. . . . Their essence was to create, out of miscellaneousness, little self-contained worlds. . . . Like photographs, these pastiches were susceptible to varied interpretations. . . . The remarkable success of such forms was due to their unique capacity to engage consumers in ‘reading’ the city.”³⁸

This culture’s vitality, in other words, resulted in part from the content of the entertainments it offered, but also—at least as much—from the way it solicited citizens’ active participation in those entertainments. They invited a kind of active participation (“reading the city”) distinctly different from the participation required on the shop floor or behind the department store counter, and as such made a space of freedom in the lives of the men and women who consumed them. The public and active nature of consumption within commercial culture liberated it from the stigma of the feminine as well, and opened the pleasures of display and interpretation to both genders.³⁹ Like tramp journalism, then, commercial culture offered its constituents “autonom[ous] and undifferentiated roles” carved out of and potentially subversive of—if not directly resistant to—an existing market structure and the gender identities it implied. Ross’s exposure to this model of consumer culture—one that solicited the attention of audiences without regard for gender, and was thus active and public, rather than passive and private—would greatly influence *The New Yorker*.

As a tramp reporter, Ross developed a professional identity, and absorbed an idea of culture, that existed alongside, but in tension with, the dominant trends toward depersonalization and professionalization of the literary culture industry. World War I gave him the opportunity to test whether this strategy of being *in* but not *of* that industry would work for an institution as well as it did for individuals. The idea for *Stars and Stripes*, a weekly paper for enlisted men, originated with Guy Visknisski, a second

lieutenant under General Pershing, at the end of 1917. Ross heard about the venture while working as a company clerk in Langres, applied for a transfer to join the editorial staff, and when nothing happened, hitched onto a Paris-bound truck and presented himself for work at the *Stars and Stripes* office.⁴⁰

Once there, he found himself in the company of the New York press—specifically Alexander Woolcott and Jane Grant, drama critic and city reporter from the *Times*, and Franklin P. Adams, “The Conning Tower” columnist from the *Tribune*. Although all three would be influential in getting the young *New Yorker* off the ground, it was the marketing strategy of the *Stars and Stripes*, not its personnel, that precipitated Ross’s magazine. Committed to a direct “soldier to soldier” address, the *Stars and Stripes* was written entirely by and for enlisted men. Its goal was to “provid[e] a common voice and articulat[e] an unwavering sense of purpose . . . relentlessly, unapologetically in the service of the enlisted man.” The paper thus targeted a narrower and more homogeneous audience than had the dailies Ross had worked for back home. This audience specifically defined itself against a dominant group (officers) whose needs were already served by existing publications (the English-language dailies published in Paris). Accordingly, *Stars and Stripes* worked to “distinguish itself from its hard-news-oriented daily competitors [by exploiting] their inherent superficiality.”⁴¹

Writing for this readership must have bolstered Ross’s sense that a *slice* of a potential market wanted to hear stories about itself told to itself in a familiar language, particularly if that slice defined itself against a larger, dominant group, as *Stars and Stripes*, which “tweaked the brass when necessary,” certainly did. His intuition was proven correct by the paper’s success: *Stars and Stripes* readers revealed that they were willing to pay for the privilege of this exclusive mode of address. The weekly paper cost ten cents, compared to a few pennies for the dailies, but within a year its circulation had zoomed from thirty thousand to more than five hundred thousand, and it ultimately netted over \$700,000 profit for the Army.⁴²

How Ross made the jump from the wartime “soldier to soldier” address of *Stars and Stripes* to the stylish mode of *The New Yorker* in 1925 remains a bit mysterious. What is clear, however, is that the *Stars and Stripes* experience proved to him that a magazine could exist in the marketplace, and could profit from it, without necessarily being tainted by its workings. If it kept its focus on an honest address to a specific audience, it could even borrow journalistic forms from the profession’s mainstream without succumbing to its blandishments. Having experienced these journalistic and financial satisfactions, it is a small wonder that immediately upon returning

to New York Ross talked “of a magazine that would report a city in somewhat the manner they [had been] trying to report on the war.”⁴³

If we consider these pieces of his early history, it becomes clear that Ross meant *The New Yorker* to function like a tramp reporter, or like the *Stars and Stripes*: it would exist parallel to, and look askance at, the large-circulation publications that comprised the literary culture industry. By flourishing in a market rigged against it, it would throw the dominant philosophy of that industry into question. If it could turn a profit, it would deliver a slap to the face of the common-sense understanding of the journalistic profession. And if it could convene around it a genuinely interested community of readers, that audience’s reading practices would validate and prove the continued existence of rich, pleasurable, and deeply retrograde ideas about how and why literary culture operates. In short, the magazine and its readers could thumb their collective nose at the powerful-but-not-yet-quite-successfully-totalizing structure of the culture industry around them. However, in order for its mocking critique to be successful, this contrary venture had to operate within—not apart from—the mainstream.

Ross’s reputation as a prankster and practical joker has typically been treated as just another aspect of his quirky personality. Kunkel suggests deeper implications of that personality trait when he briefly describes Ross’s westerner’s prejudices against “‘dudes,’ as he called them,” and his long-standing desire to “show the city slickers a thing or two.”⁴⁴ The importance of Ross’s taste for one-upmanship to the founding of *The New Yorker* should not be underestimated. It underwrote Ross’s ambitions for the magazine as surely as did his commitment to honest, well-crafted journalism. Drawing on his own experiences at the periphery of the literary culture industry, he sought, in a sense, to out-modern the modern, to invent a reader/consumer whose power would outstrip that of the Old Lady in Dubuque, and who would thus break her stranglehold on the meaning of consumer culture and the structure of magazine journalism.

How, specifically, did Ross envision *The New Yorker* transposing the principles of active, public consumption that structured turn-of-the-century commercial culture onto the booming upper middle classes of New York in the Jazz Age? In order to effect this change, Ross needed to imagine—and offer to his readers—an ideal consumer who could trump the economic and discursive power of the old Lady in Dubuque. He found that ideal in the English dandy. As a consumer, The Lady of the House paled in comparison to the Man of the Boulevards, for whom the whole city was a bazaar. The dandy appears in the prospectus and the early issues of the magazine as “our Mr. Van Bibber III,” his hyperbolic name reeking of class privilege and prestige. The most familiar manifestation of this alternative consumer,

however, is the monocled, top-hatted Eustace Tilley, created by art editor Rea Irvin for the cover of the magazine's inaugural issue.

The dandy moved the consumption of culture out of the banal realm of the middle-class parlor and into what the prospectus called "the public and semi-public smart gathering places." In doing so, he collapsed a variety of categories that needed to be blurred if consumer pleasure was going to be retrieved from the Old Lady in Dubuque. His aristocratic European authority sanctioned the pursuit of elite consumer pleasure in the urban landscape. But the hyperbolic image of Eustace Tilley—the silly name, the exaggerated gestural lines of the drawing, the playful butterfly on the other side of the monocle—suggested an amused and not-too-serious sense of self that saved the image from mere snobbishness. And at the subtlest level, the dandy's combination of effeminate physicality and the masculine gaze blurred the bifurcated gender roles that both reflected and constituted American consumer culture.⁴⁵ The dandy thus elevated the commercial culture of the street without losing its elemental inclusivity. *The New Yorker* could translate his attitude into an editorial mandate: what the prospectus called "a reflection in word and picture of metropolitan life."

Ross's choice of the optical term "reflection" to describe *The New Yorker's* purpose is telling. In his formulation, the magazine would work like Tilley's monocle, as a prism that organized for the viewer the abundance of the visible world, making it legible to a discerning gaze. Readers would look through the magazine—literally and figuratively—for guidance. And like the monocle, the magazine served both a stylish and a functional purpose: it was fully incorporable into an individual style and, carried close to the heart, was always on hand to provide focus.

The New Yorker's first cover illustration, then, tidily condenses Ross's hopes for the magazine. It suggests a reader who blurs the categories that prevailing trends had made essential to successful magazines. *The New Yorker's* readers would be both masculine and feminine, both antiquated and modern; they would be elite but not so rarified as to scorn to go among the people. Such readers would use an unusual lens—old-fashioned and almost outmoded, but stylish and functional—to bring a gaudy, fluttering world into better focus, and in so doing would turn up their noses at the aspects of that world that did not please them. Packed into this complex image is a suggestion of the ways in which Ross planned for *The New Yorker* to upset the binaries of class and gender identity that magazine journalism had helped to create and thus come to imply.

Thinking about how magazines construct gender and class identities was never a part of Harold Ross's persona. In William Shawn's words, he was "not at home with ideas, theory, speculation—abstract thought of any

kind.”⁴⁶ Such theorization, after all, reeks of the “bunk” that the prospectus promised *The New Yorker* “will hate.” Nevertheless, careful retrospection reveals Ross’s dissatisfaction with the structure of the literary culture industry and the gender identities that it prescribed. His distaste for what those structures did to literary producers and consumers ran deep. His desire to resist those structures, to save his readers from them, and to tweak the masses who succumbed to them shaped *The New Yorker*’s unique position as a part of, yet apart from, the literary mainstream.

There is a danger in invoking Ross’s tramp and military past as a way of explaining his ideas for *The New Yorker*. The powerful images of heroic reporting, urban street culture, and journalism in the trenches smack of the very masculine-cultural-producer-hero fetish by which the New Journalists elevated Ross. It would be satisfying—and tidy—to believe that his greatness grew out of his deep-seated tie to working-class culture. And the evidence I have presented here could easily be massaged to suggest that claim. But I want to make clear here that it is the structuring principles, not the contents, of these fringe cultures that Ross sought to elaborate at *The New Yorker*. While Ross believed that any thinking person would enjoy the magazine, he also acknowledged that, from the outset, it targeted the upper middle class, their lifestyles, and their interests. And he saw himself as a member, albeit an uneasy one, of that class. Kunkel makes this clear when, noting the magazine’s less-than-sensitive treatment of the Great Depression, he points out that Ross “never would be faced with the prospect of selling pencils on street corners, and neither, by and large, would his readers.”⁴⁷

It was not editorial content, then, or even what we might call class-consciousness, but a strategic position relative to the mainstream, that Ross brought to *The New Yorker* from his days as a tramp. He used the magazine to offer to the upper middle class the opportunity that commercial culture had afforded the working class, namely, the chance to use consumer pleasures to critique the very social structure that brought them into existence. The radicalism of his plan inheres not in some latent streak of working-class heroism within *The New Yorker*’s pages, but rather in its implicit suggestion that elite readers, like their rank-and-file counterparts, might chafe at the limits of the social structures within which they found themselves, and might turn to articles of consumer culture to critique and to resist their positions in society. This subtle, ambiguous, and deeply ambitious goal was left to Ross’s inheritor, William Shawn, to articulate fully.

When Shawn took over the editor’s job after Ross’s death from cancer in 1952, the transition from commercial culture to culture industry, which had begun in Ross’s youth, was nearly complete. In deference to this evolution, and to Shawn’s personality as well, the “bunk” that the magazine had been

sworn to hate took on a different cast in the postwar era. To Ross, the structures of mass society, as represented by the literary culture industries, had been a personal nuisance: competitors to be outwitted, lampooned, and ultimately ignored. To Shawn, those same structures had far more threatening implications, and required a more organized, focused resistance.

The difference between the two editors' views of mass culture is perfectly embodied in John Bainbridge's "Little Magazine," a five-part Profile of the *Reader's Digest* that appeared in 1945. While it is unclear where and when the idea for the piece originated, Ross had been enmeshed in a feud with *Digest* publisher De Witt Wallace since the mid-1930s. He had learned then that other magazines, ones with far less copy than *The New Yorker* "digested" by Wallace, were receiving payments of up to ten times as much for their material. Ross had immediately cut off Wallace's access to *New Yorker* material, but this hardly redressed the sense of affront he felt he and his contributors had suffered. To add insult to injury, in 1943 the *Digest* attempted to lure E. B. White away from *The New Yorker*, enraging Ross.⁴⁸ Bainbridge's piece bears all the marks of Ross's idea of good journalistic payback. It exposes Wallace's "cheap quack" methods of "planting" articles for later condensation, and lampoons the *Digest's* simplistic prose style and its banal subject matter. For good measure, it derides Wallace's suspect tax status, hypocritical chain-smoking, and poor taste in art and snack foods as well. Within the vintage Harold Ross sarcasm, however, resides a Shawn-style critique of a distinctly new and terrifying image of the culture industry.

The *Digest* had been founded in 1922, and its growth and success had paralleled *The New Yorker's* own. During the war, its many versions and variations had mushroomed to include not only the magazine and its reprints in eleven languages, but radio programs, newsreels, and a complex Program Service—a sort of club package that "include[d] a ready-made speech which the chairman can use to open the meeting, prepared remarks to be delivered by parties identified as first, second, third, and fourth speakers . . . a hand-me-down summary [and] 'Suggested Questions' to be asked from the floor."⁴⁹ In "Little Magazine," this mass production of texts has not only emptied them of meaning but has corrupted the whole act of reading as well.

This proliferation of prefab texts and activities results in the complete breakdown of critical faculties, aesthetic pleasure, and moral judgment. The interpretive community that coheres around the *Digest* is a grotesque of *The New Yorker's*:

Father is reading the current edition of the *Digest* while Mother is tuned in to the *Digest* radio program. Brother, just home from the

Army, is finishing his overseas edition. Sister is upstairs in her room studying her school edition. . . . Uncle is at the movies watching a *Digest* feature. Aunt, who has found a few reprints of "The Menace of Huey Long" lying around the house, is busy mailing them out to friends. Grandfather, who has lost his sight, is enjoying the Braille edition, while Grandmother, also blind but unable to read Braille, is sitting in her room taking in the Talking-Book edition by ear. In the kitchen, Cook is poring over [German-language edition] *Det Basta*. In the evening, the family will gather in the living room to welcome some neighbors, who will be coming over to take part in a meeting based on the Program Service material."⁵⁰

"Little Magazine" makes clear that no innate human failing produces such debased readers. It is the mass production of texts that deters careful, reasoned responses. The *Digest* prints so many laudatory articles about Henry Ford, Bainbridge suggests, because "what Ford has done in automobile manufacturing, Wallace has done and is trying to do in publishing. Ford got to the top by standardizing engines, Wallace by standardizing ideas." The logical conclusion to this impulse will be "on the site of the *Digest's* present headquarters in Chappaqua, a great new plant, a River Rouge for the mass production of belles-lettres. There Wallace and his staff will manufacture ideas with interchangeable parts and ship them out to the world."⁵¹

Rather than a lens that, correctly used, would improve its readers' abilities to read—and hence enjoy—the culture around them, the *Digest* was a substitute for the exercise of individual vision. The Profile's ironic title, an invocation of the independent publications that, along with *The New Yorker*, animated the literary and intellectual scene of the 1920s, suggested just how far from that artisanal spirit the mainstream American literary scene had fallen since the magazine was founded. The postwar era would see Shawn chart the continuing decline of that scene.

Ross had brashly believed that discrete aspects of the modern literary culture industry could be appropriated and used to his advantage. Similarly, he believed that readers could overcome the most pernicious aspects of modernity with discernment and attitude. His *New Yorker* was a gadfly, goading the complacent behemoths of the market by flying in the face of their formulas for success. Shawn, however, shied away from such confrontations. He believed instead that *The New Yorker's* writers and readers must be protected from the relentless logic of the marketplace that sought to dehumanize them. Maintaining and deepening Ross's skepticism of the literary culture industry, he worked to make the magazine a talismanic shield against its dangers by organizing its workplace culture and reader relations according to principles of individualism, humanity, and love. Only in this

way could *The New Yorker* continue to enact a critique of the world around it.⁵²

Shawn had come to *The New Yorker* as a “Talk of the Town” reporter in 1933. His literary career up to that point had been decidedly lackluster. The youngest son of a wealthy Chicago merchant, he had worked briefly as a reporter for the Las Vegas, New Mexico, *Optic* after dropping out of the University of Michigan. After a brief sojourn in Paris, where he earned a meager living playing jazz piano, he tried his hand at writing ad copy in New York, with little success. Through friends, he landed some occasional work at *The New Yorker*, but his remarkable shyness made reporting difficult for him. Unlike Ross, Shawn was temperamentally unsuited to direct participation in—much less direct assault on—the modernizing literary world. Indeed, it seems that the idea of being involved with Ross’s beloved “muck of daily life” terrified him.

After a few frustrating attempts at “Talk” pieces, Shawn moved to a job in the Idea Department (coming up with story ideas for other reporters to follow up), which better suited his temperament, and then to general editing. Once safely ensconced at the magazine, he flourished: his émigré’s fascination with life in The City, his interest in offbeat stories, and his fastidiousness about facts and details found a safe haven at Ross’s magazine. The two men were ideal foils for each other, with Shawn’s “reputation for politeness and tact . . . almost as legendary as Ross’s volcanic temper.”⁵³

After Ross’s death in 1952, Shawn assumed the role of editor in chief. While his first statement upon doing so was to announce that “there will be no changes in editorial policy,” he began gradually to reshape the magazine’s workplace culture into a community that would allow writers to bring forth what was greatest in themselves.⁵⁴ This, for Shawn, was the essence of rebellion against the existing social and economic order that drove contemporary mass culture.

At the center of Shawn’s philosophy was his belief that “I have no inherent authority. . . . I was appointed to my job by the publisher [who] believed that the staff, in general, wished for me—and Mr. Ross had wished for me—to be in that job. . . . Authority has been granted to me, or entrusted to me, by the editorial staff, the writers, and the artists of this magazine, in accordance with what can be called a silent, unwritten compact among us.”⁵⁵ The “silent, unwritten compact” among contributors to the magazine led him to see relationships among its writers and artists as a kind of sacred trust. Only within the bonds of a loving community, never in the impersonal embrace of a corporation, could writers produce truly meaningful work.

Shawn’s ideals of artistic production took Ross’s rallying cry of “We’re not making Ford automobiles!” to its logical end point. In contrast to the

machine homogenization of *Reader's Digest*, Shawn saw each part of *The New Yorker* (writing or art) as an organic, discrete object. Rather than an assembly line of efficient workers, the editorial staff was organized as concentric rings of midwives, radiating out from the Platonic form of the artistic endeavor. The magazine did not produce texts, but allowed them to come naturally into being. Shawn explained, "Every article has to begin with an enthusiasm, a genuine interest for [the subject] and that enthusiasm has to be shared by the editors. It's not a lot of writers running around loose and then whatever they write we publish it. Each piece begins with a discussion between the writer and [if it is a journalistic piece] me. No one ever edits a piece unless he feels sympathetic towards it. I don't tell them . . . I ask them if they would like to edit it."⁵⁶ Whether every editor at the magazine imagined his job in the same way is open to debate, but this model was clearly Shawn's ideal. Ved Mehta reports that Shawn worked with him "as if he were my Siamese twin. . . . I was not losing myself to him but, rather, discovering my true self." (VM 62, 65). Gardner Botsford concurs: "Whatever we were when we came into his orbit, we became something more under his influence. He sharpened our thinking, brought us sternly back from our vacant musings, oiled our transitions, and turned us into professionals of a greater competence than we would ever have achieved on our own." The editorial process was thus meant to precipitate an author's true voice. From that true voice, in turn, was precipitated "'good writing,' " a simple and unequivocal designation that John Updike called "the height of [Shawn's] praise and the extent of his commentary."⁵⁷

To achieve his vision of *The New Yorker* as "a magazine of individualists . . . a humane place, where everything is conducted in accordance with the highest moral principles," Shawn deliberately maintained an antimodern workplace.⁵⁸ Legal and financial arrangements were made in conscious contradistinction to those found at "publications less sensitive, less 'creative' than our own . . . [here] individual talents and skills are of the essence; people here are neither interchangeable nor classifiable."⁵⁹ Accordingly, unlike most of its competitors, the magazine did not commission work, as Shawn feared that "commissioning . . . turned contributors into employees" (VM, 73). Instead, the magazine offered its contributors a nurturing, personal, familial relationship, an extraordinary luxury in the impersonal modern literary world.⁶⁰ As Shawn explained, unlike "the world outside [which is] somewhat less harmonious [than ours] . . . [o]ur constitution [is] not written down. No one [has] to give anyone else any written guarantees. Our word [is] enough."⁶¹ To Shawn's mind, it was this mutual respect among artisans that formed the real working structure of the magazine. Against this honor system, the paper contract an employee signed was "essentially an empty agreement." What counted was not the paper but "tokens of emo-

tional bonds that needed no formal confirmation" (VM, 94). In order to keep these tokens from debasement, staffers had to "believe one another, and . . . trust one another, almost recklessly."⁶²

Although Shawn was committed to, even adamant about, his vision of the magazine, he acknowledged that "various pressures exerted by the outside world—to be popular, to be commercially successful, to be fashionable"—impinged on both the workplace culture of the magazine and on its individual readers.⁶³ Therefore the two must be knit ever more tightly together if they wanted to survive. To strengthen emotional and intellectual bonds, it was necessary to let slip some of the older connections—especially those built on humor and satire—on which Ross had built the magazine, a trade-off Shawn was willing to make. Building on the popular image of Ross, he framed his own desires for the magazine as a natural evolution of its spirit: "In our early days . . . we were afraid of emotion itself. . . . Today, we are less likely to shy away from emotion [and] ideas. We used to be enamored of facts but a little embarrassed in the presence of ideas—as if all ideas, rather than just some, were pretentious and rather suspect. . . . We began by being interested in New York City. As time went on, we began to cover more and more ground, until now . . . we have a strong sense of being bound up with everyone everywhere."⁶⁴ This Whitmanesque vision of the magazine's work pushes beyond the kind of community that Ross imagined by simultaneously expanding its reach and focusing its critique. The need Ross had perceived in his audience—to be able to read culture with discernment in order to enhance pleasure—had become instead a need to read culture with discernment in order to resist corruption.

Shawn's move to embrace "ideas" and "emotion" led him away from the humor and comment of Ross's era, and thus opened the door for the charges of effeminization noted earlier. In addition, his preference for personal, idiosyncratic, and unsystematized business relationships within the magazine, and between the magazine and its public, can—and have been—read negatively. To a skeptical eye, he was a micro-manager, his policies paternalistic, infantilizing, and, ultimately, megalomaniacal. And the affection and loyalty he commanded (in every sense of that term) could become stifling.⁶⁵ The magnitude of his commitment—what some might see as his unrelenting hubris—is clearly evident in his announcement that "[i]n a period in which so much of life is debased and corrupted, we are trying . . . to do something of spiritual value."⁶⁶

As with Ross, it is easy to reduce Shawn's policies to mere outgrowths of his easy-to-caricature personality. The temptations of psycho-biography aside, however, Shawn's vision for the magazine, like Ross's, and his management of its day-to-day workings, sprang from a critical view of the literary culture industry within which it existed, and from his concern for how

the *New Yorker* community—its writers and artists, and its readers as well—would fare in the increasingly rationalized literary marketplace and the dehumanized world. This shaped Shawn's dealings within the magazine, and also his perception of its readers. He extended to *The New Yorker's* audience the concern Ross had shown for its artists, who, as the vulnerable heart of the magazine, were “people whose minds must necessarily be removed from business and financial matters most of the time, or they will freeze up, cease to be creatively productive, and become useless.”⁶⁷ To Shawn, the magazine’s readers also were sensitive, special people deserving of exceptional care and attention. A ceaseless vigilance was required to maintain their community as “an oasis” and “a little world apart from the world.”⁶⁸

To Shawn’s way of thinking, the internal family of the magazine was a microcosm of the *New Yorker* community as a whole. As relations among the staff, based in love and trust, had to remain unmediated by written contracts and other modern trappings, so the magazine’s relationship to the world outside had to be similarly unmediated. This was the case because the magazine “reflects what we are, and if it does not . . . [it] is a sham.”⁶⁹ This meant no market surveys, special publicity, or formal demographic research—all modern contrivances that reduced readers to “audiences” or “markets.” Following Ross’s dictum that an editor should edit for himself and let the readers follow, Shawn believed that the magazine had “natural readers—people who [would] understand and enjoy it” no matter what, and that there was no need to try to create more readers; indeed, to do so was an exercise in bad faith (VM, 141). To this end, he declared that he “deliberately never made any readership surveys . . . [as] I’m opposed to the inhuman word ‘readership.’ ”⁷⁰

Accordingly, Shawn looked not to surveys but to readers’ letters to confirm his sense of the *New Yorker* community. In an interview in 1983, he mentioned that he “[got] a folder [of letters] every week with general praise” for the magazine.⁷¹ From these, he culled a careful selection that he preserved in a “Special Letters of Praise” file. While these letters can in no way be considered representative of a cross section of *New Yorker* readers, they can—and should—be read as evidence of Shawn’s belief in what the magazine, at its best, could be. They are discrete, momentary fulfillments of his fondest hopes for his reading public.⁷² In their letters, *New Yorker* readers emerge as a model of a loving community of thinking individuals within the impersonal modern nation.

The 227 letters in the “Special Letters of Praise” file were written between 1950 and 1972. They are often long, and state dramatically the importance of *The New Yorker* in the lives of individuals, families, and groups

of friends. Mirroring Shawn's best hopes for the magazine, the word "love" appears repeatedly. The metaphors readers use to illustrate their closeness with the magazine range from the familial:

We felt as though a member of our family had just received an unexpected award when Sir Kenneth Clarke on *Omnibus* told us the *New Yorker* covers were the finest example of realistic landscape painting in years (unsigned, no place or date);

Of course we are annoyed with you now and then, but as members of the family we feel free to tell you about it (unsigned, Pittsburgh; 1965),

to the romantic:

I want to write you a love letter! I think it only fair to thank you for all you give me . . . (Barbara von Treskow, Hamburg, Germany; 1952);

1965 is my twentieth anniversary with you. . . . Maybe the affair is pretty one-sided, but as far as I'm concerned, the honeymoon is still on (Gavin Worrell, Denver; 1965).

Whatever kind of love they invoked, however, the letters credited *The New Yorker* with precipitating an ideal human community, spiritually close even if geographically far-flung.

Although the letters are effusive, a somber undertone persists. The sense of shared delight in the modern world that the magazine cultivated—and the letters reflected—during the Ross years has been replaced by an acknowledgment of alienation within an increasingly frivolous and intolerant society: "the balance you seem to strike between the serious and the light [is] a big help in keeping up morale" (Kenneth Walker, Bloomington, Indiana; 1956).⁷³ Occasionally, readers refer to specific political issues—press freedoms, loyalty tests, and race issues—and the way the magazine has handled them, averring, for instance, that "your logical and rational approach has served my children as an antidote to the prejudice and irrationality that the [Negro integration] question always brings forth in a small, rural, Southern community" (Zach Cox, Mt. Olive, North Carolina; 1964). Most often, however, the magazine is praised in general terms: it is "a relief from the tedium of the days we now endure" (George Isaac, Grimsby, England; 1952), for readers "perturbed about the whole business of the invasion of

personal freedom" (Jim and Kay Cochrane, R.D. Delmare, New York; 1950).

The aesthetic and intellectual dimensions of reading were crucial touchstones in this *New Yorker* family. The magazine's "belief in the dictum that communication by the written word is a subtle and beautiful thing" (A. Santos, São Paolo; 1952) is often credited with allowing it to do justice to complex issues skirted or simplified in other media: "It is good to see a magazine which still caters to those who can summon up sufficient concentration to read a full page of print" (H.J. Corrie, Quebec; 1953). And reading *The New Yorker* was somehow different from reading other magazines: "I have continued to read it, cover to cover, with uttermost enjoyment, no matter how tired with household chores; other magazines have piled up with frequently no more than a glance" (Mrs. Charles Ranken, Wallingford, Pennsylvania; 1953). Over and over, readers mention looking forward to the magazine's arrival, reading it cover to cover, reading it all in one sitting, reading it throughout their lives. For these readers, at least, *The New Yorker* formed the "oasis" that Shawn envisioned, a sphere of culture insulated from the culture that menaced those inside it.

The precise nature of that menacing mainstream culture is made clear in a rare surviving piece of Shawn's own writing, which shows the horror with which the *New Yorker* community contemplated its evil twin.⁷⁴ Heavily influenced by Marshall McLuhan, "The Magazine for Readers" is an outline for an advertising campaign intended to appear in newspapers and magazine. Taking up where Bainbridge's "Little Magazine" had left off, the campaign explores *The New Yorker*'s difference from electronic media, particularly television, which has become the "River Rouge for the mass production of belles lettres" Bainbridge predicted in 1945. Technological advances and the urge to maximize profit have resulted in "a medium of compromise, dilution, oversimplification, and the pursuit of the lowest common denominator." These constraints disallow all the print-culture values—"explanation, analysis, digression, and reflection" (Message)—that *The New Yorker* holds sacred, exchanging them for uncritical acceptance of "the screen . . . as a mirror of reality" (Word).

Because of television's ubiquity, "rational discourse has fallen into disfavor. The verbal realm has widely come to be subordinated to the realm of sensation, yet the world of pure sensation is regressive, chaotic, lonely, and ultimately unbearable" (Word). Against these encroachments, however, the *New Yorker* community holds firm. "The printed word is the lifeblood of our civilization, is crucial, and it is to the printed word that *The New Yorker* dedicates itself" (Word). This is true both on the production side, where "by an insistence on the precise use of words . . . [the magazine] tries to

maintain the integrity of the English language and to help restore confidence in words" (Word) and on the consumption side, where "it is read both for reasons of utility . . . and for the sheer pleasure of reading" (Screen). Unlike its competitors who "aspire to the condition of t.v.," *The New Yorker* "prefers to focus its entire attention on doing as well as possible what a magazine alone can do" (Beyond).

What can a magazine actually do? In this extraordinary piece of Shawn's writing, as in the reader letters, the private and personal act of reading a magazine, as practiced by scattered individuals across the country, is credited with creating a community bound both by intellect and affect, united against the shadow of impersonal mass culture. Each of the sections of "The Magazine for Readers" concludes with an invocation of the "small, concentrated, extraordinary public" that comprises the *New Yorker* community. This ideal public, however, is imagined in the context of a would-be ad campaign, although admittedly an aborted one. Does this make the invocation of such a public merely a crass deployment of it? Or an act of wish-fulfillment? Can the *New Yorker* community William Shawn and his letter-writing readers imagined actually be said to exist? If it did exist, do the principles that bound it command our respect as worthy criticisms of the dominant social order within which it existed? Or does the economic satiety of the magazine and its readers mean that their social practices remain forever complicit with the all-encompassing agenda of capitalist consumer culture?

Such questions are difficult to answer for several reasons. In the first place, the Marxist roots of the organized study of mass culture, now articulated most clearly in the cultural studies movement, mean that scholarship is predisposed to applaud cultural practices that actively challenge the existing economic order. The role of the upper-middle, or professional-managerial, class (PMC) as facilitators of the capitalist agenda resulted in scholarly neglect of, if not scorn for, their cultural practices during the decades when the Frankfurt School's critical paradigms dominated the American academy. More recently, however, even accounts more sensitive to the PMC's dis-ease with their role in society conclude with sad pronouncements of the limitations of the PMC's capacity for critique. Richard Ohmann writes at the end of his *Selling Culture*, "For all the reformist enthusiasm of the PMC, there was no remote chance of its organizing to challenge capital's rule. . . . PMC consent was easily won through its ties to business and government, through its material success, through the respect and standing it achieved. For professionals and managers, the yoke of commodification was as light as the inducements were sweet."⁷⁵ Within the Marxist critical paradigm, the fact that members of the PMC may have worn that yoke uneasily counts

for little, since their dis-ease did not amount to a recognizable class consciousness, much less a call for revolution.

The academic predilection for “oppositional” relationships to culture is one hurdle on the road to a sufficiently nuanced understanding of the cultural practices of the PMC and the high middlebrow culture that serves it. A second conceptual obstacle results in part, I think, from the first: we currently lack a usable critical language through which to evaluate affective relationships to texts and goods. We scorn *The New Yorker* readers’ connection to their magazine not merely because they do *not* voice their affinity through the language of class struggle, but also because they *do* voice it through the language of “love,” “inspiration,” and “family.” Scholars trained to prize argument and action, we are not sure what to make of these terms, or how to plumb them for validity. Our uncertainty in the face of such relationships is evident in the hesitation with which Janice Radway writes about the judges at the Book of the Month Club. Trying to tease out a relationship between PMC members and texts similar to the ones I have described here, Radway ventures that

a certain ambivalence was expressed at the club about the segregated and isolated worlds of expertise that made up the universe as seen by the professional-managerial class. On the one hand, the judges’ logic of categorization and relative evaluation respected the segregation and autonomy of those various domains. On the other hand their constant search for sentiment, emotion, empathy, and the dissolution of boundaries functioned as a protest of the effects of carving up the world in such a way and as a kind of refuge from it. Neither like the class of people who employed them nor at home with those they were positioned to address, the professionalized subscribers of the club may have felt isolated in their little duchies of distinction and may have longed to connect with others on a level other than the abstract and intellectual. At odds even with their own colleagues by virtue of their need to compete and excel in their individual arenas, these new experts may have been constituted as much by their desires as by their privileged educations.⁷⁶

In this excerpt and in the text around it, Radway’s diffident language—the weighing of one possibility against another, the definition of her subjects through negation, and the assertions that things “may have been” or “seem to be” a certain way—suggests that scholarly attempts to come to terms with the affective relationships between readers and texts is still in its infancy.

A third obstacle hindering our ability to appraise accurately William

Shawn and his *New Yorker* community is a logistical matter, although one with conceptual ramifications. In 1967, the magazine lost ad revenue for the first time in nearly forty years; it continued to slip throughout the 1970s. In 1982, S. I. Newhouse's Advance Publications purchased the magazine, and in 1987 Shawn was dismissed. Tina Brown, formerly an editor at *Vanity Fair* (another Newhouse venture) was installed as editor in 1990 with a mandate to bring the magazine back into the black. Brown's tenure at the magazine was marked by changes that some saw as scandalous and others saw as desperately necessary. Among other things, she fired legions of old staffers, moved the magazine's offices, expanded coverage of Hollywood and Washington, and brought in comedienne Roseanne Barr to "guest edit" an issue of the magazine. Then, quite abruptly, and without turning a profit, Brown left the magazine in 1998 to start her own multimedia venture.

The exact nature of the changes Brown wrought at *The New Yorker* are multiple, complicated, and, like everything else in the history of the magazine, hard to see clearly through the smokescreen of anecdote. Taken as a whole, however, what Brown oversaw was the corporatizing of the magazine. Her flamboyant and "buzz-worthy" editorial presence was in many ways more pronounced than Ross's had ever been; to Shawn there is simply no comparison. And yet under her the magazine adopted many of the conventional strategies for success in the marketplace that it had avoided for years: aggressive subscription campaigns, special thematic issues designed to attract additional ad revenue, commissioned articles by celebrity authors, and relentless public relations activities designed to keep its name on everyone's lips. Whether or not these changes ultimately resulted in a "better" magazine remains open to debate. What is certain, however, is that *The New Yorker* could no longer claim to exist at a critical distance from the literary culture industry.

During Brown's sojourn, the magazine moved offices and drastically changed personnel; files were cleaned and papers were thrown away, making the project of recuperating Shawn's *New Yorker* logically more challenging. But the Brown years pose a conceptual problem as well. The merger of Brown's *New Yorker* with mainstream media culture makes much easier—and more attractive—a critical embrace of Shawn's magazine and its quiet, principled resistance to that culture. Torrents of nostalgia for that era gushed out of former staffers and readers and into the national press every time Brown hired or fired someone, made changes in the magazine's layout, or gave a press conference. The desire to stand in the Newhouse era and mythify Shawn, much like the desire to stand in the Shawn era and mythify Ross, only further obscures our ability to see how—or if—a high middle-brow magazine signifies and matters in the lives of the men and women who produce and consume it. Like the urge to find the class struggle latent in

popular culture, the desire to name one era at the magazine as a utopian moment that reveals the debasement of its present is a will-to-clarity that scholars of middlebrow culture and the professional middle class can ill afford. Not until we stand in the mess of the present, and of our own complex, class-inflected subjectivities, can we begin to understand what we talk about when we talk about *The New Yorker*.

Notes

1. I wish to express my gratitude to Beth Newman, without whose assistance this essay would never have been completed. *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (New York: Random House, 1982), 140.
2. Unless otherwise noted, all manuscript references to *The New Yorker* are in the Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations. Box 952.
3. Although unwieldy, I have chosen to use the term “literary culture industry” throughout this essay to indicate the interlocking for-profit institutions—authorship, publishing, distribution, and sales—of print culture in the twentieth century, not only for books, but for magazines and newspapers as well.
4. “Remembering Mr. Shawn,” *The New Yorker*, 28 December 1992–4 January 1993, 145.
5. On this dynamic, see Christopher P. Wilson, “The Rhetoric of Consumption: Mass-Market Magazines and the Demise of the Gentle Reader, 1880–1920,” in Richard Wrightman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears, *The Culture of Consumption* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), 39–64; Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1985); and Ellen Gruber Garvey, *The Adman in the Parlor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).
6. The term “middlebrow,” coined by critics to demarcate a stigmatized grotesque space between what was clearly elite and what was clearly lowest-common-denominator, has become increasingly problematic in recent years. Rather than a homogeneous, catchall sphere, as early critics assumed, middlebrow culture is fragmented and stratified; hence my awkward designation of *The New Yorker* as “high middlebrow.” In addition, scholars such as Joan Shelley Rubin, Elizabeth Long, and Janice Radway have demonstrated the existence of what Long calls “diversity within the cultural mainstream”: not a monolithic, but a multifaceted and convoluted complex of needs and desires that leads people both to make and to buy the cultural products typically denigrated as middlebrow (“Women, Reading, and Cultural Authority: Some Implications of the Audience Perspective in Cultural Studies,” *American Quarterly* 38, no. 4 [Fall, 1986]: 592). Despite the increasing sophistication of scholarship on the subject, however, critics have remained focused on—and critical of—the status-obsessed and emulative aspects of middlebrow culture. In *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), Rubin, following Warren Sussman, argues that the shift from a nineteenth-century emphasis on “character” to a twentieth-century concern with “personality” created a condition of perpetual anxiety for the modern subject. “Personality” existed in and for the (increasingly critical) public eye, and was constantly in need of shoring up before that scrutinizing glance. Thus, middlebrow culture characteristically “appeal[ed] to the fear of ‘back-sliding’” that plagued the nervous, status-conscious subject. Its invocations of “intellectual chaos . . . [implied] that consumers were responsible for their own sense of disarray” (99). Thus, Rubin argues, The Book of the Month Club’s question, “‘Why is it you disappoint

yourself? . . . might serve as the modern American's motto." Although she is at least a generation removed from Rubin's anxious culture-consumer, Radway frames herself as just such a nervous subject in *A Feeling for Books* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1996). There she claims that a similar desire to appear "authentically cultured" haunted her during graduate school, because she "could not always discipline [her] preferences as [she] thought [she] should" (1, 3). She later goes on to admit that in her study of *The Book of the Month Club* she "encountered not merely the insistent desire to rise socially through any means available but also deep-seated longings for the possibilities of self-articulation and the search for transcendence promised by education and by art" (5). But a suspicion that middlebrow producers and consumers are at heart more interested in social "discipline" than in aesthetic "transcendence" haunts Radway's work, especially her concluding readings of three "typical" middlebrow novels. It is beyond the scope of this essay to explain definitively why we are so tightly gripped by this belief that middlebrow culture is, at its heart, a means to allay status anxiety. I hope, however, at least to show that constraint at work, and thus to begin the process of loosening it.

7. This limited vision of what constitutes agency within the domain of mass culture is set in place, I think, by the powerful—and powerfully gendered—model laid down by the Frankfurt School critics. In Theodor Adorno's assessment of the music industry, for instance, it is only the high-art composer and the "individualist" (like Adorno) smart enough to understand him that are capable of escaping "that anxiety, that terror, that insight into the catastrophic situation which others merely evade by regressing." ("On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," in Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt, eds., *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* [New York: Continuum Publishing, 1990], 298.) Opposing the Frankfurt School, Stuart Hall and his followers in the Birmingham School sought to return agency to regular consumers by focusing on their "negotiated" and "resistant" readings of mass culture. Almost perversely, however, this model replicates the Frankfurt School's fetish of a "free" realm outside the reach of the culture industry, although this one is achieved not through a rarified aesthetic remove but through the manipulation and reinterpretation of mass-produced goods. When held up to the fire of working-class consciousness, mass-produced texts are revealed to be filled with liberatory messages written in invisible ink, the collective decoding of which allows "subcultural" consumers a space of imaginative freedom not found in the dominant culture. (See, for example, Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* [London: Methuen, 1979]; Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular," in Ralph Samuel, ed., *People's History and Socialist Theory* [London: Routledge, 1989], 218–39; and Paul Willis, *Common Culture* [Boulder and San Francisco: Westview Press, 1990].) Both the Frankfurt School's elevated "individualist" (Adorno, 299) and the Birmingham School's "subculture" achieve a realm of freedom through rejection of the social structures implied by the cultural goods offered to them. The unspoken assumption on which each school rests is that anyone who does not actively seek such a rejection—the professional middle class (PMC), for instance—gives tacit approval to those social structures and is thus complicit in their maintenance and, by extension, satisfied with them. The relationship of the PMC to capital, and its role in maintaining hegemony, is too complicated to discuss in detail here. My point in this micro-intellectual genealogy is to demonstrate that the major scholarly attempts thus far to explain the relationship of individuals to mass culture have proceeded from the assumption that anyone worth anything would want to escape that culture. This bias leaves as untouched whole realms of society whose relationships to the structures of power and dominance (and the cultural goods and texts that proceed from them) may be somewhat more complex, if not quite as politically "progressive."

8. "The New Yorker Prospectus." Appendix to Thomas Kunkel, *Genius in Disguise: Harold Ross of The New Yorker* (New York: Random House, 1995), 439–41.

9. Kunkel, *Genius in Disguise*, 367.

10. *Ibid.*, 351; For accolades based on war reportage, see box 1024.
11. *Ibid.*, 366–67.
12. *The World Through a Monocle: The New Yorker at Midcentury* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 11–12. Corey's fine study of the magazine appeared too late for me fully to incorporate her argument into this essay. Corey argues that for postwar *New Yorker* readers, “virtue was a precious commodity—a quality that made it easier to savor privilege. . . . By allowing for a symbiotic relationship between the possession of goods and the quality of goodness, the magazine was able to foreshorten the distance between social privilege and social consciousness” (38–39). What makes Corey's analysis so useful and interesting is her refusal to reify either of those poles, and her desire instead to plumb what made the magazine so successful, its “alchemical ability to fuse the twin values of postwar liberalism—economic privilege and social justice” (75).
13. For profit margin, see “Urbanity, Inc.,” *San Francisco Wall St. Journal*, 30 June 1958, clipping file, box 1023. For circulation and dividend figures, see Kunkel, *Genius in Disguise*, 366, 224, and *Annual Report of The New Yorker Magazine*, 1966–72, box 124. For ad pages versus circulation rankings, see Gigi Mahon, *The Last Days of The New Yorker* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1988), 58–62.
14. See, for example, “Gleams in the Formula” and “The Formula Shines,” in Dale Kramer, *Ross and The New Yorker* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1951).
15. George H. Douglas, in *The Smart Magazines* (Hamden, Conn.: Shoestring Press, 1991), characterizes “smart” magazines as those “beginning with . . . some assumed class of sophisticated readers . . . [but then broadening] their appeal to become phenomenally successful with large audiences far outside the gentry” (1–2). Douglas contrasts the smart magazines, “which stood out from the commercial mainstream” to “slick” magazines, which “make strong appeals to snobbery, manufactured taste . . . to conspicuous consumption” (2–3).
16. Kunkel, *Genius in Disguise*, 88.
17. On Ross innovations, see Douglas, *The Smart Magazines*, 129–75; Kunkel, *Genius in Disguise*, 98–206; Thomas Peterson, *Magazines in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956), 244–54; and James Playsted Wood, *Magazines in the United States: Their Social and Economic Influence* (New York: Ronald Press Co., 1949), 216–23. See also “Notes on On and Off the Avenue,” 1952, typescript, box 966.
18. Peterson, *Magazines in the Twentieth Century*, 239; Brendan Gill, *Here at The New Yorker* (New York: Random House, 1975), 393.
19. Richard Ohmann, among others, has discussed this relationship and its implications for literary and economic culture at length in his “Where Does Mass Culture Come From? The Case of Magazines,” in *Politics of Letters* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 135–57, and *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Verso, 1996).
20. The business and editorial offices of the magazine were housed on separate floors, and staffers were discouraged from traveling between them. According to legend, when correspondent Janet Flanner ran into publisher Raoul Fleischmann one day in the editorial offices, she was so shocked to see anyone from the business side of the magazine on the editorial floor that she gasped, “What are you doing here!?” When Fleischmann wanted to take new staffer Edmund Wilson to lunch, he arranged to meet him in the lobby, rather than either man's office, explaining, “you know the situation here.” Kramer and Clark, “Harold Ross and *The New Yorker*,” *Harper's Magazine*, April 1943, 517; Kunkel, *Genius in Disguise*, 213–14.
21. Ross to Hawley Truax, June 1944, box 65. On the importance of the editorial and business separation for Ross, see also boxes 27 (labeled “Ads that look like text”), 946, 951 (appropriately labeled “Hell File”). Not even a book-length work could do justice to Ross's heroic and hilarious struggles to keep the magazine's editorial and ad content pure and sepa-

rated. Brief excerpts from his interoffice memos on this subject make clear his attention to these details and the ongoing nature of his struggle. Fleischmann was particularly keen on the “advertisorial”—ads that presented themselves as copy—a strategy that J. Walter Thompson, his family yeast company’s advertising agency, had perfected during the late 1920s (see Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 52–56). Anything that remotely suggested an advertorial drove Ross wild. He wrote to Fleischmann regarding a Pepsi ad illustrated and signed by regular contributor Peter Arno, and featuring copy done up in *New Yorker*-style typeface: “Appearance of this page, the net effect of which was, of course, to make believe that the magazine had lapsed into terrible negligence or had gone incredibly cheap, was a general uproar, not so much in this office (which is rather numb as a result of things done in the past) as among the readers from the outside. Considering that there has been for at least 10 years a firm, fundamental rule, that no editorial type, or its approximation, is to be allowed in advertising, the appearance of this ad should, in my judgment, result in the discharge of one or more responsible persons. It was a flagrant violation of a long-standing and clear rule and there can be no excuse for it whatsoever. . . . This weighing of copy is a highly important matter. The lowering of our standards . . . could easily, in my judgment, be ruinous. I know that, for my department, nothing is so upsetting as the chump boners we from time to time have made. The keystone of this institution is our good name, and in this business and in these times we must guard it valiantly” (2 February 1942). Ross was equally concerned that the magazine not run ads that conflicted—either in their products or in their execution—with the tone of the magazine. A series of ads for the DuBarry Charm School was particularly offensive to him. He wrote to legal counsel Hawley Truax, “That DuBarry Success School ad on page 93 of the November 1st issue is another insult to our readers and a reflection on everyone working for the magazine—cheap, quack stuff of the most palpable kind. Why in God’s name we keep on using this stinking copy is beyond me” (24 November 1947). Both, box 27.

22. See, for example, Neil Gabler, *Winchell: Gossip, Power, and the Culture of Celebrity* (New York: Random House, 1994), 300–303. See also Kramer, *Ross and The New Yorker*, 255–58; Kunkel, *Genius in Disguise*, 270–73, 280–83.

23. Until Thomas Kunkel’s thoughtful and well-researched biography appeared in 1995, the numerous full-length portraits of Ross accorded with Dwight Macdonald’s assessment of him: “Ross was a great editor, but he was anti-intellectual, a hillbilly.” (Speech to Magazine Writer’s Guild, 1960, box 1031). Earlier biographies that ponder the Zen riddle of Ross include Kramer, *Ross and The New Yorker*, (1950), James Thurber, *The Years with Ross* (1959), and Jane Grant, *Ross, The New Yorker, and Me* (1968).

24. Malcolm Cowley, *Exile’s Return* (New York: Viking, 1951), 48.

25. This anecdote appears in Kunkel, *Genius in Disguise*, 246, and James Thurber, *The Years With Ross* (New York: New American Library, 1959), 74.

26. Kunkel, *Genius in Disguise*, 141.

27. Donald Stanley, review of *Stories from The New Yorker, 1940–1960*, in *San Francisco Examiner*, 22 July 1965, clipping file, box 1024. On the New Journalism’s attitudes toward the mainstream press, see Michael L. Johnson, *The New Journalism: The Underground Press, the Artists of Non-Fiction, and Changes in the Established Media* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1971); Ronald Weber, ed., *The Reporter as Artist: A Look at the New Journalism Controversy* (New York: Hastings House, 1974); and Tom Wolfe, “The New Journalism,” in Tom Wolfe and E. W. Jonson, eds. *The New Journalism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 3–36.

28. Thurber quoted in Henry Brandon, “‘Everybody Is Getting Very Serious,’” *New Republic*, 138 (26 May 1958), 5–16, cited in Peterson, *Magazines in the Twentieth Century*, 253; *Time*, 16 May 1960, clipping file; *Newsweek*, 1 March 1965, 62–64. Both, box 1032.

29. This equation of high modernist aesthetics with a productive, even aggressive mascu-

line identity is laid out most explicitly in Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*, Vol. 1, *The War of the Words* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988). Frances Kerr, in the excellent "Feeling Half-Feminine: The Politics of Emotion in *The Great Gatsby*" (*American Literature* 68, no. 2 [June 1996]: 405–31), adds nuance to Gilbert and Gubar's arguments by showing the ways in which the perception of popular literary culture, especially magazines, as feminine by modernists such as Pound, Eliot, and Hemingway shaped F. Scott Fitzgerald's sense of himself as a writer.

30. "Who's Afraid of *The New Yorker* Now?" *Village Voice*, 8 November 1962. Reprinted in *Shake It for the World, Smartass* (New York: Dial Press, 1970), 171–86.

31. "Tiny Mummies!" and "Lost in the Whichy Thicket," *New York Herald Tribune*, 11 April 1965, 7–9, 24, 26, 27, and 18 April 1965, 16–20, 22, 44. Many of these ellipses are from Wolfe's original.

32. Andreas Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman," in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 44–62. For examples of the popular-scholarly version of this criticism, see Bernard Rosenberg and Richard Manning White, *Mass Culture: Popular Arts in America* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1960).

33. Kunkel, *Genius in Disguise*, 345.

34. *Labor of Words: Literary Professionalism in the Progressive Era* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), 17, 19.

35. Kunkel, *Genius in Disguise*, 27.

36. Ibid., 17.

37. Wilson, "The Rhetoric of Consumption," 25.

38. William R. Taylor, *In Pursuit of Gotham* (New York: Oxford, 1992), 70.

39. Historian Kathy Peiss has pointed out that women as well as men participated in this pleasurable public culture. "Familiarity and intermingling among strangers, not decorum, defined normal public behavior between the sexes," Peiss argues, and respectable girls "socialized in streetcars, rendezvoused in cafes, and courted on trolley cars." William Leach concurs, arguing that by 1915, women, "once considered only private beings with identities circumscribed by the limits of the domestic frontier . . . had entered a public space no longer principally masculine in character." Peiss, "'Charity' Girls and City Pleasures: Historical Notes on Working-Class Sexuality, 1880–1920," in Ann Snitow et al., eds., *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983], 76, 81. Leach, "Transformations in a Culture of Consumption: Women and Department Stores, 1890–1925," *Journal of American History* (September 1984): 336.

40. Kunkel, *Genius in Disguise*, 48.

41. Ibid., 50, 51, 62.

42. Ibid., 51, 60–65.

43. Ibid., 29.

44. Ibid., 41.

45. Although somewhat effete in appearance, the dandy's public presence and power were solidly masculine. Like his French counterpart the *flâneur*, as Griselda Pollock points out in *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and Histories of Art* (New York: Routledge, 1988, 79), his "gaze articulates and produces a masculine sexuality [based on] the freedom to look, appraise and possess, in deed or in fantasy." The dandy's masculinity is further suggested by the monocle, which, as Marjorie Garber has suggested, is the definitive mark of his confident class position and sexuality, "an indication at once of supplement and lack, both instrument[al] and ornament[al], connoting weakness (in the eye) and strength (social position, as well as class and style)." Garber also cites Terry Castle's suggestion that *New Yorker* Paris correspondent Janet Flanner, who frequently dressed in Regency-era male drag, "is the model of, and for, the signature portrait of Eustace Tilley . . . making *The New Yorker* . . . in some

sense ‘originally’ a lesbian magazine, however that identity was masked.” *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 154.

- 46. Gill, *Here at The New Yorker*, 390.
- 47. Kunkel, *Genius in Disguise*, 181.
- 48. See *ibid.*, 284–88, for details of the Ross-Wallace feud.
- 49. Bainbridge, *Little Wonder, or The Reader’s Digest and How It Grew* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1946), 128. The original “Little Magazine” appeared in the 17 and 24 November and 1, 8, and 15 December issues of *The New Yorker*.
- 50. Bainbridge, *Little Wonder*, 131–32.
- 51. *Ibid.*, 175–77.
- 52. Like Ross, William Shawn had a pronounced and unusual personality, and facts about his life have frequently been bent to match the public memory of that personality. Biographical, as opposed to merely anecdotal, material on Shawn is extremely difficult to come by. Thus it is difficult to assess accurately the effect of Shawn’s shyness and reticence on his policies for the magazine. I have, somewhat reluctantly, used two recent memoirs by *New Yorker* staffers for details about Shawn’s life: Ved Mehta’s *Remembering Mr. Shawn’s New Yorker* (New York: Overlook Press, 1998), and Lillian Ross’s *Here But Not Here* (New York: Random House, 1998). (Lillian Ross, it should be noted, is no relation to Harold Ross.) Neither book makes even a pretense of objectivity, and so cannot be faulted for the frustrating gaps they leave in their depiction of Shawn’s life and work. More distressing than their paucity of facts is the air of platitudinous piety that suffuses each work, making them almost impossible to take seriously. I have tried here to mine each work for available facts—particularly interview material and Shawn’s own written and spoken statements. Otherwise, I have used Lillian Ross’s and Mehta’s recollections of Shawn less as sources of facts about him, but as indicators of the way he interacted with staff members (although since Lillian Ross was his lover for forty years, of course she cannot be considered typical even in this limited instance). I have tried as often as possible to corroborate the memoirists’ assertions with other evidence. Unfortunately, *The New Yorker* Records are of little help in redressing the gaps in Shawn’s history; he is represented by a skimpy ten boxes, (compared to sixty-nine for Ross). If nothing else, I hope this essay will suggest aspects of Shawn’s career in need of further study, and convey as well the urgency with which that study needs to be undertaken. Direct citations from Mehta will appear parenthetically in the text as VM.
- 53. “*New Yorker’s Choice*,” 60–62.
- 54. “Shawn for Ross,” *Newsweek*, 4 February 1952, 50, box 1032.
- 55. Memo, William Shawn (WS) to staff, 11 November 1976, 2–3, box 125.
- 56. WS audiotape interview with the Business Department, 11 November 1983. I am very grateful to Stuart Spizer for making this tape available to me.
- 57. Botsford and Updike quoted in “Remembering Mr. Shawn,” 139.
- 58. Memo, WS to Staff, 12 October 1976, 4, box 125.
- 59. Memo, WS to Staff, 11 November 1976, 3, box 125.
- 60. If *The New Yorker* purchased a piece or two from a contributor and believed that they would continue to enjoy a relationship with her, they would give her a “first-look” contract, meaning *The New Yorker* would have the first option on anything she wrote. If they passed, she would be free to shop it elsewhere. The structures of these contracts were quite generous by industry standards. Contract artists received health and life insurance and annual cost-of-living adjustments; they participated in a retirement plan and, after 1963, in a profit-sharing plan. They retained complete rights to profits from “after-market” publishing, that is, the subsequent publication of a work that had appeared in the magazine as part of a monograph or anthology. Most unusual, however, contract artists were not paid by the piece; rather, they were put on a “drawing account,” which allowed them to draw credit—sometimes for years—

against future contributions. Once the magazine accepted a piece, the contributor was paid for it, whether or not it ever appeared in print. This contract structure meant that artists and writers were free to work on whatever they liked in whatever way, and at whatever speed, thus sustaining the magazine's commitment to "enthusiasm" as the starting point for great work. And in theory, all contributors were paid the same amount, although in practice, the fees varied enormously, depending not only on the author but the length of a contribution and where in the magazine it would run.

61. WS to staff, 11 November 1976, 3.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid., 5.
64. "A Letter from the Editor," typescript, 9 August 1971, box 119. The provenance of this document is unclear. It is identical in places to Shawn's remarks in an "interview" with *Women's Wear Daily* on 1 July 1968 (clipping file, box 119). Since Shawn was painfully shy, when he did consent to interviews, Gill notes that he often prepared a set text; this "Letter from the Editor" may be an ex post facto transcript of such a text. However, the typescript here is clearly a piece of promotional material, as it is prefaced: "Not long ago, our editor made some remarks about changes that have taken place in *The New Yorker* in recent years. We urge you to read them. We are reprinting them here as the first in a series of special messages to advertisers that will appear from time to time in your copy of the magazine."
65. As one former staffer from the Shawn era explained to me, "It was like Jonestown in there!"
66. WS to staff, 12 October 1976, 5.
67. Ross to Hawley Truax, 6 July 1944, box 65.
68. Interview, *Women's Wear Daily*; Gill, *Here at The New Yorker*, 391.
69. WS to staff, 12 October 1976, 4.
70. Interview, *Women's Wear Daily*.
71. In the same interview, Shawn mentions that "we don't get as much mail, our readers being the kind they are, as . . . one might expect. We get complaints. If they do like something, they write to the writer.
72. The letter file contains an unsigned note: "query F. [Louis Forster, Shawn's editorial assistant] as to whether he wants to throw away his folder 'Special Letters of Praise.'" That the letters were not thrown away suggests that they were prized. They should not be read as representative of a typical, but rather an ideal, version of the reader-magazine relationship. All letters box 952 unless otherwise noted.
73. The magazine's archive contains hundreds of letters from the Ross era, most of which are probably more typical of general reader sentiment than are the "Special Letters of Praise." Typical subjects included questions of fact or usage (particularly to point out errors), requests for clarification or further information, and Newsbreak (the funny stories as the end of the column) submissions. Many readers wrote in to apply for Clifton Fadiman's job when he retired in 1943. See boxes 53, 982.
74. Written around 1970, "The Magazine for Readers" was a five-part plan for a print advertising campaign meant to appear in magazines and newspapers. "The Magazine for Readers," in five parts, unpagged. Parts entitled, "The Dark Screen," "The Word," "The Message Is the Message," "Attention," and "Beyond the Visual Image"; manuscript and typescript, box 119. Further references are noted parenthetically in the text according to the title of individual sections. Probably written at the behest of the business department in the wake of declining ad sales in the late 1960s (see Mahon, *The Last Days of The New Yorker*, 77–129), the ad campaign never appeared. When I asked a former staffer about this, he scoffed, "Of course it didn't—as ads, those were terrible!"
75. Ohmann, "Where Does Mass Culture Come From?" 349–50.
76. Radway, *A Feeling for Books*, 299.