NO NEWS HERE:

THE FEATURE GENRE,

NEWSPAPERS' "OTHER" STORYTELLING FORM

by

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NO NEWS HERE: THE FEATURE GENRE, NEWSPAPERS' "OTHER"

STORYTELLING FORM

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines one of the two primary genres of storytelling, commonly known as "soft news" or "features," in contemporary newspapers. This is a style used for people, events, processes and explanations that are difficult or impossible to incorporate into the other, dominant mode of news story structure – the "hard news" story. The "hard news" story type, written in an inverted-pyramid structure, epitomizes the objectivity and neutrality considered essential in modern-day reporting. This thesis considers why the "feature" genre, which deviates from this standard, developed, what role it performs, how it fits in with the routines of journalism organizations, and how it functions.

This form of storytelling is contextualized through a review of relevant scholarly work on ideology and media (particularly the ethic of objectivity that guides the profession), newsroom organization, the history of related types of cultural production, news story structures, and audience information-processing.

Historically, news evolved into two categories, "information journalism" and "story journalism," a class-related typification that resulted in a news-processing system where form and content were equated. There were also specific economic, professional and social reasons for the development of this storytelling form that pre-dates the "inverted pyramid" news story form that emerged in the late 1800s.

The professional practices of contemporary journalists continue to maintain this bifurcation of news into two storytelling forms. However, the "feature" form, which reverses many of the rules for inverted-pyramid, hard-news stories, creates discomfort for newsrooms because of its historic association with popular and working-class preferences and because of its implicit challenge to the profession's routines, ideology and ethic of objectivity.

A close analysis of representative samples shows consistent patterns in the feature

form's function: organization of the story in traditional narrative patterns, in opposition to the hierarchy of facts that dominates hard news; permission for an identifiable, sometimes subjective point of view; a privileging of voices from people who are not "authorized knowers;" and the use of literary-realism techniques. News values, it is concluded, are expressed through this choice of storytelling style, a news-production process that readers, journalists and scholars need to be critically attuned to.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the people who are the cornerstones of my life and who were the most affected by my two years of mental absences and emotional zigzags: my son, Marek; my mother, Marie; and my dearest friend, always ready with a cultural-theory joke at hand.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge three people in particular who were there to help throughout the lengthy road, frequently punctuated by hairpin turns, that I took to complete this thesis. The first is my thesis adviser, Bob Hackett, who endured many a late-night visit and phone call amid his own hectic schedule, was interested in my topic and saw it as a valuable contribution to research, and was very supportive as I faced the difficulties of writing while working full-time. The second is my fellow graduate student Shari Graydon, who provided reassurance, thoughtful advice, and an always-available sounding board many times in the past two years. The third is Graham Rockingham, my assignment editor at the *Vancouver Sun*, who, while he was never very sure what exactly it was I was doing and probably would disagree with many of my thesis conclusions, allowed me the kind of unquestioning flexibility at work that most employees only dream of and without which I could not have finished this thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

A beginning reporter who walks into a newsroom for the first time enters a peculiarly divided world: a world of "hard news" and "soft news," a world where "news events" are separate from the daily experience of "life." Not only that, but there are different forms of writing for those two categories.

That same reporter sent out among 5,000 people to cover a political leadership convention needs to know how, amid a barrage of noise, sensory experience, emotional fluctuations and 5,000 different opinions, to isolate certain statements and events and package them as "what happened" -- the hard-news story. That story, in addition to focusing on particular types of statements and actions, is generally also written in standardized format: the inverted pyramid, so called because of a structure where the most important information is packed into the first paragraph and each subsequent paragraph is supposed to have increasingly less momentous information. In it, the reporter is expected to be neutral, objective and essentially voiceless. The ideal hard-news story has no identifying stylistic characteristics.

At the same time, that reporter is expected to be able to capture the sensory and emotional feel of the meeting – the jokes, the people crying, what has been written on signs and buttons, the anger, the music, the small by-plays that are not considered news -- and package that into a separate story, written in an entirely different way: the feature. In this type of story, style is everything. It works as a conventional story, with a beginning, a middle, an end. There is a wealth of physical detail and an inclusion of "average people" -- not normally seen in hard-news stories unless they have been struck by disaster.

It is not something reporters learn easily. One of the classic "errors" that beginning journalists make is coming back to the newsroom with impressionistic and narrative-style

features about raucous or sombre or disorganized meetings, instead of identifying the hard-news event that more experienced reporters capture. In fact, learning the difference between the two forms and learning to make quick decisions about which one should be used marks the passage from "novice" reporter to experienced journalist. But even experienced reporters return from events bemoaning the fact that their news story will not convey the reality of what it was like to be there or "what was really going on."

For reporters working in newsrooms, the struggle to learn the distinction between the two forms of newswriting and to use them at the right times is a predominant feature of being socialized into newsroom practices. A not-uncommon question from a reporter to an editor in the newsroom, as the story writing is about to start, is: "Do you want a hard lead or a featury lead?" Reporters are frequently described within their newsrooms according to their strengths and weaknesses in either of the two areas: "great reporter, terrible writer"; "good feature writer but weak on reporting." Throughout every working day, reporters and editors assess news events and topics and decide whether they should be treated as hard news or features. Reporters assigning photos for a story will specifically note that they are writing a feature story, so that photographers can frame their shots accordingly. This kind of categorization extends to the newspaper as a whole. Newspapers are described as "very featury" or "soft" or "very hard."

This is a divided world that is unique to commercial news media and one whose intense preoccupation with the implications and choices concerning genres is something that the public is generally unaware of. [1] Everyone who works in communication fields learns

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[1] As Michael Schudson noted in his study of time in the news story, journalists are obsessed with "scoops" and appearing to be ahead of their competitors, even if it is only by a few minutes – an obsession that is largely generated by the industry and that the public does not care about. Similarly, I would argue, journalists' preoccupation with whether something is "too featury" or "not hard enough" is largely an internal discussion. Although audience members can more or less identify the different story genres, they are not as attuned to the nuances of what is featury and what is newsy in individual stories, the way journalists are.

that different genres, writing "dialects" or literary styles are needed to speak to different audiences. Many scholars write in two languages, a specialized one for their peers and a popular one for the public. Writers who move between fiction and non-fiction, among different genres of fiction, between short stories and poetry, have to learn to adapt to each form's particular language and traditional structure. However, daily newspaper journalism's two major writing genres – hard news and features – assign significantly different writing styles and story structures to different topics. They are not used by reporters to address two different audiences. (As will be seen later, they are, in fact, intended to address two different audiences but reporters do not conceptualize their work that way.) Nor do the forms differ only in their language and structure. Instead, what drives the two forms of journalism is the nature of the thing being written about -- newsworthy/not newsworthy; timely/not timely; event/process. This is something characteristic of newspaper journalism only. Other types of journalism and non-fiction do not see this kind of bifurcation. Non-fiction books and magazine articles about serious topics have produced some of the best examples this century of writing that blends narrative and literary technique, exhaustive research and richness of information. If one transferred newspaper logic to other areas of communication, it would be as though there were an unwritten rule that only certain types of daily experiences could be written about in poetry, others only in short stories, and others only in films. Naturally, that does not happen. People create depictions of all kinds of human experience in all forms. But in the newspaper world, certain types of experiences fall on one side of the line; others, on the other side. In a newspaper, a person's life, a group's actions or an institution's operations are frequently split in two, with two different storytelling formats used for the two halves. The hard-news side of newspapers focuses on the discrete event: statements, decisions, actions, disasters. The soft-news side of newspapers allows a primary emphasis on

the other dimensions of life: explanation, history, thought, feeling, mood, process, evolution.

The intention of this thesis is to examine those newspaper stories that deviate from the model of hard-news reporting. Doing that will also mean looking at the phenomenon of categorization that has essentially created this alternate storytelling form, the division of news into what Michael Schudson calls "information journalism" and "story journalism." (1978: 88-120) Information journalism has received a significant amount of attention in the last 30 years, with a large body of scholarly research on the emergence, function, structure and political effects of what is seen as the dominant story form in journalism: the "objective" hard-news story, written in the inverted-pyramid form. The inverted-pyramid story, which was first seen during the American Civil War and which established itself in the 1890s as the only form for news in American journalism, is the form that encompasses what have come to be assessed as some of the most contentious qualities of contemporary journalism, that is, an insistence on objectivity, neutrality and impersonality. However, before the inverted-pyramid story came to be the standard, newspapers recounted all of their news in stories that were personal, subjective, dramatic and narrative. And, in spite of the inverted-pyramid structure's dominance, newspapers have always retained some form of alternate storytelling. As well, since the 1970s, and particularly since the 1990s, there has been an increasing emphasis at North American newspapers on trying more writerly approaches to the news, using techniques for hard-news stories that had once been relegated only to soft-news stories.

Some academic studies of media ignore this storytelling division entirely or, if they acknowledge it, dismiss it by saying the two forms do not differ in any essentials. Phyllis Frus, who has studied "literary nonfiction," sees little difference between newspaper's hard-

news stories and its features, saying that "the story form of journalism does not preserve the features of the oral tradition and so is not very different from information." (1994: 138)

Others do make note of the hard/soft news division that newsworkers use, but most of their attention remains focused on the standard, hard-news, inverted-pyramid story. Academics who study "story journalism" tend to hit the extremes of the form: sensationalism, tabloid journalism, the *National Enquirer*, or "non-news" like weather, pet stories, and other trivia that is packaged with news (Bird, 1990a, 1990b, 1992; Stevens, 1991). Gaye Tuchman, in *Making News*, observed that newsworkers create a "typification" of news, although they are never able to define it very well, and that that kind of categorization has had an impact on the way certain types of stories, like the women's movement, are reported. Mark Fishman, in *Manufacturing the News*, also observed that reporters organize their information into different types of stories: hard news and features, with features taking considerably more time and resources. But when news story structures are studied, as Teun van Dijk has done extensively, it is the structure and representational strategies of inverted-pyramid-type news stories that have been examined. The same is true for the way van Dijk, Tuchman and Fishman analyze the way news stories establish their authority through "webs of facticity," "triangulation" and "rituals of objectivity."

In his study of television documentaries, Michael Curtin has noted the same tendency among academics who analyze that medium: the focus of their research is on the striving for "objectivity" and the techniques that are used to assure both the producer and the viewer that "objectivity" has been achieved. There is little analysis of the way documentary producers in particular (as opposed to news-story producers) use fiction-film narrative techniques in order to appeal to audiences at an affective level, not strictly through the objective-information model. In a monograph on the early development of the television documentary, he observed that "[w]hile there is a wealth of excellent literature analyzing

journalistic objectivity, there is relatively little discussion of the representational strategy of television news." (1993: 8)

This thesis is premised on the idea that the form of media messages is significant, as much as their content, in shaping audience expectations and beliefs.

> Facts exist, and all facts can be treated in all genres. The key question, rather, is what genre will be chosen to report the facts, and the amount and kind of attention they will receive. (Liebes, 1989: 169)

Or, as Richard Ericson observed: "The news is not after truth but truth reduced to its genre capacities." (1991: 218)

Finally, David Altheide argues at some length that media studies have mistakenly focused on content instead of looking more closely at form, which tends to be so taken for granted by both audiences and researchers that it passes unnoticed.

> Audience members claim to know instinctively when they see and hear something that can be defined as entertainment, news, historical documentary, and other frameworks, but they commonly explain these definitions as a function of content rather than form. Our position is just the opposite. People draw upon various forms to make sense of various kinds of experience. People interpret or make sense of phenomena through familiar forms. At that point content is established. (1991: 8)

I would add one point to what Altheide argues. Before audiences can make those kinds of connections, journalists do it first. Journalists are trained to "see" something as a hard-news story, as a human-interest story, as a feature and then they search out the content to fill in the form.

In exploring the "other" form of storytelling in this thesis, those concepts are key: form dictates content; genres set the boundaries for what kinds of truth can be told; something is happening when an issue's coverage expands from the hard-news story to a feature, or when it is only covered as a feature, never as a hard-news story. It is my contention that the different forms of news storytelling within newspapers, while they are unified by being parts of a single system, are not just barely distinguishable versions of

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identical story-making patterns. Their differences deserve to be studied because they can, for both newsworkers and audiences, say something about the way news values operate to frame "the world." The feature-style storytelling form and the inverted-pyramid storytelling form have their own rhetorical strategies. They alert audiences to conformity with or deviance from standard news definitions. They function as indicators of newsworkers' assessments of their audiences' general social knowledge and where particular news topics fit within that framework.

As was mentioned earlier, this is not a subject that has been treated directly in many media studies. However, there are areas of academic work that do cast some light on this form of news storytelling, which will be used here. They include media studies that examine the organizational and ideological practices of newsrooms, communication studies that examine news discourse, and studies of the way audiences read news. As well, there is theoretical work in the fields of literature, history and philosophy that analyzes narrative structure and audience reading strategies, as well as literary analysis that looks at forms of fiction, like American realism, and nonfiction, like the New Journalism of the 1960s, that are related to the alternative, "feature" style of storytelling in newspapers.

Besides this kind of academic work, the other base for this thesis will be, of course, the journalism world itself. I have used four methodologies – in essence, four case studies – in order to get a detailed picture of the way the feature-story genre developed and is used in contemporary journalism. Although the information distilled through these four studies overlaps somewhat throughout the thesis, each of the case studies is the basis for part or all of a particular chapter. The first study, in the first part of Chapter Two, looked at academic and journalist-written histories of newspapers. The second, in the final section of Chapter Two, was a study of journalism textbooks from the 1930s to the present. The third, the basis of Chapter Three, looks at present-day professional ideology through interviews with

reporters and editors as well as accounts from journalism conferences, feature-writing guides (both books and articles) that are still in use, and industry publications. Finally, I did a close analysis of samples from two daily newspapers, to identify the pattern of differences and use of the two forms. The results of that are in Chapter Four.

In general, this thesis relies upon American source material, although Canadian newspapers and Canadian journalists are included in the studies on day-to-day practices and story organization. Certainly, there are differences between Canadian and American newspapers. It is my intuitive judgment after doing the research for this thesis, in fact, that American newspapers have a populist tradition that makes them more inclined in general to write news in accessible, story-telling ways, while Canadian newspapers are somewhat more fixed in a tradition that sees newspaper-reading as an activity, perhaps not of the elites, but certainly of the educated classes and therefore believes its news style should be oriented to them. Further study, using some of the ideas of this thesis, could confirm that, along with undoubtedly uncovering other divergences in the topics that Americans and Canadians are likely to cover as hard news or features and what balance they try to strike between the two forms. However, the fundamental division between the two forms – hard and soft, inverted-pyramid and feature – is common to both sides of the border.

Before launching into the history of the complex evolution of the newspaper feature story and style, I will begin in the first chapter by establishing some of the basic theories and evaluations of commercial media and cultural production that media scholars have developed. Understanding the importance of storytelling form and how it operates means understanding newspapers in a way that is not always evident to readers or even to those who work in newsrooms. That includes understanding the ideological and economic forces that shape commercial media; understanding the historical relationship among literature, journalism and realism; understanding the organization of newswork and the way that

organization shapes what news is reported; understanding the organization of narratives in general and news stories in particular, which have a unique format that is distinct from other known and studied forms like oral storytelling, films or novels; and understanding the way audiences respond to stories in print.

The second chapter will then examine the historical development of differentiated storytelling forms within newspapers, focusing particularly, of course, on the early forms of the feature story. Histories of American newspapers and the evolution of journalism textbooks show the way alternative forms of news storytelling have been, at different times, encouraged, suppressed, shaped and regulated.

The third chapter will look specifically at current practices in newsrooms: how journalists define feature stories, why they decide to use one form rather than another, what they look for when they write, and the discomforts that the feature form creates for them. There are two primary sources of information for this section: interviews with working journalists and contemporary documents that set out the goals and techniques for news storytelling.

The fourth chapter will closely examine the structure and component elements of the alternate forms of news storytelling. This is a critically important element to understanding how news storytelling forms actually operate, since one of the distinguishing features of the media industry is the gap between what its practitioners believe they are doing and what appears on news pages. Reporters believe, for instance, that the decision to use a hard- or soft-news style depends on the nature of the event and that, for instance, serious, tragic, or immediate topics get hard-news treatment. However, a close examination of a representative sample of news stories shows that the feature form is used on a wide variety of stories, including the serious, tragic and immediate. The use of the feature form actually provides a map of the boundaries that define the place that certain people and issues have in

the social hierarchy, journalists' assumptions about audience knowledge, and whether topics are ranked as subjects for legitimate debate, for consensual celebration, or for marginalization.

In all of this, I cannot help but draw from my own extensive personal experience of newsrooms and feature-writing. I have worked as a journalist in commercial news media for 13 years and, in that time, have attended over 30 workshops, seminars, and conferences aimed at improving journalism, some of them in the United States, but the majority in Canada. None of them addressed the questions that I pose here, questions that arose frequently as I struggled to understand the rules about when the feature form should be used and when the hard-news form (it frequently seemed to be a question of "when you've got good news judgment, you know") or struggled to make sure that I wasn't pegged as "only" a feature writer or as "only" a news writer. Industry discussions also rarely take up the topic of what the purpose of this alternative form of storytelling is, what its inherent advantages or pitfalls might be, or any of the larger questions about the way this kind of storytelling shapes reality.

It is my hope that the close examination here of this newswriting genre will help others understand some of the hidden dynamics that go into choices about storytelling form and that their understanding will enable them to undertake more informed story creation and story deconstruction.

CHAPTER ONE

THE FRAMES AROUND NEWS STORYTELLING

Journalists tend to believe the storytelling forms they choose are largely a question of personal choice by a reporter or individual negotiation between a particular reporter and a particular editor. Ask a journalist what influences her decision to write one story as "hard news" with an inverted-pyramid structure and strictly "objective" stance, while another one is written as a feature, with a distinctly narrative structure and personal style, and she will likely answer, as did one reporter interviewed on this subject: "I think it comes back to the reporter. I think the reporter can use both devices." (Helm, Interview)

But, as this thesis will document, storytelling form is not something chosen at random by individual journalists on the basis of their personal tastes. Newspaper storytelling forms have been developed to serve or unintentionally end up serving economic, organizational and political requirements in newsrooms. The choice of storytelling form also reflects news values.

Before I look at the way newspaper storytelling forms have developed and the way they are used in present-day newsrooms, I think it is important to establish an understanding of the larger frameworks that news gathering and news production operate in, frameworks of which even newsworkers are not always conscious of. That means understanding some of the basic structures and processes that media scholars have identified in news production. This chapter is not meant to be a comprehensive review of scholarly media analysis, but it is necessary to outline some of the relevant fundamental ideas that academics have identified as governing newswork and communications. When I look at the evolution of newspaper storytelling forms in Chapter Two, it is helpful to understand the evolution that other storytelling media were undergoing at the same time. Understanding the problems that

working journalists have with the potential subjectivity of the feature form, which is the subject of Chapter Three, means understanding first the importance that the ethic of objectivity holds in the industry. Similarly, it is difficult to see the significance of the feature form's story structure, which will be examined in Chapter Four, without knowing how it is similar or different from the standard news story form. And understanding why storytelling form is worth studying at all is impossible without understanding current theories about how readers process information presented in different ways and how ideology may be expressed through form.

This chapter will begin, then, with an outline of some of the ideas on ideology and the media. That includes both media workers' professional ideology about what their role should be and media scholars' assessments of the way ideology in general shapes and works through commercial news media. A second key area of academic research that applies to this thesis is the work that has been done on the rise of literary realism in the nineteenth century, which influenced newspaper style. The third frame is the organization of newswork: how news is defined, gathered and categorized. The fourth area of study providing theories that illuminate the feature form is that which looks at external narrative "news frames" and the internal narrative structure of news stories. Finally, a fifth area of research that casts light on what I am studying here is one that looks at how audiences process and respond to different types of information, representational strategies and genres.

1. Press ideology: Public service and objectivity

All commercial news media operations function in a paradox. Publicly, newspapers, ever since they moved away from their function as political party organs in the early 1800s, have emphasized their public-service role as their first priority, which many scholars have observed and documented. (Gitlin, 1980; Bridges, 1991). To put it more accurately,

newspapers that are made up of elite reporters and that serve elite audiences have enunciated this as their role -- the more elite the paper, the more clearly it is declared -- while more populist newspapers, which actually tend to see themselves less as public-service providers and more as entertainment providers, have not offered any public counter-argument. In the nineteenth century, that public-service role was often articulated as one of moral rectitude and guidance. In the twentieth century, the public-service role newspapers have claimed for themselves is that of "watchdogs of government and democracy." A typical statement about the journalist's role, taken from a much-respected and frequently used American textbook:

> The journalist knows that democracy is healthiest when the public is kept informed about the activities of captains of industry and chieftains in public office. Only with adequate information can people check those in power. Repression and ignorance are the consequences of unchecked power. (Mencher, 1983: xiv)

That emphasis on the journalists' roles of informing and educating is maintained in many ways. Newspaper editors stress the public-service aspects of what they do. Professional journalism associations, with the support of newspaper owners, spend considerable time discussing ways to inform the public better. Industry magazines, both those geared to editors and those aimed at reporters, include stories that examine the challenges and successes of the public-service mission.

For some, informing the public means taking a very aggressive, investigative stance. For others, it means better explanatory journalism. And for others, it is newspapers' essential role in sorting through the mass of available information to present what is most important and relevant. Whatever the approach, however, the goal is clear: educating the public about important policy issues of the day. As part of that stance, the journalists in news operations maintain an ideal of strict separation between editorial and advertising; those operations that contravene the ideal find themselves the subject of industry criticism

for allowing their commercial interests to interfere with the product. The *Columbia Journalism Review*'s "Darts & Laurels" column, which routinely takes critical note of media outlets that appear to be allowing commercial interests to take precedence over established journalism values, is a prime example of this second type.[1]

However, in spite of all this, newspapers are not a public utility. They are a commercial enterprise, dependent on attracting enough readers so that advertisers will be willing to pay for space in the paper. This economic imperative affects all aspects of newswork. To attract readers, a newspaper may market itself as a serious paper examining the most important public-policy issues of the day, as the newspaper of record, as a service-oriented paper geared to giving people quantities of information about community activities, or as a collection of melodramatic human-interest stories. A newspaper's ability to market successfully whatever image it has chosen then directly affects its ability to hire more or fewer reporters and allow those reporters to spend more or less time researching stories.

Journalists, however, have chosen to address this unavoidable contradiction of purposes by focusing their attention of their professional ideology of public service and ignoring, downplaying or actively rejecting the economic determinants of their business. It may be thought that the public-service role has taken a back seat, with all the research and discussion there has been in the last 15 years about the increase in entertainment journalism, in market-driven journalism, in newspapers being directed by business administrators rather than journalists, and in economic pressures in general. Daniel Hallin certainly notes that the

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[1] The 1996 January/February issue of CJR, for example, included the following reprimands: A dart to a California newspaper for pulling a travel story that "logged the less-than-idyllic adventures of passengers caught on Caribbean cruises" (aiming at the well-known sensitivity of newspapers about offending their travel advertisers); a criticism of a Massachusetts paper for not running a William Safire column against state-sponsored gambling at a time when the newspaper was supporting having a casino built; a dart to a Philadelphia newspaper for working out an agreement to allow free ads from the city in exchange for a $500,000 bill the newspaper owed the city (a deal that was thought to influence the paper's coverage of contenders for the mayor's job). (19-20)

separation of the "profane" (commercial) from the "sacred" (public service) was maintained the most easily during the 1970s, when newspapers enjoyed their period of greatest prosperity (1992: 23), and that separation is maintained with much more difficulty in the 1990s. However, I would argue that the latest squeeze is just part of the cycle that has controlled mass media since they became commercial operations in the middle of the last century. In profitable times, the focus is on journalism quality and the division between advertising and editorial is strictly maintained. In competitive times, the intrusions from the commercial side become more and more noticeable. What does not change, however, is the stance of professional journalists and their organizations; they continue to patrol the border for violations on the commercial side, albeit with less success at some times than others. As well, they (publicly, at least) maintain a fundamental unwillingness to discuss the commercial dimensions of their work or to consider "compromise" positions. Weaver and Wilhoit's 1993 survey of the importance journalists assign to mass media roles asked them which roles they thought were "extremely important." "Investigate government claims" was ranked extremely important by 69.9 per cent of respondents. The succeeding categories ranked by importance were: get information to public quickly, 69.6; analyze complex problems, 54.4; let people express views, 52; avoid stories with unverifiable facts, 50; and discuss national policy, 44.1. "Reach widest possible audience" was considered extremely important for only 17.2 per cent. (10)

Journalism conferences, textbooks and memoirs routinely outline the challenges posed to the newsgathering by the obstruction of forces outside the newsroom, particularly secretive government organizations and business, or recalcitrant politicians, civil servants and company executives. However, those same sources rarely devote the same kind of attention to the internal newsroom problems journalists must face, problems that are created because media organizations are operating as businesses. There are the standard complaints

about newsroom cutbacks or the lack of time to do long-term projects, but one simply does not see the kind of analysis and strategizing about how to overcome these inherent difficulties as one does with external problems.

This refusal to attempt to understand the impact of economic necessity on journalism has several consequences. In general, it has led working journalists to be reflexively suspicious of any change that appears to be driven by economic concerns. As a result, journalists are frequently more critical than the general public about graphics-oriented journalism, tabloid journalism, sensationalism, newspaper redesigns, or anything else that looks as though it is marketing. (Again, this is most often articulated by journalists at elite media outlets.) This can extend to surprising aspects of news work. Researchers John Robinson, Haluk Sahin and Dennis Davis tried to get journalists interested in the results of their audience research on how well news stories are comprehended. They were noticeably unsuccessful, because journalists did not want to know anything about their audiences. They saw that kind of information as a marketing issue and "[t]he traditional occupational ideology of American journalism rejects the demand model as an appropriate determiner of news content." (1982: 165) This corresponds to other reseachers' observations that journalists are surprisingly uninformed about their audiences and unwilling to find out anything about them.

The result of this emphasis on public service and suspicion of the commercial side of their business is that news stories that appear to be written "just to sell newspapers," where entertainment is emphasized over information, are viewed negatively. News stories with the highest status, therefore, are those written about public-policy issues where there is a heavy emphasis on the information, rather than the presentation.

A second essential pillar of journalists' professional ideology is the attachment to the ethic of objectivity. This is a crucial value, in terms of this study, since it is one of the

deciding factors that differentiates newspapers' storytelling genres. Columns, opinion pieces, analysis, and features were developed as genres precisely to separate "objective" news stories from those that were considered less than objective. Therefore, to understand some of the dynamics of the way the feature form is used in newspapers, it is necessary to understand the place of objectivity and how the feature form deviates from it.

Since approximately the late 1920s, objectivity has been a predominant value for journalists. (Schudson, 1978; Streckfuss, 1990) There are a number of explanations that have been put forth to explain the sudden attachment to objectivity that appeared in the profession. Some say that it was part of the professionalization of journalism that took place around that time (Schudson, 1978; Ericson, 1991: 168), along with the appearance of journalism programs at universities, journalistic codes of ethics, journalism textbooks and increasingly well-educated reporters who had status and visibility at their newspapers. Dan Schiller theorized that the penny press of the nineteenth-century developed objectivity as a working principle because that allowed it to cultivate a role as defender of the public good, a discourse that it appropriated from the working class press. And others say journalists turned to objectivity in an attempt to find a way to work in a world where everything seemed suddenly uncertain. Richard Streckfuss's study of the origins of objectivity cites four social forces that encouraged journalists to adopt it: a distrust of human nature, partly arising from the spread of new ideas about human psychology; a concern about the way propaganda and the new field of public relations were manipulating facts and confusing issues; a belief that facts were needed to support democratic government; and a faith in the newly emerging scientific method being used in the social sciences. As well, he notes, the "jingoistic, America-first mood of the country and its press just after World War I" intensified a search among the press's elite members for a rational method of reporting, instead of the emotionalism and sensationalism that was prevalent. (1990: 975) Schudson also traced the

origins of objectivity to reporters' concern about the apparent subjectivization of facts.

While reporters in the late nineteenth century "rarely doubted the possibility of writing realistically," reporters on the post-First World War period felt adrift in a sea of economic and political complexity, in apparent manifestations of irrational public opinion, and the beginnings of attempts to manipulate public opinion through professional public-relations work.

> Journalists came to believe in objectivity, to the extent they did, because they wanted to, needed to, were forced by ordinary human aspiration to seek escape from their own deep convictions of doubt and drift. (1978: 157)

Journalism, of course, was just one of the fields where ideals of objectivity came to prevail. Scientists in the burgeoning disciplines of natural and social sciences also predicated their studies on a belief in objectivity as the method to be used for understanding physical and human phenomena. Journalists shared with these other fields certain guiding principles about how to view and record the world objectively, how to establish unquestionable and important truths amid swirling seas of contradictory and abundant "facts." Two of the most important: First, that fact and opinion should be separated -- a departure from earlier eras, where writers did not doubt that their personal observations were facts and should be reported as such. Second, that writers' statements about the world would be judged as objective (and therefore trustworthy) if they were arrived at by following certain rules or methods prescribed by that writers' professional community, which ensured that facts were consensually validated rather than being simply personal observation. Therefore, scientists could be sure of having arrived at objective facts if they observed scientific methods; journalists could be sure of the same if they followed certain prescribed routines. As John Soloski put it: "Objectivity does not reside in the news stories themselves; rather it resides in the behavior of journalists." (1989: 213)

However, there has been a degeneration between the 1920s and the present in how objectivity was to be achieved. As Walter Lippman and others conceived of it, it was meant to be a rigorous and difficult procedure that would ultimately help establish some core, reliable pieces of information amid the wash of public relations, emotionalism, and "facts." (Streckfuss, 1990: 982-983) However, under the economic imperative and time constraints of daily journalism, it ended up performing very different roles. First, it helped newspapers establish monopoly positions and establish themselves as neutral bodies, like government or legal institutions, capable of translating power interests into public interests, since a claim of objectivity helped them appeal to all sectors and be apparently free of bias to or against any one. (Soloski, 1989: 214; Hartley, 1982: 55) Secondly, routines of objectivity became practical ways of dealing with newspapers' day-to-day production demands.

> The reporter who is required only to obtain a statement from one source, and then to record a counter-claim from another source, can produce stories quickly and routinely without requiring extensive knowledge of the matter in dispute. From the viewpoint of supervising editors, these features in turn allow flexibility in assignment of stories, since any reporter can work on anything within this format. Moreover, the editors and reporters are freed from the practical and legal difficulties of sifting evidence and judging truth claims. (Ericson, 1991: 168)

The proof of this is illustrated in a study done that showed that newsrooms with the least resources had the best record of meeting journalistic norms of objectivity (McManus, 1994: 161). It should also be noted that objectivity, as it was conceived of then and is still practiced now, contains two important implications. First, it embodies a distrust of the self. (Schudson, 1978: 71) Secondly, it relies primarily on visual observations. (Frus, 1994: 102)

In the next section, we will outline the routines that reporters have developed to do their work quickly and achieve the "objectivity" that is required. Again, we will see in subsequent chapters that the belief in the importance of objectivity is an important factor in reporters' attitudes towards, and choices about, storytelling forms. Storytelling forms that appear to deviate from the ethic of objectivity create problems for journalists.

Now we turn to scholarly theories of media ideology, particularly what media scholars have to say about journalists' reliance on objectivity as a working method. This is critical to understanding the implications of the feature form's potential for deviating from objectivity. First, however, it is important to establish the fact that there is not a unified approach to media analysis and the more critical analyses of objectivity rest on a particular set of theories about the way ideology works through the media.

There are currently at least two basic approaches to theorizing about society and media among communication scholars. One view, the liberal-pluralist perspective, basically sees the world as groups of competing interests that struggle for power, with no one group having complete control. Therefore, democratic mechanisms like elections and media, where shifting public opinion can make itself known, function to give different groups more or less say at different points in time. Most important, these groups do share social consensus about basic issues. Under this kind of perspective, "objectivity," as it is understood by journalists, is a workable operating method. One of the most common manifestations of journalists' attempt to be objective is the inclusion, in any given news story, of the points of view of opposing groups. From a liberal-pluralist viewpoint, this mechanism allows all groups to be heard on an issue where there is consensus that it is an issue needing debate, and for public opinion to make its choice among them. Media act as a mirror for public concerns. Examining news storytelling genres from this perspective would produce an explanation that was based on a belief in social consensus. If newspapers consistently produce sympathetic feature stories about the victims of crime, but never do sympathetic feature stories about the perpetrators of crime, the liberal-pluralist explanation resides in society: People in general feel more sympathetic to and interested in victims of crime; newspaper features reflect that.

Under the "critical theory" perspective of media, however, the explanation for choices of news storytelling genres would very different. Critical theory, which is rooted in the ideas of Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci, the Frankfurt school, and British cultural studies, conceptualizes social interaction not as competition among power groups, all with some ability to influence each other, but as a constant effort of dominant elite groups to win popular consent to their way of seeing the world; in other words, hegemony.

> That consent is won, in part, by getting people to understand and interpret
> the real conditions in which they live their daily lives, in ways which
> support, or at least do not radically challenge, existing social relations.
> (Hackett, 1984: 57)

This hegemonic process works through the major institutions that socialize people about what society's rules and expectations are: schools, churches, media. In this perspective, media is a powerful shaper of the ideological environment,

> a way of representing the order of things which endowed its limiting
> perspectives with that natural or divine inevitability which makes them
> appear universal, natural and coterminous with 'reality' itself. This
> movement -- towards the winning of a universal validity and legitimacy for
> accounts of the world which are partial and particular, and towards the
> grounding of these particular constructions in the taken-for-grantedness of
> 'the real' – is indeed the characteristic and defining mechanism of 'the
> ideological.' (Hall, 1992: 65)

Objectivity, then, becomes "one of the most ideological aspects of news discourse" (Hackett, 1984: 81) because of the way it transmits dominant-class assumptions without even having to argue them. They become embedded in the way newswriters frame their stories, whom they choose to interview, and what background information they choose to include or eliminate.

Using this critical paradigm as a basis for analysis, there are a number of observations that could be made about the media's use of an alternate storytelling genre like the feature form. This alternate genre could perform a valuable function for media in allowing it to appear to be presenting diverse versions of reality, not just a single-perspective

dominant-elite view. This form could allow media to represent marginal or deviant or non-elite sources and events, while at the same time clearly marking them as marginal, deviant and non-elite through their placement in a particular story form that is judged to be not as serious, not as informative and not as "truthful" as objective hard-news stories. In essence, it could perform a function that serves the hegemonic process ideally, taking note of and absorbing "minority" viewpoints while ensuring that they are clearly identified as marginal and not something that sensible people would consider. As well, it could also be used to further extend the dominance of particular media frames, using devices like personalization and realism to convince readers that something is true, not just because institutional authorities say it is so, but because real people sitting in their real living rooms say it is so as well.

Naturally, the hegemonic process does not work without bumps and there is always a certain danger in allowing non-dominant voices to express themselves in order to reassure the public that consensus has been arrived at fairly by an open competition among different groups and ideas. So how can one be assured that dominant-group ideas will remain dominant? In the hegemonic model, it will be done by the story producers themselves and their professional norms. As John Soloski's study outlines, professionalism is inextricably linked with capitalism, since the establishment of professional norms allows organizations to control the behaviour of their workers without having to train them or patrol them (1989: 212). Those workers will then ensure that norms like objectivity are carried out. Therefore, in this critical-theory model, it would be expected that the genre that deviates from objectivity, that allows a subjective, more personal viewpoint, that does not adhere to standard news values, that allows writers more creative control, would generate discomfort among journalists. As a result, we would expect to see newsrooms do a fair amount of containment activity, making sure that the feature form, while not ever eliminated entirely,

does not stray too far from the norms of objectivity and making sure that it is used in the appropriate way.

2. Realism, literature and newspapers

The forms and language of contemporary newspapers have their roots in the nineteenth century. As we will see in the following chapter, the nineteenth century produced a gradual differentiation in types of newspaper stories, evolving into the kind of newspaper we have today where news production is segregated into genre categories like "columns," "hard news," "features," "opinion," "analysis," and content categories like national news, city news, business, sports, fashion, recreation and so on. The language of contemporary newspapers is also an artifact of the nineteenth-century's emphasis on "realism." Michael Schudson's history of newspapers, *Discovering the News*, documents this connection between newspaper reporting and the realism that was favored in both scientific and literary movements of the late nineteenth century (1978: 71-77). Newspaper reporters, like those working in the burgeoning field of social science and like novelists of the time, came to have a belief that their role was to observe human behaviour in minute detail and to attempt to record it almost photographically.

This is not the only facet of the nineteenth century that marked both newspapers and other types of mass print productions, of course. Newspapers, magazines, and books of all types were responding to several economic and social trends of the nineteenth century that shaped their style. That resulted in two developments that influenced the newspaper feature form.

The first was the gradual separation of literature from journalism. As Phyllis Frus documents in her study of literary nonfiction (1994), journalism was originally seen as a literary genre rather than technical writing. Stories were not labelled as fiction or non-

fiction, in keeping with a newspaper era where there was less categorization in general – fewer beats, fewer specialized sections, in newspapers. News stories even at the end of the 1800s were not usually narrated in the anonymous third person. However, throughout the early decades of the twentieth century, there was a separating out of journalism and literature. Journalism was increasingly defined as objective, neutral and anonymous, while literature became the form that was subjective and individual. What happened at the same time, however, was that as "literature" was assigned these qualities, it was also drained of any partisan or political effectiveness. That is, for journalism to be accepted as "true," it had to shed any literary qualities, and for literature to be accepted as "art," it was expected to transcend specific political or social realities, to aestheticize them and transform them into larger universal truths. That paradigm manifests itself in the present through having literary nonfiction created as a category where, although true social and political conflicts are described, they are done so in a "literary" fashion that, in effect, presents the stories to audiences as finished art works to be admired rather than as forceful calls to action.

Other forms of cultural production were also shifting. Daniel Borus, in documenting the evolution of the American literary realist movement, observed that books written in the pre-American Civil War era were written for relatively small audiences: well-educated, literary groups who knew each other and the authors. In this *belles lettres* tradition, writers tended to address their readers familiarly ("gentle reader, what you are about to hear ...") much as newspaper writers of the time tended to use essay and letter forms to address their readers. Writers had a fair amount of control over their material and publishing was a haphazard and relatively dispersed business.

By the end of the nineteenth century, publishing had become much more commercialized and centralized in New York. Audiences were no longer a familiar group whose tastes were known and understood by the writers addressing them. Instead, as a

result of the phenomenal American shift from a primarily agrarian society to an urban one during the nineteenth century, they were anonymous, mass audiences. That now urbanized audience also included a substantial proportion of new immigrants with weaker English skills than the general population. That produced several changes in book production, many of which we can easily see paralleled in newspaper production: the elevation of the writer/reporter to a new status as a kind of "star" figure; the increased distance between the author and audience, with the writer taking on a more objective, authoritative tone and abandoning the subjective and familiar tone of the past; the increasing control by publishers and editors; the attempt to appeal to mass audiences or to immigrant audiences with sensation and melodrama; and the constant demand for fresh products.

> "Novelty, which publishers called 'timeliness,' became the watchword in fiction. Repackaging and differentiating became cardinal virtues." (Borus, 1989: 45)

As we will see in the next chapter, all of these influences are seen in print journalism and contributed to the development of differentiated types of news storytelling. But the most significant shift in nineteenth-century fiction style, one that influenced journalism, was the development of literary realism.

Realism is characterized by its choice of language, subjects, setting, and a particular attitude to the world. One of the central tenets of realism is the choice of ordinary or typical subjects (Martin, 1986: 59). Realist literature (and journalism) relies on observation and detail – sometimes shockingly graphic detail. It focuses on particular social classes or working milieus (Edith Wharton's New York ,old-money class and Theodore Dreiser's working-class subjects are two examples), more often the working class and anti-hero working-class subjects who are frequently at the mercy of the social and physical surroundings – a focus described by one scholar as "class tourism." (Kaplan, 1988: 41) It is distinguished by meticulous physical descriptions of people's environments, either in their

fictional homes or the fictional cities and villages they live in, "meaningless or random details characteristic of everyday life [which] serves as evidence that the story 'really happened.'"(Martin, 1986: 64) It is characterized by objectivity and, as objective journalism is, by a narrator who stands above the crowd, making the strange events and sub-cultures of urban life "native to us all." (Kaplan, 1988: 41) Frequently, the description of someone's home environment is symbolic: it carries with it the implication that physical setting is a manifestation of character. It involves a "doctrine of natural causality" as opposed to chance, fate, or providence and a "philosophical commitment to a scientific view of man and society, one opposed to traditional religious views." (Martin, 1986: 59) Realist novels differ from romantic novels, the *belles lettres* tradition, or the literature and journalism of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in their use of everyday, colloquial language. Finally, realist fictional technique relies on access to the consciousness of characters (Martin, 1986: 69).

All of these characteristics are particularly evident in the feature form of news storytelling, as later chapters will detail. Although all news stories use certain elements to create an image of realistic verisimilitude -- pictures, descriptions of settings of events, quotations from those present, descriptions of people – the feature form adopts many more of the characteristics of literary realism as it existed in the nineteenth century. The feature form is the only storytelling genre where reporters place "average" or "typical" characters at the front and centre of their stories. Reporters writing in a feature form are allowed greater latitude with language and are permitted to write in a colloquial style that is excluded from inverted-pyramid stories. The feature form is the favoured vehicle for explorations of what are regarded as "social sub-cultures": Asians, bike gangs, gay couples with children, natives, drug users, bowling-shirt collectors and the like. One of the defining characteristics of fully developed newspaper feature stories is their use of apparently non-essential physical

descriptions. Features that are profiles of prominent people are renowned for their search for the "natural cause," the revealing story from childhood that shaped the life of Kim Campbell, Canada's first female prime minister, or Gordon Campbell, the leader of the Liberal party.

Why did this particular writing style arise? One explanation is that it arose for some of the same reasons "objectivity" entrenched itself in journalism. In fact, literary realism is closely linked to objectivity: It uses the same photographic observational method that was establishing itself in the social sciences. It shows the same urge to isolate knowable "facts" in a confusing, overwhelming, complex world. And it relies on the distanced, objective narrator who tries to create a world of consensus.

The term "realism," applied to a particular genre of literary writing, was popularized by the novelist William Dean Howells, beginning in 1886. Howellsian realism had two distinguishing characteristics: one, realists saw literature as a kind of moral influence on society and, as such, writers had a responsibility to exercise that moral influence by depicting life "accurately," not romantically or artistically; two, realism was founded on binary pairings, moral and political oppositions (Bell, 1993: 47-61). As well, Howells specifically saw it as extending literary representation to "social groups formerly neglected or idealized in literature." (Kaplan, 1988: 21)

The rise of realism is also correlated to significant social changes of the nineteenth century: a massive urbanization of American society that put different classes of people in close but superficial contact with each other; a growing sense of class conflict, social change and economic instability; and a new conceptualization of human existence – "mass society" – where one's sense of individual identity was as a minute part of a larger group whose complexity and diversity made it unknowable by one person; the rise of a consumer culture

where social life became a series of spectacles or acts of exhibition (Kaplan, 1988; Borus, 1989).

Amy Kaplan's study, *The Social Construction of American Realism*, provides an even more detailed analysis of the way realism arose as a response to social change. She postulates it as "a strategy for imagining and managing the threats of social change." (1988: 10) With its focus on the certainty of physical details, it concentrates on the parts of existence that appear knowable and unchangeable, in contrast to the social and economic upheavals people were experiencing. In fact, the quantity of detail in realist writing is "in inverse proportion to [people's] sense of insubstantiality – reality in fact seems hard to pin down." (1988: 8) Similarly, its premise of shared human characteristics in all of the subjects of realist writing responds to people's anxiety about the groups of strangers that now formed the social fabric around them, working "to ensure that social difference can be ultimately effaced by a vision of a common humanity, which mirrors the readers' own commonplace or everyday life" (1988: 21) and making sure that readers are not jarred with the "shock of otherness." (1988: 23). In a world like this, the realist narrator became a guide and translator, attempting to establish a common language that everyone, in spite of these radical shifts, could identify with (Borus, 1989: 134-135).

In this modern urban society, primary context — what people see, know and experience personally about the way life works – is replaced by secondary context – what they hear or read about the way life works. In that kind of world, people's private lives assume public significance (Schudson, 1978: 29-30) – a point we will return to when we look at the way that journalists incorporate private lives into public storytelling.

While other kinds of literary production have moved beyond modernism to the various stages of post-modernism, realism continues to maintain a near-stranglehold on mainstream journalism writing. Feature writing, in particular, continues to demonstrate

many of the qualities of nineteenth-century literary realism. In part, this is a function of the conservative nature of news production: in a business that is essentially an industry geared to packaging information efficiently, style and genre innovations are not encouraged except at the most elite newspapers. As well, realism is a dominant literary convention for much of the twentieth century's popular literature. Using a realist style ensures that readers will be instantly familiar with the way information is presented.

But, I would argue, realism continues to be the prevailing mode, not just from force of habit, but because it continues to provide some of the solutions that it did when it first developed. It focuses on physical details and personalities as a way of grappling with complex issues. It gives us glimpses into the private lives of others, which seem otherwise unknowable and alien. It frequently takes as its topics social sub-groups, helping to reduce social anxiety by allowing the middle class safe glimpses of "the others." Because of that function, it is worth examining for what types of issues newsrooms are most likely to deploy the full battery of literary-realism techniques.

3. The organization of newswork

Newswork is a production process demanding that reporters gather information and turn it into stories quickly, with the least possible time-consuming problems concerning verifiability, potential lawsuits, or "newsiness." That essential and inescapable fact dictates the structures and products of newswork as much as any overt attempt to shape the news. In fact, as Mark Fishman emphasizes, the news product is so governed by time constraints that "simply by speeding up the production line, the ideological character of news can be guaranteed." (1980: 148) . S. Holly Stocking and Paget Gross, in their study of journalists' cognitive processes, have noted that when any individuals face time pressure, they shut down their information-gathering and evaluative processes more quickly. Therefore, the

faster reporters and editors are forced to work, the more they will rely on what is readily available: accepted wisdom, stereotypes, established story forms, established methods and certain reliable types of sources. It also means that news is inescapably biased towards what can be processed quickly; strategies that help journalists minimize processing problems will be favored. That fundamental necessity shapes many aspects of news work, including news values, choice of sources, reliance on news frames, and limitation of stories according to time and geographic considerations.

News values, for instance, mainly reflect the need to work quickly. The 1973 Galtung and Ruge study identified the core values of news What is most likely to be reported as news are those events with the following characteristics:

- They have a short time span (murders are heavily covered; economic trends are not).

- The event involves large numbers of people.

- The event is unambiguous.

- The event is meaningful to the reporters and their audience -- it is able to be plugged in quickly to the cultural background of news-gatherers.

- The event is consonant or expected – violence at demonstrations, tearful reunions of long-separated twin sisters.

- The event is unexpected, in terms of what news-gatherers think is expected or meaningful.

- The story is continuing. (Once something becomes a news story, it continues to be covered.)

- The story helps news packagers achieve balance: foreign and domestic; positive and negative; political or non-political.

- The story refers to elite nations.

- The story refers to elite persons.

- The story is personalized, rather than being abstract. (Jean Chretien decides to do something, rather than the prime minister's office or the Liberal policy-makers.)

- The event is negative (62-73).

Looking at that list, almost all of the values listed make it easier for journalists to select and frame stories. Only personalization and composition may require extra effort from reporters, the first occasionally demanding that reporters search out someone willing to perform the personalizating function for stories, where it cannot be done by simply referring to a prominent figure, and the second requiring some assessment by editors of the relative merits of stories.

Another aspect of newsgathering that researchers have observed in contemporary media is the way time and location influence news coverage (Epstein, 1973; Tuchman, 1978; Fishman, 1980). News is not a careful selection from among all potential newsworthy events. A news event's distance or proximity to the newsgathering outlet and the way it meshes with that outlet's production schedule has a significant impact on news coverage or news storytelling format. News that occurs at a distance or at an inconvenient time may not be covered at all or it may be covered as a feature story. Edward Jay Epstein noted that television coverage from California in the 1960s and 1970s was dominated by feature stories about idiosyncratic aspects of life on the West Coast (similar to the way British Columbia is frequently portrayed, in the coverage of eastern media outlets, as a repository for fringe elements, unsophisticated politics and general goofiness). That kind of coverage arose in part because of geographic and time problems. Stories produced for overnight news in California could not meet eastern time deadlines, so California reporters were encouraged to file stories that would be "timeless" – that is, feature stories (1973: 244-246). While there are

other factors that would lead reporters to focus on offbeat aspects of California social life, the way was paved for them to do so because they were primarily working in a format that encouraged it.

But even when stories are near at hand and do fit newsroom production schedules, reporters and editors still need to find ways to perform triage efficiently on the plethora of potential news events available. One of the ways they do that is by categorizing the work and dividing the labour: dividing newspapers into sections, assigning reporters to beats. One of the divisions they make is the one I am examining in this thesis: the division of news into "hard news" and "soft news," or hard news and features. As Eric Fredin writes: "Form is efficient; it helps journalists meet deadlines by suggesting what needs to be in a story and how it should be organized." (1993: 801) Since hard news is always written in one format – inverted-pyramid structure with the story organized around the relative importance of different facts – and features in another, a quick decision about whether something is hard or soft news solves both a question of news values (does this qualify as a news event that we need to tell people about right away?) and story form (how shall we organize this information?). That focus on events as the primary topic of news – announcements, accidents, debates – further helps simplify the news-production process, since editors and reporters can concentrate their most energetic efforts on actions that are easily identifiable as events.

Another working practice journalists use to operate efficiently is to go to reliable sources for their information, that is, sources who will have a great deal of information easily available and whose verbal recounting of it can be trusted to be authoritative. Studies have shown that, the heavier journalists' workloads are, the fewer sources they will consult. (Stocking, 1989: 53, 71) Mark Fishman's 1980 study of news operations, in particular, documented the way reporters learn to gather facts quickly by going to "bureaucratically

organized concentrations of information." (49) That, in turn, provides the journalist with a "map of relevant knowers" in the community on any given topic (51). While journalists do this primarily to expedite their jobs, the ultimate effect of it is to turn news into a publicly visible illustration of social hierarchy, showing who is an authorized knower and who is not (Ericson, 1991: 5-8).

Another strategy news workers use is to rely on established news frames for their stories. News frames allow reporters to identify quickly the significance and importance of a particular event, to decide quickly which angles to highlight, and to endow it with ready-made background. Many scholars have examined the way the media's tendency to cover stories according to existing news frames leads to a preponderance of stories that confirm the news frame and an absence of stories that do not (Fruman, 1996; Gitlin, 1980; Hartley, 1982; Tuchman, 1978). If the news frame of an issue is that the New Left is characterized by violent protest, that Gordon Campbell is failing as leader of the Liberal party, that the Reform party is made up of anti-gay, anti-immigrant rednecks, then reporters are more likely to search out and write stories that fit into those news frames and more likely to disregard events and comments that contradict that news frame.

A final working practice in journalism is using certain routinized techniques to ensure that the stories they create may be considered objective and accurate. W. Lance Bennett has defined the routines reporters adhere to in order to maintain an objective position: They assume the stance of a politically neutral adversary. They look for appropriate sources. They observe prevailing standards of decency and good taste. They separate observable facts from subjective evaluations. They use documentary techniques, that is, they report only what they can see or support with physical evidence. And they use a standardized format – the news story – for packaging the news. (1988: 120)

4. <u>Narrative and news story structure</u>

In the branch of media research that examines news-story structure and organization, it is the inverted-pyramid, hard-news story that is the subject of observation. It is my contention that feature-style stories differ significantly from inverted-pyramid, hard-news stories, not only in the way they are obviously structured differently, but in how they establish their authority, which will be examined more closely in Chapter Four. However, in order to understand what the differences are, it is important to look at what researchers have identified in those hard-news stories.

In general, the research shows that news stories are organized around two principles: the hierarchical ordering of facts and the need to establish their authority, which is done by maintaining a stance of objectivity and by embedding stories in a "web of facticity," as Gaye Tuchman calls it. (1978: 82-103)

The hierarchical ordering of facts is the most distinguishing aspect of the hard-news story, giving it an internal logic unlike any other form of storytelling, oral or written. News stories' most immediately noticeable trait is the absence of traditional narrative structure and the lack of chronological organization that characterize most other types of storytelling. For example, in *The Language of News Media*, Allan Bell compares the pattern used in conversational storytelling with the pattern of a typical news story. (From his analysis, it is obvious that by "typical," he is referring to the hard-news, inverted-pyramid story.) The conversational story begins with the general definition of what the story is about -- the main point -- meant to get the listener's attention enough to listen to the story. Then an orientation sets the scene and a complicating action advances the chronologically told story. The speaker then evaluates the story he just told ("I think this is a sign that ..."), resolves it and recapitulates it briefly in a coda. Conversational stories tend to use personalization, direct quotes, one point of view, imprecise numbers and simple syntax. Newspaper stories have

some similarities to the structure of stories told in conversation. They begin with a lead (summarizing the main point to get the reader's attention) and an orientation: who, what, where, when. They also tend to favor direct quotes as a mark of authenticity. However, they avoid the personal, use several points of view, use complex syntax, validate themselves with the use of precise numbers, do not generally offer the reader a resolution or a recapitulation (with the exception of sports stories) and do not tell stories in chronological order. Teun van Dijk notes, in fact, that the typical structure of a news story (again, it is apparent it is a hard-news story he is referring to) is a kind of spiral: the story is told once in the most general way, and then is re-told two or three more times in the story, each time with a greater level of detail. One of the characteristics of this kind of storytelling, which many scholars have noted despairingly, is the way it fragments and decontextualizes events. Other types of narrative, from film to novels to short stories to, I will argue, feature stories, are markedly different from hard-news story organization.

At this point, I feel I have to clarify what I mean by the term "narrative," a term I used with some wariness since it is currently used in so many different ways and contexts. . As Michael Bell has observed (1990: 173), "'narrative' has assumed in the latter part of the century some of the functions of the word 'myth' in the pre-war decades of modernism;" narrative is used to explain human theorizing and model-making in fields as diverse as economics, science, police report-writing, accounts of sexual assault, and the gossip in organizational cultures. Even setting aside its uses in other fields, the term "narrative" is used by communications researchers in ways that are different from what I will be referring to. "Narrative," when it is used in media studies, has two connotations. One use of the term is akin to the idea of "news frames" that I mentioned earlier in this chapter. In this use, "narrative" describes the formulaic, one could even say stereotyped, story plot that governs news coverage of a particular issue. Some examples: Todd Gitlin's descriptions of the news

frames used for coverage of the New Left, which changed from "serious movement" to "marginal oddity" to "undoubted menace" (1980: 71-72); a study of *Newsweek*'s reporting on the famine in the Horn of Africa which "reveals imposition of a narrative structure through the use of standard rhetorical techniques to construct famine as an ideological parable" (Sorenson, 1991: 223); or a content analysis of science reporting in the *New York Times* which found three "narrative" assumptions: that scientific enquiry is progressive, that good science involves individualism, teamwork, curiosity and risk-taking; and that nature's disruptive potential is mitigated by co-ordinated human response. (Simpson, 1987: 218-241) The second way media scholars use the term "narrative" is when news stories are compared to a particular fiction genre, usually a popular one. Examples include Edward Jay Epstein's analysis of the way the Watergate story was told as a detective story (1975) or John Hartley's analysis of the way the narrative of news stories resembles television police series (1982: 115-119), or, the most sweeping example, Hunter McCartney's analysis of the ways news stories match the 36 standard plot categories (with their required characters) of fiction conflicts. (He found that half of news stories do match those standardized plot situations.) (1987: 170)

Both of these uses of the term "narrative" are useful in explaining the creation of news stories. However, this is not what I am looking at. I will be referring to throughout this thesis to "narrative" as it is used most often by those studying literature and storytelling, as a description of the internal structure and dynamic of a story. To that end, it is important to know some of the basics about traditional narrative, which feature stories draw from.

Traditional narratives are marked by several characteristics: They have recognizable beginnings, middles and ends. Unlike hard-news stories, which are always presenting the world as fragmented, narratives create a coherent, integral and unified world, complete with characters, settings, and actions. They are organized in a way that readers can follow easily:

a chronological time structure, for instance. They are produced in such a way as to allow readers to infer information from fragments the author presents to them; they encourage audiences to "execute story-constructing activities." (Bordwell, 1995: 33) Narratives function by delaying resolution; their techniques are hinting and withholding, anticipation and recall. The point of the journey is the trip, not the ending. One of the primary functions of narrative is to raise problems and then resolve them, an activity of playing out anxieties and then quelling them. This constructs ways of thinking for audiences. (Tambling, 1991: 66) Finally, narratives imply narrators who have unique points of view. The narrator works, using whatever rhetorical or dialectical methods it takes, to convince the audience to believe in the world he or she has created.[2]

Hard-news stories operate in an almost diametrically opposed fashion. They do not leave any space for audience activity (except possibly to wonder what is going to happen next). The resolution, or conclusion, is placed firmly at the beginning of the story. The point of the journey is the information, not the trip. They are organized around the hierarchy of facts, so that each paragraph is placed according to the reporter's judgment of its importance, with the most important facts appearing in the first paragraph and the least important in the last. This emphasis on the ranking of facts is accompanied by a "summarizing" function, in which news stories are written to delete or gloss over unimportant facts. Van Dijk has observed that hard-news stories primarily perform the function of generalizing: they discard specific information to construct one large, comprehensible action out of a set of small events.

Earlier, I said hard-news stories require two basics: the hierarchical ordering of facts

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[2] This extremely terse description summarizes the ideas of a number of studies on narrative that I consulted. I have jettisoned many of the finer points or those that appeared to apply only to fiction. (Bordwell, 1995; Brodsky, 1987; Carr, 1986; Genette, 1980; Martin, 1986; Rabinowitz, 1987; Tambling, 1991; Tolliver, 1974; White, 1987)

and the establishment of the story's authority. How is the hard-news story's authority established? Through rhetorical devices that establish authenticity. Just as those analyzing the rhetorical functions of academic accounts have noted that, for instance, data tables and other representational devices are frequently used in journal articles less to provide information than to perform the rhetorical function of confirming credibility (McGill, 1991: 129-141), so journalists use certain types of information in an almost ritualistic way so their stories will be perceived as factual and realistic. Those techniques include large processes, like adopting a neutral tone and establishing truth through a process of triangulation, that is, providing several "competent" perspectives of a single event so that readers can infer from the disparate accounts the central truth of what "really" happened . They also include more discrete techniques, include using direct quotes, precise numbers, elite sources, and references to other well-known facts. As we will see later, these standards of hard-news reporting are interesting because they are not the standards that feature stories use. Feature stories also attempt to convince readers that they are authoritative and realistic, but by using different techniques.

5. The way readers read, understand, remember and learn

Research about the way audiences perceive messages has come a long way since the days when it was thought they were completely vulnerable to any form of propaganda. Researchers have looked at the way that different audience members or audience groups respond to messages in different ways and the ways that audiences resist or reshape a producer's intended meaning. Because of that, one has to be cautious in making generalized assumptions about "how audiences hear and read" or "how audiences listen." Bearing in mind the variation among audiences, though, it is clear from other strands of research that audiences do have expectations about story forms based on their past reading or listening

experience; that, in general, audiences incorporate new information according to particular schemas; that particular story-constructing techniques have an impact on readers; that different story forms elicit different reading strategies; and that different audiences respond differently to different story forms.

I will restrict the overview of this research mainly to perceptions about story forms and elements. However, it is important to summarize some of the basic ideas about the way audiences incorporate information, which Doris Graber's study, *Processing the News*, outlined. According to the schema theory developed by those studying human information-processing, people develop schemas or scripts about the world into which they plug new information. Those schemas perform four functions: they determine what information will be noticed, they help people organize and evaluate new information so they can mesh it with their established perceptions, they help people fill in the missing context for incomplete information they might get; and they provide suggestions for solutions and coping mechanisms for likely scenarios.

The range and depth of schema are important in how people process information. Graber found that people who were already interested in political issues, that is, who had a schema with a lot of information in it already, tended to read more stories about them and adopt more new information about them. Those who had less established schemas about certain topics were less likely to read about them and therefore less likely to absorb new information. As a result, certain groups tended to avoid political news and to read stories that had more relevance for them, stories for which they had some kind of schema.

> People with limited education, younger age groups, and particularly women with small children, usually were least interested in news ... [and] panelists whose news interests and exposure were low tended to focus more on soft news such as human interest and crime stories. When they learned about political candidates, the panelists thought primarily in terms of personal traits and characteristics of the candidates' families. (Graber, 1984: 74)

Other studies have found similar results, that previous knowledge is the single biggest factor in news recall, which seems to lead to the conclusion that "those in the know are in a position to know more, that news is for the already initiated." (Bell, 1991: 233) They also reiterate the secondary finding -- while readers tend to learn the most from stories that are about subjects they already have schema for, readers without those schema can be enticed into reading about them if they are presented in an accessible and interesting way. Studies of science writing in particular, which show a strong interest in looking for what it is that will enhance reader interest and comprehension, have documented this (Funkhouser, 1971; Bostian, 1983). In other words, if a reader is vitally interested in a topic, story style doesn't matter as much; if the topic is unfamiliar or difficult, story style has an impact. Story recall and impact can also be affected by story-telling techniques like personalization or quotation. People developed stronger opinions about issues when news stories contained direct quotation (Gibson, 1994) or provided concrete examples (Wicks, 1991). That matches Stocking's observation that people are more likely to remember anecdotes than base-rate data, remember a story of one person abusing welfare than general statistics on fraud. (1989: 41) One corollary to all this is that audiences who did read stories they had little background for were more receptive to assimilating information. When they were reading about something they were familiar with already, they were more resistant, more likely to maintain already-established schema.

Besides documenting the fact that certain social groups are more likely to read news and others are not, several studies have pointed to the fact that different social groups prefer different types of story construction. In the previous section of this chapter, we looked at the way hard-news stories differ radically from traditional narratives. Some of the research on audiences suggests that news cast as objective, arranged according to fact hierarchies rather than chronology, will appeal to one class of readers and create barriers for another. Daniel

Borus's study of nineteenth-century realism makes note of research that delineates the division among reading preferences. Working-class readers of the nineteenth century, for instance, "desired a contemporary time and knowable landscape but required a plot with extraordinary happenings." (1989: 164) Another study showed that, when asked to retell news stories, middle-class students reproduced those stories using newspaper language and structure. Lower-class students, however, did not, using a style closer to personal narrative.

> Both comprehension of the news, and productive capability in news formats, appear to be strongly social-class conditioned. This compares interestingly with the known skill of lower-class speakers as tellers of personal narratives. Middle-class narratives by contrast are often about third parties rather than the speaker's own experience – just as the news is. (Bell, 1991:237)

Different forms also call forth different reading strategies. Peter Rabinowitz's study of audience reading strategies also notes that audiences look for different constructions in material that is deemed either popular or serious. Popular literature is read for plot rather than character. Both audiences and writers assume that it will be read quickly and read only once. Serious literature, on the other hand, is the literature of character and signification, as opposed to plot and configuration. "Serious" writing cues readers that it should be placed on a different intertextual grid of references – characters' names, story titles, and story developments have a significance that is achieved through comparisons with other cultural products.

Finally, one thing that is often forgotten about stories is that they are not read in isolation. Every story is read against a background of stories already read or heard, against expectations of what is important in the story structure and what is not.

> [W]e never really confront a text immediately; in all its freshness as a thing-in-itself. Rather, texts come before us as the always-already-read; we apprehend them through sedimented layers of previous interpretations, or – if the text is brand-new – through the sedimented reading habits and categories developed by those inherited interpretive positions. (Jameson, 1981: 9)

Readers expect situations of inertia to be upset, that diverse strands of action will ultimately be linked, that the central character of a story will not change, that the story will follow the principle of coherence – because that is what all their reading has taught them. One of the most important story elements that readers are cued to look for, through all their past reading of narratives, is the ending. "[R]eaders assume that authors put their best thoughts last, and thus assign a special value to the final pages of a text." (Rabinowitz, 1987: 160)

All of this gives some indication why story form is important and why the feature story is likely to respond to readers' expectations in different ways from the hard-news story and to elicit different responses.

CHAPTER TWO

THE HISTORY OF THE OTHER NEWS

One of the most difficult aspects of trying to examine newspapers' alternate

storytelling is the confusion of meanings around the term. News stories that deviate from the

sober tone and inverted-pyramid form have gone by many different names over the years:

soft news, tabloid journalism, features, human-interest stories, sensationalism, sob-sister

journalism, news features, featurish stories, colour stories, story journalism, the story model

of news, and, in most recent incarnations, the narrative mode. This thesis will make use of

all of these terms at various times as needed. The main point to underline is that what I am

looking at is stories whose form and language show signs of deviation from the inverted-

pyramid, objective model. That can be anything from a cute opening line to a hard-news

story to a six-part series that contains all the narrative elements of a small novel. To add to

the confusion, those in the newspaper business use the term features for a huge variety of

products in the paper. "Features" may refer to novelty items in the paper like cartoons, the

Ann Landers column, or the horoscope. In terms of stories, a "feature" refers to a wide

range: a light-hearted story about someone with a strange hobby; an explanatory story about

right-wing Israeli groups, the federal budget process, or preparations for an opera

production; descriptive "snapshot" stories of the devastation after an earthquake or a

politician's daily round; or a profile of a movie star or a murdered child. Finally, the most

challenging aspect of writing about story forms is the way form and content have been

linked over the years. As we will see eventually, understanding this link helps explain some

of the continuing tensions that feature or story journalism provokes in newsrooms, but at

first glance, the overlap of terms is baffling. At times, when reporters or journalism texts

refer to "hard news" or "soft news," they are referring to topics, not writing styles or story forms. Stories about crime are hard news; stories about how to improve relationship are soft news. At other times, the hardness or softness of a story does not depend on the content, but the way the story is presented. Crime coverage can be labelled hard-news or feature, depending on whether the reporter is simply reporting a day's testimony in court or writing a story about a trend in plea bargaining. As newspapers encourage reporters to experiment more with different writing styles, the definition has blurred even more and the categories have multiplied. The author of one feature-writing textbook came up with 10 different types of features, including the personal profile, the aftermath piece, the colour story, the investigative story, the news feature, the human-interest story, the bright, the sidebar, the seasonal story, and the enterprise story (Hay, 1990: 186). That is in additional to seeing traditional "hard news" stories being written in a variety of ways.

In Chapter Four, we will take a closer look at what exactly are the gradations of contemporary "feature" or "featurish" stories in newspapers and what their basic characteristics are: qualities like a focus on language and form over content; the foregrounding of "average citizens"; and the use of narrative structure and techniques that draw from other storytelling traditions. But in order to understand the present forms, attributes and attitudes towards alternate storytelling in newspapers, it is crucial to look at the past, at when and why different newspaper storytelling forms arose.

This chapter will look primarily at American newspaper developments. The history of Canadian newspapers shows that they have tended to follow American trends, with a greater or lesser degree of lag. As Wilfrid Eggleston noted in the foreword to *A History of Journalism in Canada*, Canadian newspapers were affected by the fact that British North America was a colony for considerably longer than the United States.

> The press had to free itself from subservience to colonial governors,
> commerce had to provide a financial base for independent editors, and the

society itself had to go through a ferment of political ideas before there was any hope of a press in Canada equal to the vigour and effectiveness to the New England papers of three-quarters of a century earlier. (1967: vii)

In more recent years, however, trends have tended to be transmitted much more quickly. Trends in writing styles, in particular, are passed on very quickly through American-based journalism magazines and journalism conferences that are read or attended by Canadian journalists.

1. The emergence of news storytelling forms

The earliest English and American newspapers did not have the kind of codified divisions among storytelling forms that became familiar by the beginning of the twentieth century. Early English newspapers used a chronicle form for the most basic information: list of events, ship arrivals, important visitors. Other news was conveyed through accounts that sounded more like letters than contemporary news stories. One example of the time:

> The person which this Court had sent privately to Constantinople to learn the sentiments of the Grand Signior and the Divan, concerning a Peace, is returned with an account, that according to the best Information he could get, the Grand Signior was resolved not to depart from his demand of having all the Ukraine, from the Black Sea to the Boristhenes ...." (Bleyer, 1927: 3)

In the early 1700s, a new wave of English journalists -- Defoe, Swift, Addison, Steele, Fielding -- developed the periodical essay. Defoe in particular brought a new approach to writing style, one that gained its strength from physical description and a strong storyline.

> Defoe's power of realistic description and detailed circumstantial narrative made him the best of news writers .... Because he possessed a constructive imagination that enabled him to describe vividly scenes that he himself had not witnessed, his critics have found evidence in his work of "the little art he is truly master of, of forging a story and imposing it on the world for truth," in other words of the art of "faking," but he always professed to hold high ideals as to the importance of accuracy in news writing. (Bleyer, 1927: 22)

In the early American newspapers of the same period, the essay was also the form that allowed for personal journalism. In general, early newspapers consisted of letter-style news accounts of politics, court and European wars, combined with brief items that announced ship arrivals, deaths, sermons, political appointments, storms, fires, accidents, court actions and so on. However, the occasional journal would take a different approach. The *New-England Courant* (1721-26) announced that its main interest was the comical and diverting, an interest that was transmitted largely through personal essays. Frank Luther Mott, in his comprehensive history of American journalism, noted that, with the Courant's style, "entertainment may be said to enter the history of American journalism as a definite newspaper function." (1962: 16) Significantly, for the points I will make later in this thesis about the uses of "story" journalism, this newspaper also distinguished itself by using its personal essays to crusade over a matter of great public interest at the time: whether people should get inoculated against smallpox. (The paper took an anti-inoculation stand.) Once it was finished with that, it turned its attention to exposing the vices of those in authority, taking a critical perspective of elites, something that had not been seen in colonial journalism up to that point. The *Courant* appears to be the first North American newspaper to match its storytelling form (the personal essay and human-interest features) to its goals (capturing public attention and lobbying against perceived injustices). It certainly wasn't the last -- that kind of linkage still pervades contemporary journalism.

The *New England Weekly Journal* in the first year of its existence, 1727-28, was also composed mainly of essays. The *Journal's* essays also dealt with topics not covered by the standard news format, topics that in later decades would come to be classified as "soft news": social and human-interest subjects like education, the place of women, laughing, dress and contemporary fads (Mott, 1962: 22). From the beginning, news stories with this type of content and approach were called features, along with other types of non-news items

that appeared in the newspaper. That included anything that appeared to function more as literature or entertainment than news: light social satires, poems, short stories, scientific articles, history, anecdotes, and novel extracts -- or, as all of these were frequently referred to, "miscellany."

Besides newspapers, however, there was also another form of news storytelling in this same colonial era: the broadside ballads and newsbooks that Elizabeth Bird identifies as the forerunners of the modern tabloid. These one-sheet news bulletins were "packed with tales of strange and wonderful happenings – murders, natural disasters, unusual births, and omens" and were characterized by a strongly moralizing tone (1992: 9-11).

Meanwhile, mainstream American newspapers, beginning in approximately 1780 and continuing to 1860, moved into a phase where they were dominated by political factions. Political parties supported newspapers through subsidies, the granting of free-mailing privileges, or by ensuring that their publishers got government printing jobs. Some political parties simply started their own newspapers. As a result, newspapers functioned as party newsletters. "Features" didn't entirely disappear from such newspapers, but the predominant story form was the polemical essay and the predominant tone was virulent partisanship. Newspapers searched for the most damaging information on their political opponents. That phase peaked in the early 1800s. Political candidates, who had previously viewed self-promotion as dishonourable, started campaigning more openly throughout the 1850s and 1860s, becoming less dependent on press coverage to present their points of view (Baldasty, 1992: 38-40). Political subsidies began to dwindle. And newspaper publishers began to turn to other sources of revenue for their printing businesses.

First, publishers experimented with the idea of selling papers cheaply to mass markets. That meant newspapers had to sell a product that would also appeal to a mass market. Clearly, producing highly partisan newspapers that would attract only a certain

percentage of the population and repel others would not be an optimum strategy. So, in the first wave of commercialization of the press, publishers turned to the most obvious salable alternative to the former partisan press: neutrality. The introduction of penny papers in the years 1833-1840 saw publishers increasingly attempting to assure their public that they were neutral, independent and accurate. One prototypical example of the kind of assurances newspapers of the time gave their readers is this one from the *New York Morning Herald* in 1835:

> We shall support no party -- be the organ of no faction or coterie, and care nothing for any election, or any candidate from President down to Constable. We shall endeavor to record facts, on every public and proper subject, stripped of verbiage and coloring, with comments when suitable, just, independent, fearless, and good tempered. (Bleyer, 1927: 186)

But mere political neutrality was not the only thing publishers turned to, especially since all newspapers were moving to a stance of neutrality and they needed some other way to differentiate their products. Morality/sensationalism became another dividing line. Some newspapers went headlong after anything that would capture a mass market, starting down the road to the sensationalism that became so marked by the end of the century. Other papers, in contrast, decided to market themselves as taking the high road: moral rather than dramatic; socially responsible rather than reporting every common crime in the city. The *Morning Star*, for instance, set out as its goal in 1836 to

> exert a happy moral influence upon the community, free from the taint of opinions and sentiments calculated to corrupt the affections and deprave the heart, and one that will improve and enlarge the mind in moral principles, in literature, and in mental and physical science. To this effect, private quarrels, notices and advertisements of immoral exhibitions, and improper medicines, will be excluded. (Bleyer, 1927: 171)

Publishers also found a third way to market themselves differently: information versus entertainment, serious news versus style and readability. James Gordon Bennett, introducing the *Morning Herald* to his readers in May 1835, wrote:

> The broad relief which the lively *Herald* will afford to the dull business air of the large morning papers, will naturally induce every patron of the former to take in a copy of the latter, so as to diversify and exhilarate the breakfast table. (Bleyer, 1927: 186-87)

In contrast to these approaches, the *New York Times*, in a pattern that would be emulated by other newspapers attempting to position themselves to serve as the elite newspaper, emphasized a strictly informational style, a broad selection of national and international news, and rational (rather than dramatic or hot-tempered) analysis of issues of the day. Its editor, Henry Raymond, expressed more articulately than any other editor of his day the ideals of objectivity in journalism that came to prevail in the industry in the twentieth century. One editorial writer's description of the paper, after Raymond's death in 1869:

> The *Times* under his management probably came nearer the newspaper of the good time coming than any other in existence; in this, that it encouraged truthfulness – the reproduction of facts uncolored by the necessities of "a cause" or by the editor's personal feelings -- among reporters; that it carried decency, temperance, and moderation into discussion, and banished personality from it. (Bleyer, 1927: 251)

But the *New York Times'* approach was the anomaly of its era and its approach would not have a significant impact on journalism until the 1890s. Other papers competed with each other to produce the most colorful, brightly written stories. The *New York Tribune*, for instance began publishing Solon Robinson's stories in 1853 about life among the lower classes in New York, stories that focused on individual characters. The first was about a little girl who sold boiled sweet corn on the street until midnight. The *Tribune*'s editor, Horace Greeley, also encouraged his staff to sign their articles, recognizing the individuality essential to narrative-style pieces.

But it wasn't until Charles Dana started publishing the *New York Sun* in 1868 that a newspaper gave a detailed and explicit statement about the quality of its writing. Dana set out the principles of the *Sun* in accordance with the partisan/independent dichotomy of the

day: "[The Sun] will continue to be an independent Newspaper, wearing the livery of no party, and discussing public questions and the acts of public men on their merits alone." However, he also announced that "[i]t will study condensation, clearness, point, and will endeavour to present its daily photograph of the whole world's doings in the most luminous and lively manner." (Bleyer, 1927: 296) Dana specifically decided to depart from the English style of news writing which, he wrote in 1875, "lays it down as its first and most imperative rule that editorial writing shall be free from the characteristics of the writer. This is ruinous to good writing, and damaging to the sincerity of writers." (Bleyer, 1927: 297) The paper came to be known as the "newspaperman's newspaper" and the originator of the human-interest story. Story lengths were decided, not by any inherent news value, but by a reporter's ability to make a story readable and interesting.

Elizabeth Bird points out that the decision to move to a more readable and direct style was a real innovation for these papers.

> It is the writing style rather than the subject matter as such that marks off the penny press from its newspaper predecessors – the colonial press discussed by Nordin indeed covered sensational subject matter, but the style was far from the human-interest narratives of the penny press era, usually lacking the "sensory detail" that the penny press pioneered. The short, clear, active style became the model for journalism from then on – tabloid journalism simply developed the style at its most formulaic. (1992: 13)

Developing this style was not a haphazard decision, either. Penny papers like the *Tribune* and the *Sun* moved to clear, direct, bright writing and, not coincidentally, a more populist approach because they were targeting the booming population of semi-literate people coming to the cities, the new working classes (Bird, 1992: 12; Schudson, 1982: 108). It should be pointed out that, in general, all newspapers moved to more colorful stories as they moved toward commercialization. Advertising trade journals emphasized the importance of attractive, optimistic, happy subjects for news. There was more focus on personalities and many newspapers made it a goal to have "sprightly" writing, "bright, lively" copy. One

advertising writer in an 1892 edition of *Newspaperdom* wrote: "The successful newspaper must be vivid, bright, pyrotechnic enough in its features to force itself into popular attention at every turn." (Baldasty, 1992: 78)

That emphasis on attracting and entertaining the reader was not confined to making news stories more interesting through a different writing style. There was also a move to new formats and topics, "features" in both senses of the word. Around 1860, newspapers began to offer items like humorous paragraphs and humorous poetry. Later, they added humorous columns that created fictional characters, frequently naive and rural, speaking some noticeable dialect and amusing the city-dwellers with their mishap-prone adventures. As well, Gerald Baldasty, in *The Commercialization of the News in the Nineteenth Century*, has carefully documented the way newspaper content changed as papers moved from being political organs to advertising-based businesses. Some of changes created problems that are still familiar in the late twentieth century: There was a sudden blurring of lines between news and advertising. Newspapers provided editorial support for advertisers. A new form of copy, the advertorial, emerged. And there were outright attempts by advertisers or those selling the newspaper's advertisements to censor certain kinds of news. But besides those direct impacts, the change to an advertising base indirectly influenced the general type of news stories that were printed. In the 1830s, when newspapers were still dependent on political parties for some funding, metropolitan newspapers devoted between 40 and 60 per cent of their available newshole to politics. By 1897, Baldasty's study shows, a similar group of metropolitan newspapers had only 10 to 36 per cent of their newshole given over to politics. Those 1897 newspapers still had a fairly heavy emphasis on business and labor, as they had had 60 years before, between seven and 23 per cent of all coverage. But there was considerably more attention paid to new topics like society and women, accidents, science and education and, in particular, leisure. In the *Pittsburgh Leader*, 34.6 per cent of

the coverage was devoted to leisure (1992:153-157). Circulation managers felt that they were more in tune with public tastes than editors were and they asked for fewer political stories, which they felt were not of interest to the general public. Advertisers wanted stories that promoted "the bright side of life," more about "fine things and fine people" and not too much about serious politics (Baldasty, 1992: 78-82).

All of this, as I have said, was an attempt to appeal to a new mass market. But advertisers with any sophistication at all know that not every product sells to the mass. So even those pioneer advertisers tended to look at readers according to their sex, class, location, purchasing power, religion and race (Baldasty, 1992: 63). Women, in particular, were a desirable audience for advertisers. Advertising expert Nathaniel Fowler noted in 1892 that "[w]omen are the buyers of everything everywhere ... Woman is the pivot which turns trade." Macy's department stores from 1889-93 insisted that its advertisements be only pages with content likely to interest women (Baldasty, 1992: 65). All of this produced a move away from traditional hard-news topics and a somewhat serious style to "features" in both its senses: light topics and engaging, attention-grabbing writing.

A second compelling reason for newspapers' interests in features was a production-oriented one. As newspapers grew in size at the turn of the century and there were increasing numbers of pages to fill in each edition, the need for some assured flow of copy not dependent on the news of the day became pronounced. Mott has noted that feature syndicates were created in the 1890s, as daily newspapers began producing large Sunday editions that needed large quantities of assured copy to fill them. Feature stories, which could be held indefinitely and which catered to audiences presumed not to have much knowledge of the topic at hand, suited this gap ideally. Wire services serving regional newspapers could provide backlogs of these kinds of stories, as could the paper's own reporters.

2. The inverted-pyramid is entrenched

One of the distinctive characteristics of American journalism up to and including the Civil War period was that there were not standard news storytelling forms. News in general was less categorized. There were fewer pages and fewer beats. As I noted in Chapter One, there was no clear division between fiction and non-fiction, journalism and literature. In fact, journalism was seen as a kind of literature. Most newspaper stories, except for police briefs, were written in a chronological form.

However, a new storytelling form -- the inverted pyramid -- first appeared in 1865 and became standard by the turn of the century (Mindich, 1993: 3). This form, unlike other types of narrative, ordered information according to news value, with the most important facts at the top and details of increasingly less importance throughout the story. As Mitchell Stephens described it: "The inverted pyramid organizes stories not around ideas or chronologies but around facts. It weighs and shuffles the various pieces of information, focusing with remarkable single-mindedness on their relative value." (1988: 253-254) Even more significantly, especially for the subject of this thesis, this was the story form that became the symbol for "objectivity" in the newspaper world.

There are competing explanations for why this form became so dominant. One is that the Civil War and unreliable telegraphs forced reporters into writing more directly and to putting their most important news in the first paragraph. However, a close analysis of American newspapers has shown that the inverted pyramid form was not common until the 1880s and not standard until the turn of the century, well after the Civil War and common press use of the telegraph (Mindich, 1993: 3). The second theory is that the emerging wire services, especially the Associated Press, used the inverted-pyramid form because it appeared to be more neutral – a quality they needed if they were going to serve a wide

variety of newspapers (Mindich, 1993: 24). This kind of neutrality, as we saw above, was increasingly being promoted as a marketable commodity. However, Mindich's monograph on the inverted pyramid makes the point that one of the earliest users of the inverted pyramid was War Secretary General Edward Stanton, who made himself responsible for controlling military information to the press. Stanton took control of the telegraphs and became the primary source of information for war news, issuing terse official statements that were his version of events, which reporters were obliged to use. Mindich notes that the history of this authoritarian control reveals some of the hidden dynamics of the inverted pyramid: "While we consider that the Civil War press was held prisoner to a controlling central authority, we might want to remind ourselves how much the modern inverted pyramid form relies on government sources to author both sides of a 'balanced' story." (1993: 24) Finally, a last explanation is that this was related to social trends as much a technology, the rise of wire services or military control. As I outlined in Chapter One in discussing the predominance of the ethic of objectivity in the news profession, Schudson attributed the change in style to a gradual division of newspaper storytelling into "information journalism" and "story journalism." While the *New York Times* promoted the first kind, the Pulitzer and Hearst papers promoted the second. However, information journalism came to be associated with the reading preferences of the middle and upper classes and therefore emblematic of "serious" journalism. As a result, it eventually became the standard for all journalism, with forms that deviated from it being considered lower status.

In spite of the growing predominance of the inverted-pyramid form as the standard for news, however, the story model of journalism was still strong until the end of the nineteenth century. In fact, sensationalism peaked at that point, manifesting itself in several ways. On a content level, newspapers became much more aggressive, crusading, raking

muck, getting their own reporters to solve crime stories, find missing people and, as the apocryphal story goes, start wars. By 1898, half of the dailies in 26 major cities were "blatantly yellow, that is, they were characterized by a mixture of news and entertainment, breezy headlines, crusades, stunts, exposes and promotions." (Frus, 1994: 42) On a storytelling level, newspaper stories were characterized by an exaggerated use of sentimentalism and lurid drama, packaged in ritualized narrative forms. Writers for the *Journal*, for example, were described as writing "true stories of new romances, mystery, pathos and humor, caught from the whirl of everyday life" and "news novelettes from real life; stories gathered from the live wires of the day and written in dramatic form." Their headlines reflected that emphasis on packaging news as stories: "The Mysterious Murder of Bessie Little"; "What Made Him a Burglar? A Story of Real Life in New York by Edgar Saltas"; "A Story of a Woman's Passions." (Bleyer, 1927: 359) Again, many of these stylistic efforts are linked to marketing. As Michael Schudson has noted, part of the trend to melodramatic, sensational stories told in a highly narrative style was connected to the influx of immigrants into the United States at the end of the nineteenth century (1978: 97-98).

But after the experimental and competitive period in the second half of the nineteenth century, the information model dominated. Newspapers in the post-World War One era settled in to a focus on presenting the news in a sober, neutral and authoritative manner. That is when the inverted-pyramid form solidified and when "objectivity" came to be a fundamental principle for journalists. If there was a concern with the constraints of the standard "hard-news story" in this period, it was that it was too limited in terms of explaining world events. For all of the eighteenth and much of the nineteenth century, newspapers had difficulty actually getting news. There were no wire services and newspapers did not maintain regular reporting staffs. So getting any news at all was a good not to be questioned. By the post-World War One period, however, newspapers had a

choice of information sources in the wire services and enough staff to allow reporters to specialize in particular areas. Newspaper editors' and commentators' concerns shifted from being leading information-providers or crusaders or compelling story-tellers to the difficulty of conveying complex information to the public. The war had produced a sense that the simple, the sensational and the dramatic were no longer enough to help explain what was important to know in the world. But just telling "the facts" was not adequate either. Instead, there was a move towards redefining the news reporters' role as interpreter.

> I believe that the traditional prejudice of newspaper men against interpretation in the news arose in part, at least, from the fact that it was built up to meet the needs of a simpler world .... Nowadays, what with the WPA, sit-down strikes, fascism, dust storms, wars that are not wars, the A plus B theorem, silver nationalization, the Comite des Forges, import quotas, Father Coughlin, cosmic rays, nonintervention agreements to screen intervention, and unemployment, news is different. There must be interpretation. (Brucker, 1937: 11)

Although this identification of the need for interpretation was the most visible during the 1920s, it was an industry trend that had been gathering strength for some time. Michael Schudson's study of reporting on State of the Union addresses from 1790 to the early 1900s shows that, long before the arrival of television, reporting style had evolved from being a stenographic record (1790-1850) to a chronology and commentary (about 1850-1900) to a report of the message itself, where it was taken for granted "the journalist's right and obligation to mediate and simplify, to crystallize and identify the key political elements in the news event [and to] place the event in a time frame broader than that immediately apparent to the uninitiated." (1982: 103)

But the advent of radio and the introduction of national news magazines like *Time* in the 1930s shifted the concerns of newspapers yet again. Media observers and even media workers have often assumed that many stylistic and design elements in newspapers are the result of competition with television after its introduction in the 1950s. But the historical

record shows that there were concerns about a more visual, descriptive and narrative writing style long before the advent of television, along with actual shifts in approach.

Herbert Brucker observed in his 1937 text that the traditional news-writing style of the day was deficient in comparison with the new style emerging in magazines. While orthodox news writing told the readers about the news in point form, he wrote, the visually oriented writing and fluid style in magazines like *Fortune* and *Time* "transports the reader to the scene of the action .... There is little doubt which is more readable." (Brucker, 1937: 80)

Brucker also noted the innovation the *New York Times* had made in handling even hard news to tell a more readable story:

> The *New York Times*, in spite of the fact that both reports must have come in by wire around midnight, apparently turned them over to a rewrite man, who wove them together into a connected story, without any dateline at all, simply telling all the news smoothly and intelligibly. (Brucker, 1937: 179)

The 1949 textbook, *Newsmen at Work*, also advocated using a more conversational tone in newswriting, telling news stories as stories, instead of using the "unnatural" inverted-pyramid form whose difficult structure "prevents some readers from reading a story that another structure might otherwise make more attractive." (74) The competitive concern that the authors of this textbook referred to was radio, which was seen as taking over the information-summarizing role that newspapers occupied previously.

Several other studies suggest that a preoccupation with form and storytelling was not confined to newspapers nor uniquely a result of newspapers' attempt to compete with television. Michael Curtin's study of the _ᴜᴇ of fiction-film techniques in documentary television observes that when the television news documentary first appeared in the early 1950s, its content and form were largely controlled by correspondents. Those correspondents had started their journalism careers in print or radio during the Second World War, at a time when "'great issues' commanded audience attention almost regardless of a news program's structure or style." (1993: 15) However, once the narrative framework of the war

and immediate post-war period was no longer there, television producers, trying to make the documentary form not just worthy but also popular, began to focus on developing a more narrative style for the documentary. Network correspondents became less important and documentary producers took control of the new form, consciously using techniques of Hollywood fiction films – using "a strong, unifying central character, a definite setting, and a strong unifying plot" (1993: 15) – in order to attract the public.

Other scholars (Powell, 1987; Scott, 1992; Turow, 1983, 1984) have noted that the trend in television news overall is toward more entertainment, soft news, feature stories. Some (Turow) explain it as being caused by changing definitions of the news. Others cite economic or technological pressures. For instance, Adam Clayton Powell notes that a shift in network policy resulted in television affiliates getting the networks' best pictures directly. The networks then had to come up with some strategies, besides just good pictures, to get affiliates to show their news. Their solution was to produce more features and more "emotional" stories in order to create a product that affiliates' local news could not match.

The influence that television has had on newspapers is to force them to match certain practices because of the hold it has on mass markets. As Richard Ericson has noted, newspapers have traditionally attracted mass readerships by appealing to an aggregate of specialty interests. Unlike radio or television, newspapers allow people to flip through to what they like instead of having to sit through every item. That means newspaper reporters can write stories for a specialized audience, likely to be interest in the latest news development in an already familiar field. Television and radio must make every story appeal to the widest possible audience. Although newspapers maintain the linguistic variety that is unique to them, they have been forced to conform to some television formats and the broadcast practice of establishing objectivity by including quotes from each side (1991: 37-39).

3. New journalism and features re-emerge

The most prominent debate over journalism style did not appear in the 1950s, when television appeared, nor was the debate focused on competitive concerns. (In fact, newspaper circulations continued to grow throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.) Instead, it was in the mid-1960s that style came to the forefront, primarily in journalism and non-fiction magazine writing, with the advent of "the New Journalism." Unlike the nineteenth-century move to emphasize writing style, where publishers and editors encouraged individualized and literary writing as a competitive advantage to offer their readers, this movement, although clearly it had to have had the support of some publications, was (and still is) seen as being primarily writer-initiated. Those writers also articulated reasons for new writing approaches that had nothing to do with competitiveness or professionalization, the two main impetuses for a focus on writing style in the nineteenth century. Instead, the new style developed specifically in reaction to the objective, standard news-story format, with some saying the objective style was simply a deadened and ineffective form and others taking a more critical and politicized stance. Gay Talese, for example, described the new journalism as seeking "a larger truth than is possible through the mere compilation of verifiable facts, the use of direct quotations, and adherence to the rigid organizational style of the older form." (Mills, 1974: xii) Andrew Kopkind, going further, defended the subjectivity of the new journalism by saying that "objectivity is the rationalization for moral disengagement, the classic cop-out from choice making" (Mills, 1974: xiv). Deliberately opposing the objective tradition, writers created pieces that were subjective, personal, studded with literary techniques, filled with description based on the author's individual observations, and that had a story structure intended to carry readers through to the end. Scholars have described the New Journalism as defining objectivity in a different way -- as authentic, personal and many-faceted instead of being detached and representative, as

traditional newspaper objectivity is – and as breaking the codes of realism and objectivity by presenting an admitted perspective, instead of a hidden one, and by introducing fantasy into factual accounts (Hellman, 1977; Haas, 1991). However, as Phyllis Frus observed in her detailed study of literary journalism, some authors, like Tom Wolfe and John Hersey, used literary techniques for writing but still maintained an objective distance from their subjects. Others, like Norman Mailer, abandoned both the objective style and the objective author's distance.

Many of the journalists were cause-oriented and saw their writing as a way to fight political battles – an attitude that was certainly not something that originated with their generation. For example, Ernest Hemingway's story, *The Old Man at the Bridge*, originally appeared as a newspaper feature and Hemingway's editor was enthusiastic about the story because he saw it as "one of those successful 'short punches' that would help the Loyalist cause more than 'columns' of 'ordinary reporting.'" (Frus, 1994: 86)

Not surprisingly, considering what I have already described about the journalism profession's attachment to objectivity and impersonality, the New Journalism provoked intense debates and fierce criticism. One critic called it "a bastard form, having it both ways, exploiting the factual authority of journalism and the atmospheric license of fiction." (Mills, 1974: xv)

Daily newspaper reporters did not go as far as people like Tom Wolfe or Norman Mailer in their experimenting with literary journalism innovations, but the intense experimentation of the new journalism period did have its impact on commercial news media. Since the 1970s, a focus on newswriting style and effectiveness has become a staple of the industry, with activity coming from two distinct groups. On one side are the journalists who, in continuing attempts to professionalize their work and emphasize its creative aspects, have developed an increasing interest in writing style. On the other side is

the newspaper industry, which is preoccupied with the way writing style influences readability and, presumably, circulation. Since the 1970s, newspapers have experienced serious and continuing circulation declines that have prompted an unusually energetic period of analysis and experimentation.

The journalistic side of the effort has been supported by an increasing number of awards, textbooks and conferences that focus on writing style. Textbooks and journalism curricula routinely include sections on writing feature stories. In 1978, the advisory board for the Pulitzer Prizes created a new category of feature writing where the prime consideration was to be "high literary quality and originality." (Mencher, 1981: 200) Also in 1978, the American Society of Newspaper Editors made the improvement of newspaper writing one of its primary goals and started a contest to select the best writing from newspapers in the United States and Canada.

The writing-coach movement in the United States has been identified as starting in 1977 and a survey of daily American newspapers in 1993 indicated that about one-third had writing coaches (Laakaniemi: 570). In Canada, several major metropolitan newsrooms have or have had writing coaches. Others support good writing through financial rewards, bringing in speakers, and producing writing newsletters for their reporters.

A major contributor to the "better writing" movement in American newspapers has been the Poynter Institute for Media Studies in St. Petersburg, an education centre founded by the chairman of the *St. Petersburg Times*, Nelson Poynter, in 1975. It has become the leading institutional force promoting better writing in North America. From 1992 to 1996, the Poynter Institute has been co-ordinating National Writers' Workshops for journalists every year in a handful of locations around the United States, workshops that distill the essentials of the current push in journalism to move away from the inverted-pyramid structure – something its organizers are quite explicit about.

Don Fry, who with Roy Peter Clark, is one of the best-known promoters of the better newspaper writing movement, said at the 1996 workshop in Seattle that the "inverted pyramid is the major reason why circulation is dropping. It is the worst form of communicating information to another human being." At the same conference, Rick Bragg, a feature writer for the New York Times who just won the Pulitzer Prize for feature writing, said: "We've got to accept the basic fact that the hard-news lead serves no one in the newspapers of 1995. I believe that."

In the first four years of their operation, about 14,000 journalists from the United States and Canada have attended those workshops. Among the topics at the 1994 and 1996 Portland and Seattle conferences: "Storytelling on deadline", "Making believable characters in nonfiction", "God is in the details", "Imagery, metaphor and rhythm", "From source to character", and "Writing where people live."

One of the notable aspects of the journalist-organized push for storytelling journalism, however, is the absence of discussion about what the purpose of better writing is besides "reaching" readers or "touching" them. In direct contrast to the New Journalism of the 1960s, this new-writing movement avoids discussions of cause-oriented writing. In fact, there is typically, in books or conferences, very little discussion at all of why reporters decided to tackle particular issues in lengthy features. For example, a 25-page interview in an annual collection of good newspaper writing with one award-winning Oregon feature writer, Terry Claflin, about her five-part series on crack babies contains only the vaguest information about why she thought this topic was important. The series was initiated because an editor wanted a long-term project the paper could throw itself into and Claflin said that, after talking to one crack baby's foster mother, "I was so taken by the situation, and by the baby, and by the commitment that she had to such an incredibly hard job, that I knew the story was going to be a lot more than I expected." (Fry, 1990: 31) The remainder

of the interview is given over to discussions about writing, research, interviewing and organization techniques. Journalism conferences reflect the same kind of apolitical, non-analytical stance. In three years of research for this thesis, the strongest statement of public mission I heard from anyone was Richard Ben Cramer at the 1996 Seattle conference:

> We are the storytellers. We are telling the stories that make the world intelligible for our readers and show them how the world is connected. Then you decrease fear and you make people more at home in their own worlds. I consider it the most important and best thing you can do with a life.

He was also one of the few writers or speakers in the better-writing movement who criticized objectivity, not, as others did, because it was driving readers away but because "this attitude of 'well, maybe they have a point' is an abdication of our responsibility as reporters."

On the industry side, newspapers have focused their efforts on trying to find out more about what makes people read newspapers. While writing style is not the only factor newspaper managers look at as they attempt to find out what will improve newspaper readership, it has become one of the basic factors they consider.

Newspaper readership research, initiated by the industry, began just prior to the Second World War. The early phase of readership research is significant for the fact that it did not look at writing style at all, which makes it difficult to extrapolate any meaningful information from that era about the impact of style on readership. The early research concentrated instead on what kinds of stories people wanted to read and how readable stories were. That meant finding out what items different demographic groups (men, women, youth) might read, the amount of time spent reading, and measuring the "readability" – that is, simplicity of language and grammar – in news stories.

Only in the 1960s did the importance of story structure and writing style begin to appear in research. A 1963 study noted that the newspaper conventional wisdom of the time was that "[a] news story gets more readership when both it and the headline are written in a

narrative style than it does when the story is written in the traditional inverted-pyramid style." The study's statistics bore that out: a newspaper story written in a narrative style was read by 55.4 per cent of readers; one written in the standard hard-news style was read by 27.5 per cent (Bush, 1968: 15). Another indicated that "stories of five paragraphs written in inverted pyramid structure lost more readers than did stories of the same length written in a feature form." (Bush, 1968: 77) A 1979 study by Georgia M. Green concluded that the inverted-pyramid style contributed to disorganized newswriting, which was a barrier to reading. She said the "script" for writing news stories should be changed, "de-emphasizing editors' convenience and traditional readability assumptions in favor of literary and language techniques that serve comprehensibility." (*Ways with Words*, 1993: 4)

A 1994 study, *Ways with Words*, examined the way a difference in writing style affected four indicators of people's reading interest and learning: how much of the story they read, what they learned, how they assessed the quality of the stories (expressed as an assessment of the story's fairness, balance and writing), and whether they cared about the subject. The study acknowledged that two other factors played a more important part in a reader's decision to read newspaper stories than style: One was behavioral, response to modern lifestyle; the other was the subject. Beyond that, however, the study concluded that writing style does make a difference for readers. The study used four different types of newswriting on the same story: the traditional, inverted-pyramid; the narrative; "radical clarity"; and point-of-view. It concluded that narrative-style stories "simply were better read, and they communicated information better." (19) Confirming the results of previous studies (and the results of studies referred to in Chapter One of this thesis), it was found that infrequent readers felt they learned more from narrative stories, while frequent readers liked traditional stories best and felt narrative stories didn't get them involved. The best-educated group of readers considered "traditional" stories to be the highest-quality stories, yet post-

reading tests showed they learned the most from narrative stories. The least-educated people also learned the most from narrative stories, while mid-educated people learned the least from them, although they said they thought they were the highest quality stories. Men preferred narrative stories, as did young and middle-aged readers. As well, the youngest people and most infrequent readers learned the best from them.

The Poynter Institute study highlights one of the paradoxes newspapers deal with, which is the fact that they must try to cater to distinctly different audiences and reading styles. Early audience research had implied that all newspaper audiences are attracted equally by certain techniques, that a narrative style will appeal equally to all or none. That research matched the general perception that newspaper managers of the time had of their audiences – that they were largely indistinguishable masses.

But the more recent branch of newspaper research has broken down audience responses to storytelling styles, identifying sectors inside newspaper audiences and finding out what particular information, or story-delivery system, works best for which audience.

For instance, studies appear to show consistently that if a reader is already interested in a topic, that reader will read a related article in any style up to and often including the oppressively obscure. And if a reader is completely uninterested in a topic, there may be no style that will make it appealing. But for most other stories, and especially for marginal groups who do not see newspaper reading as a central activity, style -- not content or reading level or where the story originates -- will have an impact (Bogart, 1989: 155-156).

That echoes the research on audience learning that I referred to in Chapter One and it is a corollary to the basic finding that has been distilled from many newspaper readership studies, which is that that there are two distinct audiences for newspapers. One type of

newspaper audience is composed of people who are consistent newspaper readers. They are people of

> higher education and social status, who are most at home with the printed word. Moreover, newspaper reading is an acquired habit that is strongest among people of maturity who are rooted by material self-interest and emotional attachments to the community that the newspaper represents. (Bogart, 1989: 54)

They tend to be more politically active, more involved in their communities, and more confident about their ability to influence governments. One of the most important social functions of newspapers is to act as a "catalyst for conversation and human contact." (Bogart, 1989: 120) The newspaper audience of established community members uses the news to show its integration in its own community -- those who are settled and feel that they have some say in their community are more attracted by the idea of meshing. They are heavy media consumers and tend to look to commercial news media primarily for its information aspects. They are actually repelled by efforts to introduce entertainment into news.

The other type of news audience is their reverse. This audience tends to be made up of people who are less settled, more socially marginalized, less meshed in the local social and political structure: women, the young, the elderly, the working class, the mobile, the poor. (While working class audiences may be rooted in their communities, they frequently do not feel they have any influence over political processes and so are marginalized that way.) They read newspapers infrequently and show a general apathy about the wider aspects of news. When they do read newspapers, they look more for entertainment than information. One study particularly noted the tendency of non-newspaper readers to be uninterested in traditional news: "The droppers, whose discontinuance of newspaper reading was hypothesized to be a function of self-constraints, clearly diverge from the other groups by their low consumption of hard news content." (Chaffee and Choe, 1981: 210)

Some groups are so marginalized, especially combinations of the poor, the elderly and

women, that they almost never read newspapers and are generally considered hopeless

write-offs by the newspaper industry. That same study noted: "Many among the poor, the

elderly, the isolated and the undereducated may never surpass these constraints and so

should be expected to remain nonreaders across the years." (Chaffee and Choe, 1981: 202)

The industry's difficulty of the last two decades, then, has become one of trying to

serve both those audiences at once. That means deciding what blend of the two genres of

story telling -- information-heavy (and often specialized) stories and general-interest,

stylistically appealing narratives -- to offer.

The question of women's readership has been of particular interest to newspaper

operators. As in the nineteenth century, advertising has driven some of this concern, since

advertisers are particularly anxious to shape women's consumption for their families. A

story that became apocryphal in Southam, Canada's major newspaper chain, was recounted

in one of its internal reports:

> Mike Wellman of K-Mart USA put it bluntly to SNG president Russ Mills:
> "I don't care how many men read your newspapers ... until you start putting
> out newspapers that are interesting to the busy budget-conscious moms that
> provide the bulk of our business, I'm going to try and spend as little
> (advertising) as I can (with you)." (*Adding Value*, 1992: 6)

That kind of statement, which represents a common position for advertisers

representing businesses that sell domestic consumer items, has been a constant prompt to

newspapers to look for ways to attract women. The newspaper studies of the 1950s and

1960s looked at content as the most important ingredient to readability, so newspaper

editors of the 1950s and 1960s believed that content was the way to attract women. More

recent research has focused on the story-telling style women prefer and several studies (along

with feminist research and articles on popular magazines) have suggested that women prefer

a more narrative, subjective, personally oriented or explanatory style. (Bula, 1991; Brown, 1991; DeVault, 1992; Hansen, 1992; Astor, 1993)

4. The feature form over the years

In the next chapter, we will look at what feature writing means to contemporary news reporters: the topics, the divisions between hard and soft (if any), the approaches. But to understand the present, it is useful to look at what the feature genre of the past has been and what feature writing has meant to reporters and journalism instructors of earlier decades so that we can see the antecedents of continuing traditions and the divergences. A look at the research on journalism development and a survey of journalism textbooks written from the 1930s to the 1990s makes it clear that the news profession has always identified two clear genres, each with its own subject matter and rules of composition, although those genres have overlapped to a greater and greater degree in recent decades.

As we noted above, in early American newspapers news and "features" were separated to such an extent that a feature was by definition a personal and literary piece of writing: a personal essay, a poem, a humorous article. The first feature or human-interest type news stories that appeared were in the mass-market penny papers, when they were short stories, often written by the papers' police reporters (the first "beat" that newspapers established). There was a clear demarcation between the hard news story and that often ironic, mocking, or pathos-laden human-interest feature that focused on some aspect of "human misery or folly." (Campbell and Wolseley, 1961: 311)

The importance of human-interest features grew to the point where they were more than just a police-beat sideline. As the history above indicated, newspapers editors began making explicit references to the quality of their writing, placing feature-style stories in prominent places and rewarding journalists who wrote them, through bylines and

placement. As well, as newspapers began to create sections aimed at catering to the leisure needs of the new middle class, a kind of writing that had only been seen in magazines started to appear: travel pieces, biographies, histories, stories about how to do something, explanatory pieces. Feature stories and feature sections brought two related innovations to newspaper readers: interviews and descriptions of private life.

As Michael Schudson has documented, interviews were virtually unheard of before the 1860s. Journalists certainly had private conversations with public figures, but they did not report them or make them the basis for news stories. Reporters largely took their information from official documents. When the first interviews were done, they were not seen as "news" but as features, glimpses into the private lives and thoughts of public figures, done without taking notes and thought of as spontaneous and artistic. Several other scholars have observed the way private life became the focus of interest in the late nineteenth century as American society was urbanizing and becoming more anonymous (Borus, 1989; Kaplan, 1988; Frus, 1994) Laurel Brake, in her study of the "new journalism" of the late nineteenth century in England, also noted the era's move towards personal description, description of private lives, and interviewing, something that was considered shocking to older journalists (1994: 89) To this day, the feature form continues to be marked by heavy use of the interview, which became established as the fundamental act of journalism by the turn of the century, and its description of private life. Feature writing, like the literary realism of the day, also provided opportunities for class tourism. Just as Solon Robinson initiated the human-interest stories at the *New York Tribune* with features about the lives of poor and working-class people, other reporters wrote features stories about industrial life, high society and other sharply defined demographic niches. Amy Kaplan observed that there is a reason why features about social sub-cultures and interviews arose at the same time.

> In the late nineteenth century, "the house beautiful" movement, which
> offered voyeuristic glimpses into model homes of the rich, shared the same

cultural preoccupation as did investigations of slum life; both introduced the environments of foreign classes to middle-class readers. These explorations assume what the interview assumes: that classes have become inaccessible to one another and that individuals cannot know one another face-to-face through direct contact or conversation. In this context, the writer as guide and translator becomes the necessary mediator. (1988: 41)

Journalism textbooks began to appear shortly after the turn of the century, as journalism professionalized. It was also the same period when there was an entrenchment of the inverted-pyramid story form and the establishment of objectivity, which required a separation of fact from opinion, as a working principle of the press. In a survey of journalism textbooks from the 1930s to the 1990s done for this thesis, it is the earliest textbooks that most clearly set out the two genres, with the most rigid division established between "hard news" and "features." Obviously, some of the differences in textbooks from decade to decade mark personal differences among authors rather than industry-wide trends. Despite that, however, there is a noticeable evolution between 1934 and 1994 in how those prescribing newswriting practices categorize and define the different kinds of news and newswriting styles.

Carl Warren's 1934 textbook, *Modern News Reporting*, takes a highly structured approach to newswriting. Echoing the positivist thinking of the day, this textbook defines and categories all the possible types of newswriting, allowing for no crossover or ambivalence. The news story is defined as a form that, unlike fiction writing, begins with a "summary" lead. Occasionally, news stories may be permitted to use "novelty" leads: the punch lead, the picture lead, the contrast lead, the question lead, the background lead, the quotation lead, or the freak lead. Story structure is defined as fitting into three patterns: fact story structure, quote story structure, and action story structure. All three, however, start with the summary lead and none mentions the possibility of telling stories in chronological order.

Besides "novelty" leads, the only other permissible outlet for a deviation from the hard-news lead and hard-news story structure is in the "feature," a story defined as having "few of the standard news ingredients" but something that contributes "a well-flavored dessert to the daily menu of substantial fact." (1934: 201-202) Again, there is a well-marked dividing line between straight news, which is "an up-to-date chronicle dealing with persons, things or events of significance, and is intended primarily to inform," and feature news, which "generally seeks to entertain the reader by presenting a linotyped drama, with real actors in a real situation, with no other object than to stir his emotions." (1934: 202) Features are divided into human-interest features and news features. The human-interest feature subjects are listed as: animals, children, humor, pathos, adventure, oddity and "general" – to be found at institutions that otherwise provide hard news. They also generally focus on stereotypical situations. Some of the listed "favorite formulas for human interest stories": "Starving mother .. deserts baby .. kind policeman;" "Country visitor .. meets slicker .. gold brick"; "Childhood lovers .. surprise meeting .. happy wedding." (1934: 211) The news feature is a more extended human-interest story, attached to a somewhat more serious topic. Some of the suggested topics, which echo back to the feature form's predilection for class tourism and realism, are: sweatshops, bread lines, slums, airships, lighthouses, mines, laboratories." (1934: 227) As well, the appropriation of the private and personal to this genre is still evident. Another suggested topic: "career sketches reviewing the biography, views, occupation and hobbies of prominent people." (1934: 227) It is clear that features have a gendered element to them. In the chapter "Writing For and By Women", Warren writes that a woman reporter is

> most likely to receive assignments rich in romance and human interest, news-features from police and the courts, and stories pointed with "the woman's angle" concerned exclusively with civic, welfare, religious and educational organizations. The demand for emotionalized writing by some papers has sometimes labeled her a 'sob sister,' a composer of 'fluff stuff.' (1934: 316)

Textbooks of the next six decades show a slow but gradual shift. Gradually, textbooks move away from categorizing standardized openings or leads. There is an increasing amount of textbook room given to feature stories and a wider range of approaches and topics suggested. There is an increasingly ambivalent tone about the clearness of the division between hard news and features. There are more frequent references to the constraints of the hard-news style. There is increasingly more emphasis placed on the serious, explanatory possibilities that feature stories may have. While Warren's 1934 textbook allotted only two paragraphs to a mention of another type of news features -- "special informational features that seek to interpret and clarify certain aspects of the news" (1934: 227) -- textbooks in the following decades expanded on that category considerably.

However, that was a slow evolution. *Newsmen at Work*, from 1949, echoed many of the same categorizations of Warren's text. Again, the inverted-triangle was presented as the pattern for "most of the well-prepared news stories." (Campbell and Wolseley: 67) But authors Laurence Campbell and Roland Wolseley suggested that there may be other story structures. The right-side-up triangle, which starts with a detail and proceeds to the climax, was "most suitable for the feature handling of the news." (69) And the rectangle story to be used for news stories that are combined with interpretation, a facet of news that was considered important in order to provide readers with more than they would get from a radio news story (74).

The chapter on feature writing, subtitled "The Journalist's Chance for Individuality," expanded its categories of features: human interest, biographical, historical, explanatory, and how-to-do-it. Again, it gave the reporter a chance to "use his imagination, to employ the techniques of the fiction writer, and to kick aside the stiff patterns of ordinary news writing." (243) Although the feature continued to be defined as "light," not serious news, there were many lengthy and contradictory attempts to define journalism in

relationship to literature or features in relationship to real news. The introduction stressed that journalism is not and cannot be literature, but went on to list the news reporters who had become fiction writers and dangled the possibility that any journalistic piece may become literature in the right hands and with the right material. At one point, the authors stressed that "it's a mistake to believe that feature copy is necessarily inconsequential or that it must always be pathetic or humorous or trivial." (245)

Reporting the News is a 1959 textbook by Philip Ault and Edwin Emory. In contrast to the emphasis in the 1934 and 1949 textbooks on what news is and where to find it, this textbook assigned seven of its 19 chapters to advice on news writing. Also in contrast to the two earlier textbooks, which went to some length to explain the utility and importance of the inverted-pyramid story structure and summary lead, this textbook cautioned against following the formula too rigidly and devoted several chapters to ways of varying the basic story form. It made the traditional division between hard and feature news, with feature news being stories "that the reader may not really need but which he finds interesting, informative, or entertaining and which give him an insight into how people live and think." (266) But the authors also went on to make the point that the line between the two is very thin. Evidence of the status the feature style was gaining, they cited a story about school integration in Little Rock, Ark., that won a Pulitzer Prize for distinguished national reporting. The story given as the example had a strong narrative structure, had the reporter referring to himself in the story, made heavy use of physical realism, and finished with a strongly marked ironic conclusion. Clearly, as well, the serious topic made it plain to reporters that a combination of strong writing and strong reporting on a social issue was a goal.

John Hohenberg's 1969 textbook, *The Professional Journalist*, showed less emphasis on writing style than the previous text and an approach to newswriting that echoed texts of

the 1930s and 1940s. However, like *Reporting the News*, it made a less clear distinction between straight news and features than those earlier texts did. Instead, it defined hard news as being anything "that has actually happened" and soft news as "both features and interpretive news material." (204)

Melvin Mencher's *News Reporting and Writing*, with editions in 1977 and 1983, put an unmistakable stress on writing. Four of 26 chapters were about how to write (as opposed to report) news; three were about writing generally, one was about features. Again, there was a note about the blurred lines between the two genres. As he put it: "Nowadays, editors see only a fine line between news and features." (200)

Finally, the sharpest contrast to the principles of the 1934 textbook is the 1994 textbook, *The Canadian Reporter*, where the demarcation between "hard" and "soft" is almost impossible to identify. All stories are now labelled news; what distinguishes them, according to this textbook, is only their approach. The only organizational indication of that previous hard/soft division between forms is the inclusion of three subsections: "hard leads," "soft leads" and "writing short features." (This last is included, not in the writing chapter, but under general assignments.) There is no section on feature writing. Instead, two chapters concentrate on "writing the news." They include subsections on "showing and telling," "building suspense," "exploiting dramatic irony," "touching mythic chords" and "story endings."

This apparent blurring of the lines is characteristic of contemporary conversations about news writing and at journalism conferences. But how realistic or accurate is it when it comes to the day-to-day experience of journalists? As was outlined in Chapter One, the production requirements of newsmaking do not lend themselves very well to ambiguity nor to lengthy discussions of style. The next chapter will look at the way journalists and present-day texts talk about features and feature writing.

There is one more important point to make in this account of the way "storytelling" or the "feature form" has developed over the years. That is the different way it is used by the popular press and the elite press. In earlier sections, I have talked about the way newspapers became divided between "information journalism" and "story journalism," with information journalism gradually coming to be seen as the preferred news format of serious reporting and of the middle and upper classes, while story journalism became the type of journalism associated with the lower end of the market: tabloid journalism and the lower classes. Richard Ericson's studies also emphasize the difference in storytelling style between the popular and "quality" media, with popular media using a much more narrative style. This is analogous to difference in storytelling genres that exists between television and the elite press. Daniel Hallin notes that television (along with newspapers that serve the same type of market that television does) has developed a different narrative style from the prestige press, in part, because of the differing nature of its audience. Television's audience is "down market" in comparison with the elite press, being older, less educated, and with greater numbers of the working class. Television producers, assuming this audience to be less interested in politics, deliberately structures its stories to be more narrative, to develop a strong thematic story line, and to provide an entertainment, not just an information, component (1986: 114-126)

In fact, of course, all levels of media use a more storytelling style for some stories compared to others. The elite newspapers of Canada and the United States – the *Globe & Mail*, the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Los Angeles Times* – are renowned in fact for their intelligent and writerly features. However, as media scholars have pointed out, they employ a different form of storytelling. Ericson observes that quality newspapers create more complex stories, use a "literary" vocabulary, and provide primary and secondary (explanatory) information in a objective tone while popular newspapers use

simple structures, colloquial language and gives more emphasis to emotional, tertiary

information (1991: 37). Itzhak Roeh points out, the storytelling style of the popular press is

romantic and melodramatic, while the elite press uses "the opposing mode of irony." Not

surprisingly, Glasser and Ettema have found that investigative journalism features tend to

make their points through irony, as does much political reporting (Glasser, 1985; Glasser

and Ettema, 1989; Ettema, 1994). The romantic style of storytelling tends to emphasize an

emotional approach to social and political realities, while the ironic mode emphasizes the

cognitive approach (Roeh, 1989: 168).

CHAPTER THREE

FEATURE-WRITING IN THE NEWSROOM

A feature story is a creative, sometimes subjective, article designed primarily to entertain and to inform readers of an event, a situation or an aspect of life.

It is often not perishable – it can be held for days or weeks before being printed. It has no established limits of length. It allows for descriptive and stylish techniques that are banned from newswriting, and it may not have any news value.

A veteran newsman once described a feature story succinctly: "A feature story is anything that isn't a news story." With few exceptions, his definition is correct."

♦ *Daniel Williamson,* Feature Writing for Newspapers

We have looked at the history of what has been called "features" in newspapers in the last two centuries. Now, the question is: what do the terms "features" or "feature-writing" or "featurish" writing mean in the contemporary journalism world? Is there a distinct division between hard and soft news? Are hard and soft news still equated with certain topics and certain writing styles? What makes a feature different from a hard-news story? What makes a newspaper feature different from a magazine article? And finally, how does this news product fit into the ideological and news-organization grids that shape news coverage, which we outlined in Chapter One?

This chapter will look at the way journalists and contemporary journalism texts respond to those questions. They do not have all the answers, because few working journalists systematically analyze the structure and language of their stories or their decisions for writing certain stories certain ways. Some of the answers to those questions can only come from a close study of actual news stories, which I will do in the next chapter. For now, the journalists' world.

1. What is soft news, what is a feature?

Unlike journalists of the 1930s, who had clear boundaries marked out for them, journalists today have a difficult time coming up with basic definitions for the two forms of news storytelling they routinely employ, even though the terminology of "hard/soft", "news/feature" is used in every North American newsroom on a daily basis. As well, it is clear from the responses of journalists interviewed for this research that hard news and soft news cannot uniformly be applied to particular topics, as they were at one time. However, it is also clear that working reporters do see their stories as falling into the two distinct categories, in contrast to the view expressed in *The Canadian Reporter*, which describes all stories as being more or less in the same category, separated only by "hard" leads and "featurish" leads. When asked to describe the difference between hard news and features, no one said: "There is no difference between them any more." Instead, everyone interviewed attempted to explain the differences in some detail. A prototypical response was offered by one editor at a daily newspaper:

> Hard news is something that's hard news.... an immediate story. It's something -- I really don't know how to define hard news and soft news -- it would be the immediate story, written in an objective way, no analysis by the reporter, like a police story, or a court story, or political happening. That's basically hard news: the what, when, where. I don't know, it's hard to define hard news. I mean, you just know what's hard news and what isn't -- the sh ter story that's going to go on the front page. And then soft news is a feature, interpretive and, you know, more background, so you can have hard news with background. Soft news could be about something that's breaking in the news, but you give the reader a sense of who you're talking about by providing the background. So then you wonder, is that hard news or soft news? I could go through the newspaper and put checks beside hard news and soft news stories. (Duncan, Interview)

> Another reporter answered this way:

> Well, soft news is more human interest. I mean one certain soft-news section of the paper has historically been the You section of *The Vancouver Sun*, for example. But soft news doesn't have to be like that, too. It doesn't have a hook, for example. It could be something about a

> medical centre that you do because it's interesting but there's no earth-shattering, breaking news. (Fitterman, Interview)

In answer to the question, "Do certain subjects by their nature tend to be more soft news than hard news?" she answered:

> Not necessarily. It depends what's happening at the time. I mean, I think that every, at certain points, every subject will have a hard-news element to it.

And a third reporter answered the question this way:

> I see hard news as more immediate, breaking more information, as something that's presented in a straightforward, usually shorter format, so generally the purpose is to get the most facts across in the shortest amount of space. With features, they're softer approaches. I guess I was thinking more about features, because I think features can be hard news also. But with that kind of format, you've got more room, you can flesh out the news through using people, character, settings, and it sets more of a mood, you can use language and devices like structure and taste with the language and what not to sort of convey information and say things other than through the bullet style of conveying information. (Helm, Interview)

In general, journalists easily recognize hard- and soft-news or feature-story forms, which continue to exist in present-day newspapers, in their purest forms. A typical story no one would have trouble identifying as hard news begins like this:

> Four people were found dead of gunshot wounds in Everett last night in a dispute in which a man apparently killed his family and then himself, police said. (Miletich, PI, 14 Nov., 1995: A1)

It employs the classic inverted-pyramid form, beginning with deaths and apparent reasons for them, going on to descriptions of the relationships of the four people, the police response and their evidence from witnesses, and ending with descriptions of where the bodies were found. It quotes authoritative sources -- the police -- and is easily characterized as a story strong in "negativity," one of the essentials that makes a story newsworthy. It has no identifiable personal writing style – any reporter could have written this – and it is on the front page of the newspaper.

A story that no journalist would have trouble identifying as a feature:

At first, Bindon Kinghorn dreamed of creating a *Salome* on the
mega-spectacle scale of .... oh, say Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten
Commandments.*
Well, almost. He nurtured no fantasies of the Red Sea parting on
stage. (Such stunts are hard to pull off on university budget.) But it's true
that, given the task of directing Oscar Wilde's 99-year-old play for the
University of Victoria's theatre department, Kinghorn initially thought big.
(Chamberlain, TC, 16 Nov., 1995: F1)

There are several signals that would indicate to any journalist that this is a feature

story even before reading a word: the placement (front of the entertainment section), the

typeface of the headline (an artistic, wedding-invitation-style font), the length of the story (it

covers a quarter of the page), the layout (a significant amount of white space is left around

the pictures and copy, in contrast to the density of the average news page), and the pictures

(dramatically costumed actors in static and clearly staged poses). The first two paragraphs

would confirm that impression: The language is informal and familiar. The major character

of the first two paragraphs is not identified and the focus is on his thoughts. There is no

identifiable news event. Instead, the topic is the process of mounting a university theatre

production, clearly not hard news by any standard criteria. (That is not to say a university

theatre production could never be the source of hard news. Protests about a play's perceived

racism or sexism, a conflict between students and administration over the choice of play, a

financially disastrous production – these could move a play production from the soft- to

hard-news category very quickly.)

The intermediate forms, however, are much more difficult to categorize, especially

since all contemporary newspapers have been influenced to some degree by the current

journalism trend towards trying to move away from the inverted-pyramid form. I will look

at the variations in the next chapter; the important point for now is to understand the

fundamentals of "hard news" and features and, in particular, to understand what journalists

believe constitutes feature writing, whether or not their beliefs are actualized in what they

write.

2. Why write features?

In Chapter Two, I examined at length why the newspaper industry developed the feature form and what purposes the feature serves. The answers, it was clear, are primarily concerned with economics and production. Features, because they do not have to be geared to a specific time or place, are used to fill production holes in newspapers. Mainly, however, they were and are used to attract mass audiences, in particular marginalized audiences – immigrants, women, the working class, the young, the mobile – who are not interested in the conventional "hard news" topics of newspapers like politics, crime and business.

Journalists, not just newspaper managers, are aware of the competitive edge that a different writing style may bring. But they do not conceptualize their readers as separate categories that need to be appealed to in separate ways, the way newspaper advertisers or marketers do. Instead, they tend to see all of their audience as having a preference for a more entertaining form of news. In answer to the question of why reporters will use "feature" leads on news stories (that is, leads that call attention to language or that delay the main news point of the story until after an introductory scene), Susan Duncan, city editor of the *Kamloops Daily News*, replied:

> I think it would be just to provide a different type of story than everyone
> else's. All the media outlets are quite often writing about the same hard-news
> topic so you might use a feature lead just to break away from the pack. And
> also because the reader today is so used to being entertained that you almost
> have to make hard news more entertaining than in the past.

As well, although reporters spend a considerable amount of time discussing what it takes to attract readers away from other media, when asked about why they write certain stories as features, competitiveness with other media is not their first or dominant reason mentioned. Instead, consistent with the professional ideology we outlined in Chapter One, where public service is valued and economic considerations devalued, journalists tend to denigrate features written about lighter topics – stories that appear to be catering solely to

entertainment or marketing needs – and focus their attention instead on the two public-service functions they see the feature story as having the potential to perform.

The first function feature stories perform is they give reporters room to get information into the newspaper that, because of the way hard news is defined, does not have a place in hard-news stories. For some reporters, the limits of the hard-news story are a significant irritant, especially if they feel they are confronted with significant or dramatic events that the hard-news story decontextualizes and drains of emotional impact or real understanding. Reporters also find that features are the natural vehicle for stories that are not about events, but about gradual evolutions. *Vancouver Sun* reporter Pete McMartin said the feature's allowance for tackling those kinds of topics is one of the reasons he prefers writing them. "I love process stories. You get a lot of time off work and it's neat to know how things work."

Faced with information that does not fit the constraints of the hard-news story, reporters have several choices. They can forget about it. They can write only a feature story. Or they can write a feature story that amplifies a hard-news story. Features amplify or extend current hard-news stories by absorbing background information, analysis, context, or description, emotion, and detail that reporters just can not get into those hard-news stories, either because that background is judged as being too interpretive or because there is no room in the hard-news story, which is generally only allowed as much space as it takes to tell the facts judged most important. *Montreal Gazette* reporter Lisa Fitterman said: "You always need to put stories into context, hard-news stories or features, but more context, more background go into features because you tend to have the space to do it."

Sometimes, nothing about the issue fits in to the parameters of hard-news writing. In that case, the feature story doesn't amplify hard-news coverage; it replaces it. For instance, *Victoria Times-Colonist* reporter Denise Helm was assigned to do an interview with

Timothy Leary: "I came away from it with no, no story, and I ended up writing a story just sort of about the event itself."

Because feature stories fulfill the function of absorbing information that falls outside hard-news parameters, they consequently allow reporters more autonomy and latitude in both subject matter and approach. There is generally little room for negotiation between reporters and editors about what constitutes "news" – news values are well established. But features are more subjective. A reporter may be successful in getting prominent placement of a story with a topic or character generally considered unnewsworthy through an engagingly written feature story. Even *Vancouver Sun* editor John Cruickshank, who makes it clear that he prefers newspapers with a commitment to a serious news agenda, acknowledges that reporters can "write their way on to the front page." As well, when features are being used to amplify and provide background for hard-news events, even though an editor may have an idea in mind of what angle a feature story should take, the reporter has relative freedom to come up with other angles, if their sources justify them. And, since features are usually allotted more time for completion, the reporter has a slightly longer period to develop an independent hypothesis about the event at hand and to search out the supporting sources. Unlike a hard-news story, where a reporter either gets the story that has been conceptualized and it runs or does not get it and nothing runs, a feature, even an editor-requested one, implicitly gives a reporter permission to explore a number of possible angles and the paper is likely to run it, no matter what he comes up with.

Journalists talk about another value features have besides giving them a form to use for information that does not fit in hard-news stories: Features are the vehicle they can use to reach readers. They can use them to get readers interested in topics that they might not normally be drawn to or they can use them to impress on them the impact or drama or personal effect of an event whose hard-news version might have seemed abstract and

impersonal. The important point here is that they want to reach readers, not for marketing purposes or to capture audiences, but as part of their public-service ideal. Because of that, the feature-writing they refer to is the kind that explains and humanizes public-policy or serious social issues. One reporter talks about the reason she writes features as being that "you can also use the writing to engage people in a subject they might not be interested in and pull people into something that way." (Helm, Interview) One editor said features are important for amplifying policy stories because they provide a human face and human consequences. "If a newspaper were simply hard news, it would be a very cold one, in its way inaccessible to many readers." (Cruickshank, Interview)

Contemporary journalists do not go as far as did the New Journalists, or some of those who analyzed their work, in arguing that writing style can be a potential political tool that breaks through the public passivity fostered by the objective style. As I observed earlier, contemporary journalism writing conferences and texts are devoid of suggestions that reporters use their writing in the service of political or social causes. Nor are there ever any discussions about the unethical or biased use of the drama and emotional impact that define well-written features. But they do see themselves as struggling to interest the public in important issues that they feel the public should care about. William Ruehlmann, in *The Art of Feature Writing*, writes:

> The feature writer attempts to tell truths which, like most curative medicine,
> are unpleasant to the taste, so he surrounds those truths with formal coatings
> of good writing and dramatic content that get the pill down where it can do
> its work. To properly instruct, one must first amuse. (1977: 69)

All reporters believe that they have to make an extra effort with their writing when they are writing longer, non-immediate news stories. However, two groups of reporters are even more likely than standard feature reporters to be conscious of the need to write their pieces as recognizably narrative stories and to use compelling language; one group is

investigative reporters, the other is reporters who do unusually long projects by newspaper standards. The introduction to an interview with Walt Harrington, in the *IRE Journal*, the magazine of the American association, Investigative Reporters and Editors, said this:

> No matter how thoroughly a subject has been investigated, success of the pieces often precariously rests on how the journalist chooses to tell the story. To tell the story – this is the key. (Harrington, 1996: 6)

Investigative reporters frequently write their stories in a recognizably narrative form, as opposed to the inverted-pyramid structure, often starting their stories with a description of those who have suffered because of some miscarriage of justice. As National Public Radio reporter Bruce Gellerman put it in one speech to journalists: "If you're not sure where to start, start with the victim." W. Lance Bennett, in his study of the narrative form of investigative reporting, also noted that investigative reporters spend a considerable amount of thought to casting their stories in a distinctly narrative and personal form. For example, a series on jail rapes was dramatized by running twelve case studies of men who had been raped while in jail for minor crimes or even men who had been arrested mistakenly. These stories were written as features, since only a feature form would allow this, as will be evident in the next section where news stories are analyzed in detail. The series employed two narrative strategies to evoke outrage: "highlighting cruelly ironic details of the victim's experience, and privileging the victim's own account of that experience." (Bennett, 1988: 14)

Besides investigative reporters, reporters struggling to get unusually long stories in to newspapers with increasingly tight newsholes are finding that they must stress writing style and narrative more in order to get editors' approval for their projects. Where newspapers used to run lengthy and somewhat pedestrian features because they saw it as their civic duty to do so, as well as having the kind of economic conditions that permitted them to do it, editors now expect a lengthy piece to be noticeably more readable than the routine news story. (An average news story is anywhere from 8-20 column inches, or 320-800 words. A

mid-length feature story usually ranges from 20-40 inches, or 800-1,600 words. Once reporters start going beyond the 40-inch mark, they require more and more support from editors and deskers in order to have the piece run in full. All of these numbers would be somewhat lower at more populist or tabloid papers and somewhat higher at more elite, upper-end newspapers.) In an article for *Washington Journalism Review,* "Going Long in a No-Jump World," Carl Sessions Stepp wrote: "If anything draws widespread agreement, it is that a principal way of getting big stories into the paper is to write them in." (1993: 19)

3. How do you write features?

"Stop committing journalism and start telling stories. Don't write reports, write stories."

- John Foreman, Quill, *March 1993*

Every journalist textbook, every journalism conference and every newsroom ends up devoting some time to a discussion of what makes "good" feature writing and what material is suitable for features. In addition, some reporters have devoted entire books to the art of feature-writing. All of these can be condensed to some basic ideas that journalists hear over and over again about the "right" way to write features. It should be noted that not all feature stories will achieve these ideals. In fact, few will. The important point is that they are set out as ideals, the way "accuracy" and "newsworthiness" and "objectivity" are set out as the ideals for hard-news stories. It should also be noted that those who evangelize about feature writing fall into different camps. Some see feature writing as a kind of higher calling, one with a social purpose, and, while they don't dwell on the social purpose of feature writing, they are likely to frame their advice in terms of the public good or serving readers well. Others see it as an art form. And others see feature writing as simply a particular writing market; they tend to focus exclusively on the craft of writing, research and interviewing, along with the business of pitching story ideas, using computers, running a freelance

business and negotiating with editors. In the following chapter, I will use the analysis of representative samples from two newspapers to examine how these ideals translate into day-to-day news writing. Finally, it cannot be emphasized enough that much newspaper writing, in spite of individual reporters' best intentions, is formula writing where reporters plug in stock structures, quotes, and characters. Hard news has one formula, features have another – that will be evident when news stories are analyzed in the next chapter. For the moment, however, these are the prevailing tenets.[1]

a. The concrete to illustrate the abstract

Many media researchers have commented on the way news is fixated on the "concrete, the particular and the individual as opposed to the structural, the abstract, and the universal," as Barbara Phillips put it (1976: 89). What Phillips particularly objected to were the disconnected quirky human-interest stories that provided no context and the endless round of fragmentary hard-news stories, equally decontextualized. The feature form, as it is envisioned by contemporary journalists, also maintains a heavy emphasis on the concrete, the particular and the individual, but with a specific purpose in mind: to illustrate the abstract. Real people who exemplify real issues, real settings, real actions: this is one of the most-often heard rules for newspaper feature writing. In fact, this is so ingrained in present-day reporters that, one of the first things they do when requested to write a feature

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[1] I must emphasize here again that not all journalists will concur that this is what makes good feature-writing. Many of the written material about feature-writing is generated by American journalists and, to reiterate a point I made in the introduction, I believe American mainstream newspapers have a slightly more populist orientation than Canadian ones, with the result that newswriting in American newspapers is sometimes closer to the language of Canadian tabloids than Canadian broadsheets. As well, elite newspapers are more likely to emphasize the explanatory, not just the story-telling, aims of features. Consequently, someone like *Vancouver Sun* editor John Cruickshank, both a Canadian and formerly an editor at Canada's most-elite newspaper, the *Globe & Mail*, expressed views about features that were distinctly at odds with the principles that I lay out in this chapter. When asked what he thought of the quotation at the beginning of this section, "Stop committing journalism and start writing stories," he saw that as a circulation-oriented strategy, aimed at pleasing readers. What he saw features as doing, instead, was "to provide information and context and some of the material that provides depth."

on a certain topic, is to start casting around for a person or incident to illustrate the story. The insistence on using the concrete to illustrate the abstract has become so standardized that there are even specific names for the feature types that use the specific-person or specific-anecdote technique as an opening to the story. The "Zimmerman" lead (or "Joe Schmo" lead, as it is more commonly referred to in Canada) "begins with one person who, in microcosm, represents everyone affected by the story's issue or subject." (LaRocque, 1995: 22) Paula LaRocque, a writing coach who is frequently brought in for seminars at newspapers in Canada and the United States, noted that the Zimmerman stories have become so automatic that they are used even when "they begin with some unknown person who says and does nothing very interesting." (1995: 22) However, reporters and editors believe that having a "real person" in the lead helps readers identify more with the story. In Denise Helm's words: "[P]eople want to see themselves and their community reflected in papers and I think if they see a person rather than institutions in the lead, that somehow makes it more real."

Another, related type of lead is the "anecdotal," which can be any small but telling exchange that captures the larger subject: a scene, a detail, an account of a conversation. Reporters are not encouraged to choose those details haphazardly; in fact, there is an extremely strong emphasis on choosing exactly the right symbolic detail. William Ruehlmann's text on feature writing epitomizes this view:

> One way of insuring a strong opening is to display something specific – an item, an illustration, an incident – that not only rivets the attention but also manages to embody in some symbolic way your subject. (1977: 118)
> The best way to reveal a problem, phenomenon or social circumstance is to illustrate it with a single, specific instance. Just as one exemplary detail serves to focus a description, so does one representative situation afford the most effective insight into a larger course of events. Generalities bore. (1977: 225)

Both of these types of leads, the personalized and the anecdotal, usually reported to have been initiated by *The Wall Street Journal*, are common throughout North American newspapers.

This kind of focus on the symbolic ultimately underscores a belief that feature stories, unlike news stories, should make at least some of their points indirectly. The hard news story operates in a mode where "facts" are asserted directly and language is transparent. The newspaper feature story, on the other hand, is consciously constructed as a collection of symbols. Certain "scenes," details, characters or pieces of dialogue are chosen over others because of the way they evoke certain themes. Like literary or film narratives, feature stories want audiences to do some of the story construction themselves, following clues left by the writer.

b. The story is "constructed"

Reporters writing a hard-news story focus almost all their information on the single new piece of information that will be the news, the lead, of their stories. Everything in the story supports that lead. Reporters writing features, on the other hand, select their information to support the story structure, not the lead. Feature writers frequently talk about the importance of choosing the right elements, as though they were playwrights or short-story writers trying to decide on exactly the piece of dialogue, setting, gesture necessary to create a coherent and dynamic whole. One reporter says:

> (Hard-news) writers think you have to give every detail. Good writers know
> you have to be selective. It's all information. You have to learn what will
> draw the reader along. (McMartin, Interview)

One of the corollaries of this approach is a different attitude to precise numbers. In hard-news stories, precise numbers -- and the more of them, the better -- are paramount. "Newspapers seem to think you have to pack a story with numbers," says McMartin. In

feature stories, however, numbers take a second place to story. They are moved out of the leads, reduced or even rounded off.

A second consequence of that belief in the need to construct stories is that reporters carefully choose endings to their stories. One reporter describes the process she goes through in developing story conclusions this way:

> Sometimes it would echo back how it started or sometime it would be one of the best bits that you saved to the end as a kicker to either, it depends on the mood, if it was something light, it would be something that would reinforce that mood so it would be something that would, like, make someone smile when they got to the end or it was a serious feature, it might be something that could be troubling and to either pose a question or leave people with a sense of unsettledness. (Helm, Interview)

Other reporters are even more explicit about their intention to lead the reader to their conclusion. The interview with investigative reporter and feature writer Walt Harrington asks him how he decided on the conclusion for a particular piece about a woman being murdered by her ex-husband, where the story ends with a description of policeman who investigated the murder ending his shift around dawn, as people are beginning their daily routines and a rat is scurrying away on the sidewalk. The last sentence is: "Life as it should be." Harrington said:

> That line captured what this whole piece was about. It was about a guy struggling with a respectable and a disrespectable society. . . And when the light comes, that rat is off to hide like the drug boys that V.I. has to deal with on a daily basis. It is emblematic of the idea that the bad and evil fold under pressure of the good and the respectable. ... This isn't only V.I.'s feeling, but is representative of society's feelings as well. (Harrington, 1996: 11)

c. A single-theme storyline

As I have noted already, the inverted-pyramid structure, which is the form used for hard-news stories, is organized around facts and their importance, not around chronology or a traditional narrative line. Textbooks about feature-writing and reporters writing features, however, stress that the feature needs to have some kind of story line or narrative structure,

with introductions, mid-story developments, and resolutions or, at least, some sense of an ending.

Jon Franklin, a Pulitzer Prize-winning feature writer who is now a professor at the University of Portland and a writing coach, describes the difference among news stories as one of a difference in how much narrative framework the public has already. Most news stories take place in a narrative framework the public has already in place. Those hard-news stories simply act as bulletins to update the reader, fill in a detail, or recount the latest advance. With issues like elections, the O.J. Simpson trial, the British royal family, disasters, strikes and the like, the story requires the reporter to provide fairly minimal narrative framework. The more unfamiliar the topic, the more unlikely the reader is to be familiar with the narrative framework, the more the writer has to provide it. That is what feature stories do. (Presentation, 1994)

However, there is one fundamental difference between the narratives that reporters are encouraged to create and the typical development of literary or film narrative. As I noted in Chapter One, other types of narrative stories are characterized by the way they delay and digress from their resolutions. But journalistic narrative has a low tolerance for this. One of the consistent emphases in journalism texts on writing features is that the story has to have a unified theme with no digressions, which is also expressed as "finding a focus." In either case, that means having a direction to the story, a kind of narrative trajectory, that permits only those elements in the story that support the basic theme. To do that, reporters are encouraged to develop their narrative story lines early.

> Don't wait until you're back at your desk to figure out what the story is
> about. Find your focus in the field, Richard Ben Cramer advises, so that you
> can search for the details, scenes, quotes that support it. The deadline
> storyteller must be a radar screen, forever monitoring for information that is
> the heart of the story. (Scanlon, 1994: 4)

d. <u>Evoking emotion and response</u>

The feature form of news storytelling is far more reader-oriented than hard news. As journalists talk, they talk more about readers and reader responses. In particular, the response they are looking for is an emotional one. While hard-news stories are written, for the most part, to convey information cognitively, features or featurish writing specifically looks for other avenues to appeal to readers. In an internal newsletter from *The Oregonian*, Portland's major newspaper, the editor's note says: "One of our major goals is to get more emotion into *The Oregonian*. One of the main ways of reaching that goal is more effective storytelling." (*Second Takes*, 1994: 1) And Daniel Williamson, in *Feature Writing for Newspapers*, stated: "Feature stories evoke more emotional response than straight news stories." (1975: 13) One of the reasons investigative journalism pieces are written as feature pieces or generally have a feature-style piece attached to them is to allow reporters a form that will provoke the maximum outrage among readers, in a way that hard-news stories simply will not.

e. <u>Prohibitions</u>

In spite of the latitude that feature writing appears to allow, journalists do express caution about certain uses of the feature form or certain techniques. They do not believe it should be used for certain types of subjects, they are generally not in favour of reporters making references to themselves in stories, and they do not see features as being expressions of a subjective opinion.

The first prohibition, against inappropriate feature techniques, appears frequently in journalists' conversations. One example that Susan Duncan of the *Kamloops Daily News* gave:

> In our paper the other day, the head of the theatre company was fired and the reporter chose a head, a lead, like 'To be or not to be is no longer the question.' And that just did not work. It was too cute. It was too cute for an issue of somebody being fired.

Another, more dramatic example, was this:

> Remember David Shearing, the park rapist? He went to court and pleaded guilty and we thought, 'What type of a lead should be put on this?' Because everyone in Canada is there covering this story. And we just decided in the end, there is nothing you can do. You just shouldn't be playing around with that lead, it's just too big a tragedy. It's sensational enough that he's just pleaded guilty to killing six people. Anything that's really tragic, you have to be really careful about putting a feature-type lead on.

Don Fry echoed that at the 1996 National Writers Workshop in Seattle in a seminar on lead-writing: "I think it's not appropriate to put a colour lead on a tragedy."

These kinds of statements appearing puzzling to anyone familiar with newspapers, where one frequently sees features about serious or tragic events. However, as I will argue in the next section, the feature form is not always chosen for the reasons reporters think it is. Feature writing is used for current news events and for tragedies. It is not always used for available human interest stories or to explain unexpected turns in current events. For one, the decision to write a story as a feature depends on the newspaper's relation to its audience and its conception of its audience's social knowledge. Reporters are more likely to use feature treatments for tragic events that are considered distant or unfamiliar for the audience, for example.

4. Newsroom issues arising from the feature-writing form

Using literary techniques whenever one is writing about "real life" provokes certain

tensions among all those who do it: historians, sociologists, "true life novelists,"

anthropologists, magazine writers. Journalists in the commercial news media are no

exception, although they add the idiosyncrasies of their workplace culture to what can be

seen as a classic and enduring conflict over language's functions – informative, persuasive,

poetic.

At first glance, journalists who get recognized as "good" feature writers in their

newsrooms would seem to have achieved success in newsroom terms. They get favorable

assignments, they are generally allowed more time to work on their stories and their stories

usually get prominent play in the newspaper.[2] They are more likely to win feature-writing

awards. They are more likely to "graduate" to writing columns, magazine articles or books.

And, because their styles are distinctive, they attract more public attention and even a loyal

following of readers. Even for reporters who are not full-time feature writers for their

newspapers, the desire to write features is strong.

However, the status of features in newspapers is much more anomalous than that

first glance reveals. Michael Schudson has observed that, even in contemporary journalism,

(where feature writing is not synonymous with sensationalism, the way it was at the turn of

the century), "feature reporting takes a back seat to hard news in the journalistic hierarchy of

importance." (1987: 11) An editor interviewed for this thesis stated that even more

forcefully:

> Hard news is just formula writing, but the people who write the hard news,
> they're viewed as the important reporters, even by their bosses. Good feature

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[2] For instance, Montreal Gazette feature writer David Johnston had 50 bylined stories in 1995, almost half
of them, 22, on the front page. The newspaper's court reporter, in contrast, wrote 178 stories and only 19
of them were on the front page. At the Vancouver Sun, feature writer Pete McMartin wrote 77 stories in
1995 and 50 of them were on the front page. The paper's Supreme Court reporter wrote 240 stories; 13 of
them were on the front page.

writers are seen as really important and invaluable, but they're not viewed in that same sort of exciting light. (Duncan, Interview)

As I will detail in this section, a news storytelling style that deviates from the purely informational (or at least the form that has come to be accepted as that) creates discomfort among journalists, for a number of reasons. First, it is frequently perceived as violating one of the two basics of journalists' ideology: the emphasis on public service and the resistance to or outright denial of economic imperatives. Second, this news form poses problems for production routines and norms. And finally, feature stories challenge the industry's second basic ideological principle: objectivity.

a. Features as marketing, not information

Working reporters and editors have a long tradition of regarding features with either disdain or suspicion. Essays and poetry, the original "feature" material of American Colonial papers, were seen as filler, something to be used only when more important items were in short supply. Richard Draper in the *Boston News-Letter*, wrote in 1763 that: "When there happens to be a scarcity of News, we will insert Pieces of Speculation that may be entertaining to the Reader." (Mott, 1962: 56) As I detailed in the last chapter, that attitude, that features are light stuff written when there is no real news around, was prevalent in early journalism textbooks and it continues to resurface at regular intervals. Melvin Mencher, in his classic textbook, *News Reporting and Writing*, described a feature as something that "aims to entertain through the use of material that is interesting but not necessarily important." (1981: 198) Even more critically, John Hohenberg wrote, in the journalism textbook *The Professional Journalist*:

> The human interest twist, while it invariably adds to public attentiveness, also entails the inevitable risk of distortion. It can illuminate the news at many levels if it is applied with taste and discrimination in appropriate situations, but nothing is likely to be more embarrassing to a reporter than a mawkish personal story where the news calls for clear writing and a detached position. Such pieces are usually spiked. (1969: 205)

But even that is not the worst that journalism practitioners have to say about the feature form. The sensationalism and yellow journalism that characterized American newspapers at the turn of the century left a lingering distaste for feature-writing that has lasted several decades. In the chapter on feature writing in his textbook, Melvin Mencher outlined the shady history of sensationalism, which he connected to feature writing, and noted that "the feature has been approached gingerly by many editors because of its abuse by the penny press and, later, by some publishers, notably William Randolph Hearst." (1981: 198)

Sensationalism comprises three basic dimensions: an emphasis on personalities, a preference for trivial over significant news; and the use of colloquial, personal language – the basics of any good storytelling, some argue.

> There is at least a modicum of sensationalism in any news account intended
> to grab the reader's attention, so perhaps as Warren Francke has suggested,
> 'the very elements of story-telling are so interwoven with the concept (of
> sensationalism) that any interesting news risks the damning label.' The more
> chatty and breezy its tone, the more likely a piece of prose is to be branded
> sensational. (Stevens, 1991: 6)

This is all part of what Michael Schudson has described as the "moral war" that developed between "information journalism" and "story journalism" in the 1890s. Until about the time of the Civil War in the United States, all classes of the population showed a common preference for ornate and somewhat melodramatic writing. But around the 1890s, Adolph Ochs' marketing of the *New York Times* as decent, sober, accurate and filled with information highlighted the divergence between different types of newspapers for two different classes. Papers like the *Times* aimed at the professional classes of the city and clearly were accurate in their targeting of a population who wanted to read about a rational, orderly world. Papers like Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World*, on the other hand, catered to readers who were nonparticipants in city life and dependent on the economic and political decisions of others. Because of that class difference, "information journalism" began to be

seen as the badge of respectability while "story journalism" carried with it a hint of moral shame. As well, as I outlined in the previous section, as well, the popular press and television continue to be characterized by a more narrative style in general. And even when the prestige press does use narrative form in its feature stories, its prevailing mode is irony, in contrast to the romantic and melodramatic modes of popular-press storytelling.

So the association of storytelling with lower-class reading tastes and "moral shame" is not an attitude that has disappeared. Tabloids, of course, are considered to be beneath serious attention as Elizabeth Bird has amply documented. But even feature writing at mainstream newspapers, which has been getting positive reinforcement inside the industry for at least 20 years, is still subject to ambivalent attitudes. Journalists still tend to define newspapers as "featury" or "hard" and to equate "featury" papers with the light, the trivial, the overly sentimental, the tabloid and the populist.

A vivid illustration of the continuing prevalence of these largely unspoken journalistic assumptions took place at *The Vancouver Sun*, beginning in the fall of 1995. From 1991 until 1995, the paper's editor-in-chief was Ian Haysom, who had a noticeably populist style. He encouraged human interest stories, stories about or including average people, feature-writing and a newspaper that at least made the motions of being responsive to the public. The newspaper had focus groups to ask the public what they thought of coverage and it encouraged more public input, through new formats like the "Voices" column, which allowed average readers to express their opinions and tell personal stories at length. John Cruickshank, who arrived at the *Vancouver Sun* in September 1995 as the new editor, was critical of the paper's emphasis on features and feature-writing. In response to an interview question about whether the *Sun* was a "newsy" or a "featury" paper, he responded:

> My feeling was, when I first arrived at the *Sun*, was that the place was in a panic about circulation and had been for some time and, as a consequence,

there had been a tendency to allow marketing issues to become paramount and a loss of faith, if you will, in the ability to win and to hold on to readers through a vigorous news agenda.

An Angus Reid survey done shortly after his arrival appeared to make the link between the decline of "information journalism" and the rise of "story journalism" in the *Sun,* although of course it wasn't put in those terms. The survey repeated questions from a survey done three years earlier, which asked people how they rated the *Sun* in terms of international, national, and local coverage, as well as in terms of features. The second survey's numbers showed a marked decline in the number of people who thought the *Vancouver Sun*'s coverage of national and international issues was good and a marked increase in the number who thought its features had improved. Cruickshank's objective, then, became to return the newspaper to a more information-oriented stance and move it away from that feature orientation. He reduced the number of columnists in the newspaper, reduced the number of Voices columns, discontinued public consultation groups, and repeatedly told editors and reporters that the paper needed to move away from its emphasis on feature-writing and start focusing on news. In contrast to other editors, who had strongly emphasized the need to get "real people" into stories, Cruickshank said he did not feel every news story had to have a human face. He also indicated a strong preference for political and public-policy news. Although Cruickshank did not articulate this as a marketing strategy, people within the newsroom generally interpreted this as a sign that the paper was planning to go "up market" – that is, move away from anything with tabloid characteristics and instead try to appeal to a more literate group of people interested in "serious" news.

It is important to emphasize at this point that the crucial element in all of this is not what feature stories are or can be, but the way journalists perceive them – as light, as down market, as trivial, as sentimental, as not serious. Obviously, all kinds of writers, including reporters for commercial news media, have managed to use literary techniques to convey

serious information. Features may be used to provide more complete coverage on all kinds of topics, ranging from the light to the serious. As Michael Schudson points out, "[i]nformation journalism is not necessarily more accurate than story journalism." (1978: 119) But information journalism has acquired the status of being fair and accurate, while story journalism has not. When journalists talk among themselves, "features" and "feature-writing" become iconic symbols of certain qualities that are associated with tabloid or popular, as opposed to elite, newspapers.

That kind of dichotomous thinking (literary technique = feature = light; neutral writing = hard news = serious) is something that frequently affects feature writers and what they are assigned to write. Pete McMartin, who primarily writes features for the *Vancouver Sun*, expressed it this way:

> Because I'm perceived as one of the better writers, I get certain stories. Because you can write, you end up getting a preponderance of fluff. You get stories about the weather, Hallowe'en, dogs. If I were a plodder and gnawed a story to death, maybe I'd be put on the election beat. I'm sort of like the after-dinner mint.

Lisa Fitterman, who has been a feature writer at *The Montreal Gazette* and *The Vancouver Sun* and is known for using a very colloquial, personal style, observed a similar trend. She said that, not only did editors assume she could only write features, but only a certain type: "Light, bright and trite. If you needed a light, bright and trite reporter, send Lisa." Of course, not everyone who is considered a feature writer has that label applied. But generally, those who avoid it are those who mix their feature writing with a strong component of hard-news writing or they tend to tackle only the most serious topics in their feature writing.

Adding to the way journalists stratify news forms into high-status hard news and low-status features, there is a significant body of academic research on media that reflects the same thinking. Of course, that does not include all academic research. In the last

chapter, I surveyed academic and industry research that indicated that newspapers could help their readers by moving away from the inverted-pyramid story structure and into one that is more narrative. As well, there is a branch of media research into popular culture that tends to validate popular cultural forms like tabloids or sensationalism, seeing them as legitimate expressions of oral story-telling or lower-class discourse that is denigrated because it deviates from middle-class modes of expression. However, this branch of research tends to focus its attention on those popular forms, leaving other researchers to define the norms for mainstream or elite journalism, norms that reproduce the hierarchy that journalists have. Researchers who are looking at the economic and ideological determinants of media are particularly inclined to fall into that dichotomized thinking, where journalism is viewed as being either information or entertainment. Therefore, while some academic studies have found positive approaches associated with changing newspaper writing styles, these others argue the need for newspapers to maintain their traditional, primarily informational approach. For example, one study observed that people turn primarily to television to satisfy their "stimulation need" and primarily to newspapers for their "surveillance need" – that is, their desire to reassure themselves about events in the community and nation and to assuage anxiety about not knowing what is going on. It concluded that:

> Partly in response to the perceived threat of television, newspapers often
> promote heavily their entertainment features and "people" packages rather
> than their traditional strengths, the presentation of news and analysis in
> depth. But ... this may not be the best approach .... Newspapers are seen first
> of all as information machines, not companions or entertainers [and they]
> newspapers ought to promote themselves as repositories of the information
> that will relieve that anxiety and hasten integration into the community.
> (Lain, 1986: 73-74)

Another study of newspaper readership concluded:

> Attempts to maintain readership by making the newspaper more like
> television and other entertainment media seem misdirected. To judge from
> other research, television has improved its competitive edge versus the press
> by upgrading its public affairs programming, which is to say by becoming
> more like the newspaper. (Chaffee and Choe, 1981:211)

That media research tends to reflect the industry presumption that features or soft news cannot inform and that they are produced primarily for the purpose of revenue-enhancement (Scott and Gobetz, 1992; Turow, 1983; Turow, 1984). One of the rare exceptions to this is John McManus's recent book on market-driven journalism, which conceptualizes four categories of news: one that is high in entertainment values and low in "orientation" values, a second high in orientation and low in entertainment, a third low in both orientation and entertainment, and a fourth high in both orientation and entertainment. This last he described as "optimal," pleasing both viewers who watch for pleasure and viewers who watch to be informed. (1994: 121-123)

It should be added that there is a gender-based dimension to the discomfort over features and feature styles. As women reporters have frequently noticed, the terms "soft news" and "features" were first applied to subjects thought primarily to interest women and the whole hard/soft question has distinctly gendered overtones.

> Hard news? Soft news? Where did these terms come from? Their sexual implications fairly leap from the page. Hard news is news about foreign policy, the federal deficit, bank robberies. Historically, men's stuff. The right stuff. Soft news is news about the Four F's – family, food, fashion and furnishings. Women's stuff. Back of the book. Plays, movies, books. Lifestyle.... The hard news-soft news distinction is becoming increasingly absurd. Yet it still governs the way some newspaper people distinguish what is important, who should cover it, and who should supervise that coverage. (Mills, 1988: 110)

As was documented in the second chapter, there has been a consistent theme in newspaper marketing history of targeting female audiences in particular. Advertisers want newspapers to make sure they are attracting women readers, so that they can be sure their consumer messages are reaching them. Originally, newspapers did that by including content they felt women would be interested in. It is not coincidental that many early human-interest features and sensational stories were covered by women reporters known derogatorily as "sob sisters."

As a result, there has come to be an assumed linkage between marketing, features, women's issues, sensationalism and trivial or unimportant subject matter. The assumed equivalency between women, features and lightweight issues has been so strong that one of the first things the women's movement did in the 1960s was to lobby to have news of their activities reported as hard news and in the hard news sections of the paper (Mills, 1988: 124). Although many newspapers dissolved their women's sections in the 1970s and 1980s in favor of apparently generalized feature sections, called "Life" or "Style" or some other non-gender-specific name, those sections continue to be dominated by what are still perceived as largely women's issues: food, childcare, social issues, families, relationships, health and wellness (as opposed to doctors and the established medical system) and the like.

b.   Features as disruptions to routine

Feature-writing also disrupts newsroom routines and creates tension for both editors and reporters, as they struggle with a form that the news production schedule is not well organized to handle. One study found that journalists identified their biggest obstacles to "good writing" as the newsroom itself. The newsroom's procedures were identified as the problem at the top of the list. Second were deadline pressures, space limitations or formal limitations. Finally, copy and supervising editors were named as obstacles (Coulson and Gaziano, 1989).

In an earlier chapter, I noted that one of the attractions of features was that they, in fact, help solve newspaper production problems by providing a mass of copy that is not dependent on stories of the day from institutional sources and that is not time-related. While that is true, it is important to make some distinctions here. Newsrooms are typically divided into specialized departments that produce certain types of news. Sports, business, entertainment, lifestyle and city departments are the most common, with some staff devoted to putting out a weekend magazine or the Saturday and Sunday papers. Some sections run

almost nothing but features: stories without a time element, without an institutional source and on topics generally regarded as "soft." The lifestyle and weekend sections, dealing with topics like leisure, family life, and consumption, are the most geared to feature production and they do it well. However, other departments have varying degrees of difficulty generating features, in particular city departments. Like other departments -- sports, business and entertainment -- a city department is expected to generate a mix of hard news and features. City departments tend to have larger staffs and a larger space to fill, both of which create production problems in terms of trying to co-ordinate everyone to get the right balance of news and features produced every day. Some newsrooms attempt to solve the problem by designating some reporters as only feature writers, thus assuring a constant supply of features, and making de facto hard-news-only reporters out of others. However, most reporters in the newsroom are still expected to supply a mix of the two forms of news. That creates a great deal of uncertainty on a day-to-day basis about what mix of news will appear for that evening's deadline. The result is that, while news managers may value the balance and "entertainment" value that features provide, production needs frequently dictate that they demand stories that can be produced quickly. This becomes particularly noticeable when staff numbers decrease.

Features create time problems not just for reporters, but for editors as well. Newsdesks are best equipped to handle the hard-news, inverted-pyramid format, which allows editors to focus on content only: what is the most important fact, is it supported by the remainder of the story, and are the facts in the proper hierarchy? As well, the descending-order-of-importance form of the hard-news story allows editors to cut stories very easily to fit space available. Feature stories, on the other hand, demand that editors look at stories for both news value and storytelling style. Their story organization and focus on the ending make them difficult to cut straight from the bottom.

Narrative-style stories also require reporters and editors to take more of a risk with sources. As Gaye Tuchman and Mark Fishman have noted, a constant need to avoid libel and be sure of credibility while working to deadline pressure leads reporters to rely primarily on "authorized knowers" or "unimpeachable sources" for their information. (Tuchman, 1978: 85) Writing narrative stories, which we have noted allows the introduction of non-authorized knowers into news stories, means having to use the information of people who do not have the social status or title normally associated with information providers. To minimize the risk, reporters or editors have to work to contain whatever it is those "average" people are saying, either by restricting them to stories where they are authorized knowers only about their own lives or limiting what they say to innocuous statements. Again, that is a more complex and time-consuming process than just relying on standard sources who, along with all of their other attractive attributes, frequently have learned how to communicate efficiently with media, unlike non-expert sources, who tend to ramble and stray off the reporter's point.

c.   Features as challenges to objectivity

Finally, and I believe this is the most significant conflict, feature-writing by definition, with its use of narrative structures and distinctive, personal language, is a form that challenges the underlying principle of objectivity that is the basis for contemporary journalism. Newsrooms work to contain the most troublesome aspects of feature-writing and to contain features within certain accepted parameters, but those that escape mark the border of the industry's struggle to maintain a position of objectivity and neutrality for itself.

Leo Bogart, who studied newspaper writing and readership for the Newspaper Advertising Council, noted the connection between a concern for objectivity and the suppression of certain writing styles.

The historical emphasis on objectivity in American
journalism has always meant a deemphasis on the colorful
personal style of writing that other journalistic traditions have
fostered. There is rarely in the American press a positive
emphasis on good writing for its own sake or on the
expression of a peculiarly personal (and often myopic) vision
of the kind that has flourished in the European and Latin-
American press. (1989: 169)

The two ways that objectivity is defined in general, by many professional groups, is

by its separation of fact from opinion and by its use of accepted methods within the

professional group for ensuring that what is observed will be accepted as fact. The methods

that W. Lance Bennett has identified as the basics in the journalistic practice of objectivity

are: assuming the stance of a politically neutral adversary, seeking appropriate sources,

observing prevailing standards of decency and good taste, using documentary reporting

practices (which by his definition means that journalists to report only what they can

observe or support with physical evidence), and using a standardized format – the news

story – for packaging the news. (1988:12) To this, I would add two other components of the

objective style. One is the emphasis on cognitive, rather than emotional, response. The other

is an emphasis on "transparent" language, with no idiosyncratic phrases or unusual,

individual uses of language that tend to alert readers to the indeterminacy and selectivity of

language, and on neutral language, which attempts to minimize any appearance of

subjectivity on the writer's part. Objective stories are marked by their impersonal language

and standardized style, as the following piece of advice from the *Montreal Gazette* style

guide makes clear:

Remember this: you're a writer or an editor, but you're primarily a teller. If
the reader comes away saying, "Boy, that guy sure can write!" rather than
"Well, that's the information I needed," be flattered, but consider the
possibility that you're in the wrong line of work. ... This kind of writing is
more demanding than that of the self-expression-oriented "artiste" who is
concerned chiefly with only one kind of content – that of his (her) innards. If
you want to display your creative power or your sophistication or the scope
of your intellect – or for that matter, if your purpose is to lead mankind to

> global peace, universal love and an end to leghold trapping – you're not in the right place. (Gelmon, 1991: v-vi.)

Distinct turns of phrase, adjectives, adverbs, bits of extraneous description – anything that calls attention to the writer or appears to imply some kind of subjective assessment is generally removed in hard-news stories. The more junior the reporter and the more "serious" the event is judged to be, the more likely it is that that rule will be strictly enforced. That concern about maintaining "objective" language is reflected in some newspaper research. One study noted that colorful writing can generate mistrust in readers. When writers used active attributive verbs along with body language statements ("half rising from his chair," "pointing his finger at the audience"), it caused readers to perceive the entire news story suspiciously.

> This finding suggests that the use of strong attributive verbs and "body language" statements might lend excitement to the stories, but they are also more likely to be judged as less believable, accurate, clear or objective. In addition, Cole and Shaw suggest that what a reporter might gain in story excitement, he or she could conceivably lose in credibility. (Burgoon, Burgoon and Wilkinson, 1981: 227)

On all counts, feature stories, if they fully exploit the possibilities of the genre, have the potential to transgress all of these rules for objectivity. They are written specifically to elicit an emotional response from readers. They use evocative, descriptive language. Feature writers do not always use appropriate sources -- one of the distinguishing characteristics of the feature style is that it privileges the accounts of "average people," non-institutional sources. Feature writers are also more likely to transgress the bounds of good taste and decency, as they report the conversations of those not normally allowed access to hard-news stories and as they describe the effects of war, sexual assault, illness, child abuse or other subjects that hard-news stories typically confine through inoffensive language.

Feature-writing permits the writer to stray from using strictly documentary techniques. This aspect of feature writing causes journalists to engage in some of their most

energetic boundary defining, as they unite to condemn practices that contradict the objective method. Feature writers who recreate scenes that they have not been at, who purport to write the thoughts of people in their stories, or who create composite characters come in for some of the most severe criticism in the industry. W. Lance Bennett observed, in a 1985 study, that journalists, rather than being passive victims at the mercy of prevailing news logic, actively work to enforce normative behavior and patrol the boundaries of acceptable journalistic activity. When there is a transgression, they engage in strenuous "repair work" to establish the norms and cast the offender as an outsider. There have been many examples of journalistic "repair work" done to re-establish the boundary crossed by those pushing literary and fiction techniques to the limit. One of the most well-known, of course, is the case of Janet Cooke at the *Washington Post*, who created a fictional "composite," an eight-year-old heroin addict, in order to create a central character for her feature story on drug addiction. Significantly, the ensuing debate did not centre on two of the more salient points: whether the story was true in essence, although not in details, and how much the pressure to find the necessary "central character" for the feature genre played a part. Instead, news stories and editors' opinions focused on the use of unnamed sources, the pressures of newsrooms to win awards and Cooke's personality (Anderson, 1982; Eason, 1988). The same kind of criticism emerged when a Vancouver columnist at the *Province* newspaper, Lyn Cockburn, said she had created a composite character in writing a column about someone who had helped a friend with AIDS commit suicide (Ouston, 1991). Cockburn and her editor were criticized for a number of years over that column and public debate was vociferous enough that it prompted B.C.'s chief coroner to open an investigation in order to discover the identity of the anonymous column characters. It was never proven one way or the other whether Cockburn's character had some basis in reality but, some years later, a

Simon Fraser University doctoral student did document in his thesis on euthanasia a number of B.C. cases with similar circumstances (Todd, 1994).

But these incidents are not the only ones where journalists have united to condemn the intrusion of fiction techniques into "objective" reporting. Tom Goldstein, in his book about the ethical compromises journalists make to shape the news, begins with a reference to reporters' "troublesome" practice of reconstructing scenes that they were never at (1985:11-12). This is a relatively common technique in feature stories, where reporters need to come up with the kind of physical, scene-setting detail that is one of the characteristic elements of the feature form. Journalists have also been prominent in criticisms of writers who write stories that detail a subject's unexpressed thoughts. There was a flurry of journalistic criticism when Joe McGinniss wrote a book about Ted Kennedy that created dialogue and described what Kennedy was purportedly thinking at various moments. (Baker, 1993; Diebel, 1993; Kurtz, 1993) One critic called this "turning history into fiction," adding that McGinniss had become a "dealer in industrial-size catnip for the vast human market that gorges on Sunday-night docudramas, grocery tabloids, big-budget movies and gossip-dispensing machines." (Baker, 1993) At a more local level, there was internal criticism from journalists when *Vancouver Sun* reporter Robert Mason Lee wrote features where he related the thoughts and actions of people just before they died: one about a man who died while climbing Mount Everest (Lee, 1993a); the other about a woman who drowned in a capsized boat that had been hit by a tug (Lee, 1993b).

Finally, the fundamental problem of feature writing is that, ultimately, it is an attempt at traditional narrative. And, by definition, traditional narrative demands a personal and subjective viewpoint that it asks the reader to submit to. Reporters and editors recognize that what makes the best feature-writing is that individual style. One editor's approving

assessment of a feature: "This story has the writer's signature on it, the kind of writing touches that make the story have a personal hallmark." (Mencher, 1981: 204)

Even if the narrator of a feature is not inserting himself directly into the story, he structures the pictures of reality through his selection of physical details that others might not even notice. As Michael Bell writes, "[t]he narrative seeks to convince; and in doing so it seeks the reader's commitment to its fundamental terms." (1993: 179) Michael Curtin also observes that the television documentary has similar problems combining narrative and traditional notions of objectivity.

> Thus, the documentary's claims to offer an unprejudiced rendering of
> objective reality were strained by a number of factors associated with the
> story-telling conventions of popular television, including considerations of
> plot, character, pursuit of an affective response from audiences, and
> conscious competition with entertainment programming. (1993: 19)

The problem, then, of news stories that are constructed into narratives is that they must maintain the balance between the news industry's ethic of objectivity, impersonality and neutrality and the personal vision that it takes to create a narrative-style story. That means newspaper feature stories are always more restrained than the feature reports or literary non-fiction of magazines or books and newspaper reporters and editors do more repair and containment work to mark out the boundaries. Vicky Hay, detailing the differences between newspaper and magazine feature writing, notes that newspaper features usually require the reporter to be more objective, take a third-person stance and avoid certain literary techniques like "telling the story from a participant's point of view, extensive dialogue, and lengthy, detailed description." (1990: 3) She contends that magazines, which cater more to specialty markets and are more heavily dependent on advertising than newspapers, have a much heavier focus on entertaining readers. As a result, they allow reporters to be less objective and to interpret facts and events to fit a particular viewpoint.

CHAPTER FOUR

FEATURE WRITING ON THE PAGE

So far, this thesis has looked at how the feature form is used to broaden newspapers'
marketing attempts, to satisfy certain production gaps, and to deal with events, processes
and information that fall outside the rules for "hard news." As well, I have outlined what
journalists say they are trying to accomplish with the feature form and how they construct
feature stories. Now I turn to the stories themselves, to look at what their component parts
are, what techniques are dominant, and how, where and why they are used. As will be seen,
this does not always match what journalists believe they are doing with feature stories.

I examined feature stories using two methods. First, I looked at story construction
and characteristics in all the stories from two samples in two newspapers. The tendency in
analyzing feature-writing is to focus on memorable features, those that are noticeably bad or
good. By analyzing a week's worth of coverage in two newspapers, I wanted to focus on the
consistent, standard, day-to-day patterns of story-form use and construction. But feature
stories also tend to represent particular points in the overall coverage of a news event and
they have a broad range to which a couple of seven-day samples will not do justice. In
particular, it is difficult to understand the relationship a feature story may have with news
coverage that extends over several months. Therefore, I also sought out examples of stories
that illustrated certain aspects of feature-writing that were not evident from the samples. The
two samples I analyzed were from the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, a broadsheet newspaper in
a major American metropolitan market that is one of two dailies in the city, and the *Victoria
Times-Colonist*, a broadsheet newspaper that is the only daily newspaper serving that mid-
sized Canadian city. I chose these two newspapers because they were accessible and because
both are typical examples of standard, broadsheet, urban newspapers of the kind to be found

in dozens of cities across Canada and the United States. It would have been interesting to compare their use of story forms with other types of newspapers – tabloids, community newspapers, or special-interest newspapers – but that was outside the scope of this study.

The circulation of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (hereafter referred to as the PI) is 203,679 Monday to Saturday; on Sunday, when it puts out a combined edition with the Seattle Times, it is 503,619, according to audited circulation figures for 1995. The *Victoria Times-Colonist* (the TC) circulation is 77,810 during Monday to Saturday, 76,253 on Sundays. I look at the week of Monday, Nov. 13, to Sunday, Nov. 19, for this sample. In that period, the PI produced 323 stories and the TC, 434. It was a slightly more eventful news week than the standard, very eventful compared to summer or Christmas seasons. In the United States, some major events were the federal government shutdown over a failure to reach agreement on the budget, a space shuttle mission, a Seattle teachers' strike, a Boeing machinists' strike, and the opening of a sex-abuse trial in the Washington interior. In Canada, the major events were the resignation of British Columbia Premier Mike Harcourt, the allegations of bribery surrounding former prime minister Brian Mulroney concerning the Airbus purchase, and the aftermath of the Quebec referendum.

1. The storytelling genres

The previous chapter identified two examples of newspapers' two storytelling genres in their most easily identifiable forms. One, a crime story with the police as a source, was written as a "hard news" story, with a minimum of stylistic effort, an objective, neutral tone, and little attempt at description. The other, a feature story about the process of mounting a theatre production, used informal language, had "soft" content, focused on an individual to start the story, and was structured as a narrative.

However, many newspaper stories do not fall neatly into those two easily identifiable forms. This is not surprising, since the division between the two is an artificial one created by industry demands. When someone looks at an actual newspaper, as opposed to reading journalism textbooks or hearing journalists define their work, it is evident that there is a large range of story types. There are sports scores and stock listings, for instance, reported as unadorned numbers. There are "notebooks" and briefs that contain two- or three-paragraphs chunks of information. There are columns and analysis and opinion pieces and editorials. There are short hard-news stories, long hard-news stories, short human-interest "brights," mid-sized features, and very long features -- some on government budgets, others on film actors -- that cover a broadsheet page. All these story styles blend some combination of information and narrative. If one uses the definition of narrative that says its basic element is a change in condition over time, then even sports scores and stock tables, with their inclusion of overall records or the previous day's activity, contain some element of narrative. For the purposes of this thesis, I looked only at stories that were recognizably identifiable as news and feature stories: they had headlines, they had bylines, they were not columns or opinion pieces or letters, and they were more than just a collection of short items in a briefs or notebook package. Within that group, it is still possible to generally categorize stories into the two basic types: hard news and features. However, there are sub-groups within each of those categories.

How to tell the difference between hard news and features? I have to note here that attempting to categorize these stories was one of the most perplexing, but illuminating, pieces of research for this thesis. As an experienced journalist, I started off defining stories as hard news or features mainly by feel. After 13 years of reporting and editing, I know when something is a hard-news or feature story without consciously identifying the particular elements that make me think that's what it is. However, I regularly came across stories that

I stumbled over: Is this news? Is it a news feature? Is this a news story with some feature elements in it that are confusing me? Some of the elements that I had taken as given basics of one form or the other didn't always hold to the rule. For example, frequently I came across stories that were pegged to a recent event, they were about serious topics, but they had a feature feel to them. Other times, I found myself looking at stories that appeared to conform to all the rules of the inverted-pyramid, hard-news story, but the content was clearly considered to be light and trivial. The academic literature on the difference between "hard" and "soft" was not especially helpful. The Scott and Gobetz study of the increase in soft news content in television broadcasts defined "hard news" as "any story that focuses on issues of ongoing policy consideration, factual accounting of current public events, or social issues and controversies that concern members of the audience" and that had occurred within the past 24 hours. Soft news "was defined as any story that focuses on a human interest topic, feature or non-policy issue" and that did not have a timeliness aspect. (1992: 408) This seemed subjective and ambiguous. What did "factual accounting" mean? How would someone classify a story about the importance of pets in producing improved mental and physical well-being in their owners? A "social issues that concerns members of the audience"? Or human interest feature? What about the dramatic accounts of hurricane survivors? Human interest? Or, because it is about a recent event, hard news? It is clear that this kind of categorization focuses heavily on content, with a serious/not serious polarization, while what I have been saying is that any issue can be formatted into one genre or the other. What I am looking at is the relationship between news values, representational strategy and content.

That confusion forced me to backtrack and begin to analyze what it was that I had used in previous stories to make me think they were hard news or features. Once I had a rudimentary list of basic characteristics for each genre, I could go back to the story I was

puzzled over and assign it to one category or another. For example, if I was not sure how to classify a particular story, I could look at the basic characteristics: where was the "average person" placed in the story, did the language in the lead call attention to itself with a metaphor or a pun, how much quotation was there, how many unattributed sentences were there. Inevitably, there would be a pattern that pushed the story closer to one genre than another. Doing this, I realized that I (or any other journalist) would define a story coming from a single study or survey or report as "hard news." But a story that essentially said the same thing as a single Statistics Canada study or journal article in the *New England Journal of Medicine* might announce – that television is increasingly being geared to women, that the income gap is widening between the rich and poor, that doctors treat babies of HIV mothers less aggressively than other babies – was perceived as a feature if it relied on several sources and if a report or survey cited as substantiation was not prominently mentioned or recent. In other words, I saw it as a feature if the story appeared to have been generated by the reporter rather than a single source: he or she had brought the story into being by imagining its topic and had gone to several sources to provide the pieces to flesh that out. I identified that kind of creative work as going on when I read stories where the reporter took on more of a narrator's role, stating facts without attributing them, and where multiple sources were used to back up the thesis of the story.

My method of classification has its obvious apparent weaknesses. For one, at first glance it appears tautological. It seems to be saying: A hard-news story is anything with a yesterday time element and an institutional authority as the first source and any story with those two characteristics is a hard-news story. Second, I could not be sure that another person could replicate exactly the classifications (which I have detailed in a table at the end of this section) that I came up with. However, I am confident that a sample group of journalists, asked to classify news stories, would come up with approximately the same

divisions that I did, and that a researcher would go through the same process that I performed on myself, that is, determining from the spontaneous classifications what the elements were that caused that group of journalists to categorize a story as one or the other form. (An interesting piece of research, but beyond the scope of this thesis.) While some of the details might be different, the essential observations, I believe, would remain the same. As well, some of the distinguishing characteristics I have observed – the use of metaphors, the tendency of features to be cast in the subjunctive tense, the hard-news orientation to the immediate past 24 hours; the time structure of hard-news stories – have been documented by other studies.

A data table and explanatory notes that summarize the categories are provided at the end of this section, pages 123-124.

a. Hard news and the inverted pyramid

What is a hard-news story? When is the inverted-pyramid form used? In general, the basic characteristics of the hard news story that remained constant were: an identifiable, discrete event; a time frame for that event that is limited to the past 24 hours; an institutionally authorized source, either a report or a person, as the main source for the story; a preponderance of institutionally authorized sources throughout the story; "average people" play minor roles, either not quoted at all or only quoted lower in the story; a high proportion of statements that are attributed to a source (he said, she said) and the reporter/narrator makes few independent statements; a low proportion of sentences that use language or literary devices that call attention to themselves – metaphors, puns, visual imagery. These types of stories are structured as inverted pyramids, with the main point of the story being stated with overwhelming frequency in the first paragraph of the news story. Occasionally, the news might be spread across the first two paragraphs and, for one sub-

category of "hard news" that I will detail later, the main point of the story is slightly delayed but will occur no later than the fourth paragraph. As Teun van Dijk observed, the time structure and language of news stories, by which he means hard-news stories, are complex. Although news stories can be as long as 35 paragraphs, few of them are. Most are somewhere between eight and 25 paragraphs. The placement of background or context is crucial. It is impossible to write a news story without any background or context, but the more "hard news" a story is, the lower down the background or context will be and the less of it there will be.[1] Finally, the hard news story tends to be stronger in some news values than others. The hard-news story is more likely to: be negative; be about an unambigious event; refer to elite nations; refer to elite persons; be part of a continuing story; and be unexpected. As well, it is almost always focused on an event with a short time span.

I identified three broad sub-divisions of hard news. The first was the "straight" hard-news story, written in the inverted-pyramid form, where background or context was absent from the lead paragraph and was instead placed lower down in the story. One of the core news values (and news production virtues) is unambiguity. The more obvious is it that something is "news," without any need for explanation – an earthquake, an accident, a murder, a resignation, a declaration of war – the more easily it falls into the hard-news format and the less context it needs. As well, the statements of elite groups about what are perceived to be well-known subjects are treated the same way.

An example:

WASHINGTON – The country is failing its moral test to care for the poor, America's Roman Catholic bishops declared yesterday, blasting both Democrats and Republicans for creating a budget impasse they said puts politics ahead of needy children and families. (Briggs, PI 15 Nov.: A3)

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[1] This is something that Eric Fredin also remarked on in his study of background and quotes in news stories. He noted that "in the traditional hard news story, background generally appears toward the bottom where it can be lopped off easily if the space is needed. Background is often treated as a kind of detail which simply supports, or, more likely, merely elaborates upon the news at the top of the story." (1994:802)

In a story like this, the reporter does not provide any immediate background, implying that readers will make the necessary assumptions and links: First, they will understand the familiar narrative theme, that "the country has a moral obligation to care for the poor." Second, they will understand that America's Roman Catholic bishops are a group worth listening to, whose pronouncements are newsworthy. Third, they will already be familiar with the narrative of the "budget impasse," which had been dominating news coverage that week.

The second category of hard-news story, still written in the inverted-pyramid form, involved a noticeable degree of contextualization, interpretation or summarization by the reporter. Michael Schudson noted in his paper on the development of narrative in political reporting that, between the 1850s and the 1900s, reporters moved from strictly transcribing statements to summarizing and then interpreting them (1982), a practice that is continued today. That observation was certainly illustrated in these kinds of stories. For instance, one story about Israel began this way, with the reporter framing the news event in advance by explaining the significance before recounting the action:

> TZOFIM, West Bank -- Seeking to demonstrate to the Israeli public that he would not neglect their security as he pursues peace with the Palestinians, acting Prime Minister Shimon Peres joined security chiefs yesterday in a tour of West Bank areas from which Israeli troops have withdrawn. ("Peres meets security needs," PI 15 Nov.: A2)

In other cases, reporters gathered disparate pieces of information to create a lead that summarized a number of elements that contributed to an overall picture of a particular situation. The source of the information was not a single individual. Instead, the reporter's story (and lead) could be the result of direct observation (most frequently with court, legislative or sports sessions), of a number of interviews with different sources, or a summary of many activities not directly observed but assumed. An example:

WASHINGTON - With the Smithsonian's museums shuttered and federal workers sent home in droves, the Clinton administration and Republican leaders failed to reach accord on the budget yesterday and sharply attacked each other over a partial government shutdown. ("No budging" PI 15 Nov.: A1)

Then there is the third type of "hard news" story, which is a news story about a time-related event that might normally be reported in the inverted-pyramid structure, but which has instead been written with some feature elements incorporated at the top of it. While it retains the basic characteristics of the hard-news story – 24-hour past orientation, geared to an event, straight language, reliance on institutional sources – it provides a reader-friendly introduction to the story through metaphors, puns, anecdotes or personalization. In stories like this, the essential news of the story is delayed until the second, third or fourth paragraph (called the "nut graph" in newsroom language). The story could survive intact if the feature material above it were removed, but, for various reasons which will be examined later, reporters and editors choose to present the news of this event in this particular way.

An example:

Medical researchers at the University of Washington have found eggs-actly what egg-loving people with cholesterol worries might want to hear.
"Two eggs a day don't make much difference if you follow a low-fat diet," said Barbara Retzlaff, a dietician at the UW and at Harborview Medical Center's Northwest Lipid Research Clinic. Retzlaff presented the findings yesterday at a California meeting of the American Heart Association. (Paulson, PI 15 Nov.: A1)

Another type of feature introduction to a news story:

June Cleaver, where are you?
An Indo-Canadian describes family differently than a lesbian – and both versions differ from that of a street person.
And while some people lament the demise of the traditional Cleaver family of Leave it to Beaver television fame, did that idealized model ever exist?
How we define family is one of the issues a $650,000 study based at the University of Victoria will investigate. (Helm, TC 14 Nov.: B1)

The first two categories of hard news, written in the straight inverted-pyramid form, continue to dominate news coverage. In both papers, slightly more than half the stories in each day's paper were told in a strictly inverted-pyramid form. Since feature stories tend to predominate in the feature sections, like sports, travel, entertainment and lifestyle, the news sections are even more heavily dominated by inverted-pyramid stories than the overall averages for the week would indicate. The third category of hard-news story I identified, where the inverted pyramid structure was only delayed for at most three paragraphs, accounted from seven to 22 per cent of a day's stories in either paper, with the average around 11.

b. Feature form and feature techniques

Feature stories may be written about recent news events. They may also be based largely on the statements of institutional sources. As well, they may concern "hard news" topics – politics, crime, business, labor. What is it, then, that characterizes the feature story? It may be any combination of the following elements: The story uses language to call attention to itself; it is more likely to contain a narrative story structure with an identifiable beginning, middle and, most important, an end; it uses informal or colloquial language; it focuses on individuals; an "average person" may become the focus of the story; the time frame extends beyond 24 hours into the past and it may include the future; the author of the story makes independent statements to contextualize and narrativize the story, relying less on attribution to establish the story's authority; the story may include a number of sources who contribute to the overall theme of the story, which has been defined by the reporter; it includes descriptions of apparently irrelevant physical details and scene-setting. Some feature stories can be short, but the average feature story is longer than the average news story. Some will extend to 70 paragraphs.

Most importantly, unlike the hard-news story, which functions as a bulletin update of a story for which the audience already has a narrative frame, the feature story provides its own narrative frame. Feature stories are meant to be read independently, without having to rely on the audience's knowledge of the narrative framework for the event. Background and context are placed prominently, if the feature is amplifying a news story or is about a social issue, so that the reader unfamiliar with the story is supplied with the framework immediately. The frame of a feature story that is attached to current news events may reflect the hard-news-story frame or it may diverge from it. (I will look at examples of that further in this chapter.)

In terms of news values, feature stories display a different constellation of news values than hard-news stories. While feature stories may sometimes be about negative news, a higher proportion of feature stories, compared to hard-news stories, are not negative. A feature story is likely to be the form used to tackle ambiguous events or processes with long time frames. As I indicated above, the feature story is more likely to personalize through the use of "average citizens" and it is the form used for stories, apart from crime stories, that are not about elite nations or elite persons.

As with hard-news stories, there are subsets of feature stories. The "news" feature is one where the subject matter is serious and is often an explanatory story attached to a recent news event. It is more likely to appear in the news pages and less likely to adopt all of the feature-form techniques, limiting itself to a few and maintaining an even-handed and "objective" treatment of sources with different viewpoints. Typical examples of this kind of news feature were those that followed the resignation of British Columbia Premier Mike Harcourt, in a familiar news-treatment pattern where a surprising news event is accompanied or followed by a cluster of features. In this case, they included a feature on potential successors, a "colour" feature that gave a dramatic, chronological account of the

resignation, and several explanatory feature stories that looked at what led to Harcourt's resignation. Other news features for the week included features on the consequences of the federal budget impasse, a new voting system in Oregon, the legal precedents that were set by the families of Paul Bernardo's victims, and the way the assassination of Israel's prime minister had brought attention to the militant group of rabbis based in New York.

There are also serious features that are not connected to a recent news event, either investigative features or social-trend features, that document overall changes in social behavior. Some examples: A feature on native women's rights in the TC's Sunday edition; a feature on the growth of distance education in the PI's Sunday edition.

Then there are the light features, most often seen in feature-oriented sections like travel, lifestyle, sports, entertainment and business. They include profiles of film actors, sports figures, new businesses and people in the community who are noteworthy – either because they are eccentric or because they do community work. They also focus on single events or people that are viewed as "light": the production of a play, a vacation in a particular place, pet-sitters.

There was one more story type identified that combined the structure of the hard-news story but the content of light features, what news writers call the "brite" – a short story about some quirky or odd event. There was rarely more than one story like that per issue of either paper; they included stories about a waitress who won the lottery after a regular customer gave her his ticket or an aging hippie charged with dope possession after the local hemp festival.

The feature story appears to be continuing to fulfill a traditional function of providing a reserve of filler copy for large weekend newspapers, in that it is the predominant form in the Sunday newspapers, particularly the combined PI and *Seattle Times* edition. Out of 81 stories, 27 were features of some kind and 14 of the news stories had feature-type leads

on them, accounting for 63 per cent of the stories in total. In general, features accounted for only about 30 per cent of stories the rest of the week, and news with feature-type leads representing another 11 or 12 per cent. The numbers of feature stories tended to be at their lowest mid-week, when news staff and news events are in full swing.

It is also the preferred storytelling form in feature sections: travel, food, entertainment, lifestyle. One of the most striking patterns of feature use was in the sports section, where more than 80 per cent of the stories in sports sections consisted of either news features (stories that either advanced or did post-mortem analysis on games), features (mainly profiles), or news with very featurized leads. These stories were unique in the amount they relied on players for quotes, opinions and information and in their use of description, metaphors, puns, dramatization and the full roster of feature techniques. Added to that, sports sections are the only sections of the newspaper where writers are allowed to be both reporters and columnists on the same subject and frequently columns and news stories are almost indistinguishable. While this may seem puzzling at first, especially if one has been exposed to essentialist ideas of gender differences in reading (men read for information and women read for story), it seems clear that present-day sports sections were developed and continue to be written to attract audiences not interested in "traditional" news, and that sports has always been considered to be a primarily working-class interest. (That appears to hold true. The *Vancouver Sun*, which positions itself as the city's up-market newspaper, reduced its sports coverage considerably in 1992. The *Province*, which positions itself as the down-market, working-class newspaper, devotes a considerable part of its newshole to sports coverage.) It is likely, then that the wide latitude allowed for feature writing in sports is directly related to the fact that it is considered to appeal primarily to working-class tastes, and those tastes are assumed to be biased toward the storytelling and colloquial language of features.

TABLE 1. Story Classifications: Distribution and Definitions

SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER, NOV. 13-19, 1995						
	Inverted pyramid/ Bulletin	Inverted pyramid/ Context	Feature lead on news story	News feature	Non-news feature	Bright	TOTALS
Monday, Nov. 13	14	1	6	5	7	0	33
Tuesday, Nov. 14	25	2	3	5	8	0	43
Wed., Nov. 15	11	15	6	6	3	0	41
Thursday, Nov. 16	26	5	4	8	3	0	46
Friday, Nov. 17	20	2	3	7	6	1	39
Saturday, Nov. 18	17	1	9	2	10	1	40
Sunday, Nov. 19	22	6	14	13	24	2	81
TOTALS	135	32	45	46	61	4	323

VICTORIA TIMES-COLONIST, NOV. 13-19, 1995						
	Inverted pyramid/ Bulletin	Inverted pyramid/ Context	Feature lead on news story	News feature	Non-news feature	Bright	TOTALS
Monday, Nov. 13	15	5	5	1	2	0	28
Tuesday, Nov. 14	30	11	7	4	6	1	59
Wed., Nov. 15	44	3	9	8	6	0	70
Thursday, Nov. 16	37	8	9	9	7	0	70
Friday, Nov. 17	47	5	8	1	12	1	74
Saturday, Nov. 18	35	7	11	4	9	1	67
Sunday, Nov. 19	27	9	5	7	17	1	66
TOTALS	235	48	54	34	59	4	434

CRITERIA FOR CLASSIFYING STORIES:

Not every story will have every one of the elements listed. Instead, stories will typically have a strong cluster of elements from one category.

INVERTED-PYRAMID/BULLETIN: A single institutional source is the main authority for the story; a defined time element – most frequently the word "yesterday" – appears in the first, second or third paragraph; the main point of the story is contained in the first paragraph; the main point of the story is repeated in the headline; the story is concerned with a single event (as opposed to a process or a trend); a high proportion of

story statements are attributed to a source; the story has a high proportion of institutional sources; background, explanatory or contextual information appears low in the story; there is no discernable conclusion to the story; "average" people are most often either not referred to at all or referred to as collective groups observing or participating in the event ("voters"); if "average people" are quoted directly, they appear in the middle or bottom third of the story; description is confined to actions relating to the news event; language is formal and literal (there is little use of metaphors, similes, and so on); reporter does not refer directly to self.

INVERTED-PYRAMID/CONTEXT: Similar to the inverted pyramid/bulletin story except for the following variations. 1. The lead summarizes information from multiple sources or sources plus reporter observation. 2. There is explanatory or contextual material in the first or second paragraphs of the story that cues the reader as to the story's significance.

FEATURE LEAD ON HARD NEWS: Similar to the hard-news/bulletin story except for the following variations, which appear at the beginning of the story: The main point of the story does not appear in the first paragraph. Instead, it is delayed to anywhere from the second to approximately the fifth paragraph. The paragraphs preceding the "nut graph" (a term used by newsworkers to describe the paragraph that summarizes what the story's main point is) may fall into several categories: 1. They contain a play on words, a metaphor or a colloquial description to briefly summarize the main point of the story, which is then repeated further down in more formal language. 2. They contain a description of a person or they recount an anecdote that was part of the news event. 3. They provide a historical or explanatory introduction to the story before the main news point is made. The story may have a conclusion, most frequently a quote from a source in the story.

NEWS FEATURE: The main point of the story may appear anywhere from the first to approximately the 10th paragraph; the introductory paragraphs describe a person who illustrates the theme of the story; the introductory paragraphs describe an anecdote that illustrates the theme of the story; the introduction uses colloquial, humorous or literary language; the story contains passive description of people or places; there are multiple sources for the story; the story has a high proportion of institutional sources; a low proportion of statements are attributed to a source; story may contain contradictory information from opposing or different perspectives; there is an identifiable time element to the story – it is an expansion on an event that occurred yesterday, earlier in the week or month, or is about to occur; there is a recognizable conclusion or closure to the story, most often through the use of a 'telling' quote by one of the sources; the "average" person is in the beginning third of the story and institutional sources follow; the "average" person is quoted; the story is accompanied by a prominent photograph; the story centres on a process, a system or a trend rather than an event.

FEATURE: No time element or time element is vague; source numbers are low - a single source or few sources; low proportion of institutional sources; story may rely exclusively on non-institutional sources; story contains little or no information that contradicts or opposes the central theme or point of view in the story; passive description of character or setting in story; nut graph may be absent; story is accompanied by prominent photograph; headline has no verb expressing action; story, headline and photo arrangement diverge from standard news visual presentation; reporter may refer directly to self; story uses colloquial, humorous or literary language; story has a conclusion; conclusion may be reporter's own play on words or ironic final twist.

BRIGHT: Story length is short; story tells its primary news within the first three paragraphs; tone is humorous or ironic; conforms more closely to the form of the inverted-pyramid/context story than any of the other classifications.

2. Structure and elements of the feature form

This section will look in more detail at the key characteristics of the feature form and analyze the reasons for their use. I will look primarily at four areas where the composition or approach of feature stories differs substantially from hard-news stories: the use of "average people"; the use of sensory detail; the use of language; and the story structure.

a. "Sources" and "characters"

Hard news stories are defined by their institutional sources. It is impossible to imagine a hard-news story being written that does not include an institutional source, with the exception of investigative stories, which instead rely on institutional documents. Alternative or non-government groups that want to get their point of view into mass media have found one of the most effective methods is to constitute themselves as an institution and to issue statements and reports. As well, the more elite the source, the more important the story is generally judged to be. (Tuchman 91-92; Fishman 92-101; Ericson 191) When citizens do appear, in crime stories for instance, they appear only as victims or criminals. (Ericson 1991: 193-196)

This generalization holds true in the samples examined here. Institutional sources are the main sources for all but a few of the news stories in both newspapers. The exceptions are people who are witnesses to crime and disaster, who are placed prominently. Average members of the public most often appear in hard news stories as collective and voiceless groups. In the Nov. 13 edition of the PI, for example, there are 21 hard-news stories with the conventional inverted-pyramid structure. Of those, seven stories have no references to anyone except institutional sources. The others refer to "victims," "workers," "the crowd mumbling," "Serbs," "babies," "mothers," "angry fans," victims of crime or accidents, "parents" and "children." Only three of those stories have individual, non-experts quoted. One story quotes the wife of an astronaut on a space mission; the second includes parents

talking about the impact of a school strike; the third quotes workers affected by a strike. In the second two stories, in a pattern that is the norm for hard-news stories, the non-institutional authorities appear only after the institutional authorities have spoken, usually in the middle third, more frequently in the bottom third of the story. For instance, in the story concerning the Boeing strike, the workers are quoted only in the final four paragraphs of a 34-paragraph story. In the story about the school strike, the parents are quoted in the twelfth paragraph of a 18-paragraph story, appearing only after the union and school board officials have spoken. The story that seemed to be atypical is the one about the space shuttle mission, which had a news-oriented lead but which quoted the astronaut's wife before anyone else, in the third paragraph. However, looking at the space-shuttle coverage for the week (there were several stories in both papers), it is apparent that this story was not seen as a hard-news topic. It consistently got feature or featurized treatment throughout the week. Monday's story, although it had some characteristics of the hard-news story, carried out this pattern of "soft news" coverage by focusing on one astronaut's wife and children high in the story.

Of the 105 news features and features that appeared in the PI that week, however, 14 of them positioned "average people" as central characters of the story and allow them to speak for themselves. They included: a 34-year-old woman completing a degree through distance education, for a feature on distance education; various people saying what they thought of the federal government's budget impasse; a feature on a group of "average citizens" working out their own government budget; potential jurors in a small town where a prominent sex-abuse trial was about to start; and a profile of a black bank officer who came out of the ghetto to make middle-class life for himself that includes a lot of community work. Feature stories tended to use the "average citizen" either as the concrete symbol of the larger issue in the piece or as representative voices of the public at large. The distance-education story, for example, uses Shelli Evans as its "Zimmerman," beginning:

Shelli Evans, who dropped out of high school 23 years ago at age 15, waited a long time to go after her dream – a college degree. Children, marriage, money and geography kept getting in the way.

None of that has changed.

She still has four daughters, a husband and two part-time jobs. Her family is still low income. And home is still Metaline Falls, 12 miles south of the Canadian border in the remote north-eastern corner of Washington state. What's different is that college came to her. (King, PI 19 Nov.: A1)

The story about public reaction to the budget-impasse story began with the reporter summarizing the theme – people thought Washington politicians were acting like children, especially the Republicans – and went on to support that with verbal snapshots of "average people" commenting:

"I blame Congress," said Jessdarnel Henton, as she cooked up a batch of ox tails at Ms. Helen's Soul Food Restaurant in Seattle. "They're holding us at bay, and trying to ram something bad down the president's throat. But this time, he's finally standing up to them, and that's good."

In the coffee shop aboard the ferry Cathlamet, sailing between Clinton and Mukilteo, cook Shawn Greene and customer Tanya Morris agreed that Washington, D.C., egos play a big role in the impasse. ("Area residents," PI 17 Nov.: A1)

What is the purpose of this almost ritualized use of "average people" in the feature story form? Journalists interviewed and journalism texts emphasize that it is important to get "people" into complex, abstract or institutional stories as a way of getting readers interested, as the issue is presented on a more personal level.

However, this explanation does not really lead anywhere. Why is it assumed that people not interested in a particular social issue will be more interested because it is being articulated by an individual who appears briefly in a quick character sketch? Why are "average people" used for some serious topics and not others? Why the placement of them as central characters only in feature stories?

The explanations for that reside in the four functions they perform: as literary-realist devices to present complex issues in a knowable way; as central characters for the narrative form; as symbolic representatives of the public; and as rhetorical devices.

I emphasized in Chapter One that it seems apparent that many of the elements of the feature form are derived from the literary-realist movement of the nineteenth century. One of the strongest indicators of this is that use of "characters" to illustrate feature stories. As Amy Kaplan noted, character-painting was one of the hallmarks of that movement.

> 'Character-painting,' of the individual human figure has the function of scaling down and increasingly interdependent society to a manageable size. The episode replaces complex relations between conflicting social groups with the more intimate and knowable range of character. (Kaplan, 1988: 24)

Understanding that, it is not surprising that the use of "average people" will especially called on for stories like the federal budget, a complex sexual-abuse trial, or a story that is essentially about class and race, like the profile of the black middle-class bank officer.

The second dynamic: the need for a narrative focus. One of the major components of narrative structure is the presence of a single, strong and unifying central character upon whom the story rests. This is not unique to newspapers. The television-documentary form, which has developed into a form that makes heavy use of fiction film techniques, also relies on a central character to illustrate its story. Michael Curtin's study of this form's development notes that NBC producer Fred Friendly saw "character" as the basic building tool for a documentary.

> He looked for people with strong convictions who would not wilt under the pressures of filming. If he could not find someone who came across powerfully on camera, Friendly was known to drop a project. (Curtin 17)

The appearance of an average individual at the beginning of the news story cues readers to expect a narrative and to read the story accordingly.

Third, the "average person" acts as the symbolic representative of the public. They performed that function particularly in major news stories. In the week under study, "average people" were surveyed for two stories, the American federal budget impasse and the resignation of the British Columbia premier. Ericson (1991:15) notes that popular

newspapers, in particular, are more likely to include "average people" as proof of their link to the public and are

> especially likely to give a face to sources outside of government. One explanation of this fact is that many of these sources lacked the ability to appear credible based on an officially authorized position, and the photograph was a way of lending weight to their representations. Another consideration, especially in light of the number of individual sources pictured, is that photographs are important to the 'vox pop' orientation of (popular newspapers). *Photographs personalize accounts to the views of the individual source, whereas the absence of photographs leaves the account in* the more distanced and anonymous voice of the spokesperson for a bureaucracy. (1991: 219)

Finally, the average individual also acts as the "authority" for the story. "Objective," hard-news stories rely on the institutionally authorized for their credibility. But institutions are not respected equally by all classes and the last two decades of North American life in particular have seen a decline in general public respect for all institutions. For a good number of people, it is the personal and emotional that carries authority, not institutional source and the fact. It is significant that "average people" are, in particular, highlighted in investigative stories or stories where there is a perception of institutional injustice. Ericson's study of crime and justice reported that: "When individual citizens were given a voice in the news, it was to address institutional arrangements and practices." (1991: 198)

I will come back to the importance of using "average people" later, when I talk about the feature form's overall rhetorical strategies and its use to extend news frames.

b.   Detail and scene-setting

Although many media researchers write about the way news stories create a realist picture, what is the most striking about hard-news stories is how disembodied they are. Just as hard-news stories appear to be disconnected and fragmented in terms of comprehensive narratives, they also appear to be disconnected and fragmented in terms of their setting in the physical world. Physical details are rarely reported in hard-news stories unless they relate

directly to the events of the news story. Most frequently, whatever physical description there is is an action: strikers chant and march up the street with a police escort (Glover, PI, 13 Nov.: A1); a bomb blast tears off a facade and engulfs the wreckage in flames (Malik, PI, 14 Nov.: A1) or Abbotsford residents "gathered at a park before the 25-minute trek" to express grief over the murder of a young local girl. ("Abbotsford residents," TC, 13 Nov.: A5) The only time hard-news stories appear to include non-action detail is to drive home a particularly emotion-evoking point. For instance, in a news story about the trial of a sex killer, someone testifying against him is described as "giving evidence in a wheelchair after being taken ill" while the accused is described as "burly." ("Sex killer," TC 14 Nov.: C4) In contrast, feature stories are marked by their use of "passive" physical detail: descriptions of people's looks or the setting of a town; descriptions of the setting for an interview, a conference, a debate, a funeral.

Again, there are several reasons to be discerned for why this particular technique is so routinely used in feature-writing. First, it acts to support the narrative form, revealing character and motivation through description – a classic technique of realist fiction. As well, this kind of description acts as the equivalent of the television news clip, authenticating the fact that "we were really there" and bolstering the story's authority by linking it to the realism of visual images. Just as the news film clip acts as the "guarantor of the narrative's validity" (Hackett, 1984: 252), so the focus on detail acts more to establish the author's and interviewee's presence than anything else. Michael Curtin's study of the television documentary also notes that "visual imagery in these documentaries invites the viewer to enter the world of the narrative without being conscious of the author's efforts to shape that world. There is an illusion of naturalness." (1993: 20) As Ericson has noted, television realism is more powerful because "it can be 'validated' through visuals that bind messages to context" (1991: 78), making their messages seem more valid and real. Descriptions (and

photos) do the same thing for newspapers. It is no coincidence that feature stories tend to be accompanied by photographs, as well as including more description.

c. Language

Since objectivity and neutrality became the marks of news professionalism, the industry has always maintained a certain wariness about colorful language, as I noted in the last chapter. Hard-news stories, in particular, are characterized by their essentially neutral and impersonal language. The feature form, however, is marked by language that reflects a personal style, more colloquial use of language, and more use of "poetic" uses of language -- language, in other words, that uses the power of words to the maximum to make its point or that plays with meaning, rather than being restricted to a kind of language that is as self-effacing as possible. That expanded range of linguistic styles allows language to perform in several other ways than the "transparent" one that objective, hard-news stories restrict it to.

Feature stories about serious subjects tend to use literary language and devices: description, imagery, emotive words, lyricism, sound repetitions to create a mood effect (but not oppressive alliteration). These techniques are frequently used to intensify some aspect of the narrative. For instance, in an on-going series of feature stories about a small town divided by a sex-abuse trial, reporter Scott Sunde described the town this way:

> Waterville, population 1,000 and seat of Douglas County, is surrounded by snow-spotted fields of wheat stubble, high on the bluffs east of the Columbia River. It seems far too small for the size of the scandal that has engulfed it...
> (PI, 14 Nov.: B1)

Feature stories about topics considered lighter will use playful and familiar language: puns, jokes, direct questions or advice to the reader, slang, humor. While this type of language appears most often in the feature-oriented sections of the newspaper, it is also used from time to time for news.

> MOSCOW – Where are the balloons? The bunting? The banners?
> The billboards? The band? What kind of election is this anyway?

Russians appeared to be doing their best to ignore the parliamentary race that kicked off this week. If Campaign '95 has generated any grass-roots excitement, it's invisible.

The Russia now slouching toward election day is not a happy place. (Hughes, PI, 18 Nov.: A2)

Stories about hard-news topics that have feature elements to them will frequently rely on descriptive verbs to create a sense of dynamism. This is a popular technique with stories that appear to be repetitive or abstract, like the rise and fall of the Dow Jones or the budget process.

One of the most significant aspects of the expanded capacities features allow for language is its ability to convey opinion and interpretation indirectly. An example that illustrates this is the use of metaphors. Hard-news stories are the format in print writing where metaphors are the least used, according to a study done by Clement So on the use of metaphors in coverage of the 1985 U.S.-Soviet summit. Material on opinion pages – editorials in particular, but also commentary, analysis and letters to the editor – are the most likely to use metaphors, with a metaphor in less than every two column inches of news space. Feature-style news magazine stories, which are close cousins of news features in newspapers, fall between the two. As So notes:

> This reflects the story-telling characteristic of the feature articles – not too "dry" and not too opinionated. The above figures also lend support to the conjecture that news stories are more direct and "objective," while other kinds of news writing are more interpretive and meaning-loaded. (So: 625)

d. <u>Story structuring</u>

What distinguishes the hard-news story is its decontextualization. News events are fragments that require a great deal of social knowledge to fully understand. (Think of how difficult it is to read hard-news stories in unfamiliar cities or countries.) What distinguishes the feature story is its construction as a unified story whose narrative framework is explained for readers. But that narrative structure and unity is accompanied by certain consequences.

Because the story has to make sense as a coherent whole and also because reporters are allowed more leeway in feature stories, the reporter provides more explanation and does it as an independent narrator, dropping the frequent attributions that are part of the hard-news story. An example of this is the *Post-Intelligencer* story about Republican Rep. Enid Waldholtz, whose husband had disappeared that week after having apparently absconded with $1.5 million. (Foster, PI 19 Nov.: A1) There had been hard-news stories throughout the week on the unfolding events. This 64-paragraph feature, headlined "The tale of Joe and Enid," which detailed their personal lives, their marriage and their finances, contained references to only three sources. The body of the story was carried by statements with no attribution, which the reporter simply stated as fact.

A second consequence of the need for narrative unity is the tendency to favour one side of events and to drop contradictory information that disturbs the drive for coherence. In the hard-news story, the requirement for objectivity dictates that reporters present the assumed two sides of every story as evenly as possible. The hard-news story relies on the headline and lead to establish its coherence and unity. But the feature, like the narrative, needs to continue establishing story unity throughout and it is most effective when it follows one theme and brings readers to one conclusion. While other literary narratives, like the novel, allow for digressions and the inclusion of many points of view -- the Bakhtinian heteroglossia – this is not the kind of narrative newspaper reporters are trained in. As I stressed in the last chapter, reporters are drilled in the belief that they must find one theme, preferably before they start researching, and then collect evidence and structure their stories to elaborate and support that theme. Inevitably, that creates reporting that does not balance perspectives equally. Ericson has noted that tendency for feature stories to be more one-sided, observing that feature sections – lifestyle, family, entertainment, travel, housing, sports -- allow more explicit opinion than other sections of the newspaper. As well, in the

sample he studied for his work on crime and justice reporting, most of the stories where a newspaper "took sides" were "features and opinion-column pieces in which one side was described in 'straw man' fashion and then lambasted with the favoured viewpoint of the author." (1991: 169)

That one-sidedness is most often revealed in the conclusions of stories. One of the most distinctive elements of reporters' attempts to construct a narrative-style story is the emphasis that is placed on endings. A typical hard-news story, of course, has no recognizable conclusion. It is structured to end with the least important fact. Feature stories, on the other hand, attempt to satisfy readers' expectations of narrative, one of which is that it will have an end. The preferred method reporters have for ending a story is to allow one character to have a strong quote that wraps up the story. That quote conclusion drives home the reporter's narrative theme in the story. For instance, the Waldholtz story basically creates a storyline that portrays Enid, politician, mother and hard worker, as an innocent victim of her less-scrupulous husband. The quotes and information throughout the story focus on Joe, the perpetual storyteller and con artist. The conclusion:

> The central questions left are as vital as they are cliched: How much did Enid know, and when did she know it?
> "Sometimes we believe the things we want to believe," Owen says. "Enid's biggest fault is that she trusted the man she married. Usually, that ain't such a bad thing." (Foster, PI 19 Nov.: A18)

In conclusion, some of the characteristic elements of the feature form represent markedly different strategies from the hard-news story for establishing its authority and for engaging in rhetorical communication. The hard-news story establishes its authority through reference to elite sources, objectivity, the use of precise numbers, formal language and quotes. In contrast, the feature story establishes its authority through the privileging of average citizens' voices, realism, an informal voice, an extensive use of quotes and a willingness to show some subjectivity.

As Teun van Dijk outlined in his study of the way newspaper rhetoric operates, rhetoric performs four basic functions. It represents textual information in memory, it organizes this information better, it enhances the chances for its retrieval and use, and it influences intended belief and opinion changes (1988: 84). One form of rhetoric is the "objective" news story, which organizes the information so that the main point is emphasized in both the headline and the lead, enhancing its chances for reception, and which uses its appearance of objectivity to convince the reader that this information is believable. The other form of rhetoric, this thesis argues, is the feature-type news story, which uses very different strategies. The main point of the story may not be in either the headline or the lead and the story strays from a strictly objective viewpoint. Instead, it attempts to embed itself in readers' memories through the use of vivid details and language, through personalization, by evoking emotion, and by packaging the information in a strong and unified narrative line whose conclusion drives home the point.

But all of these techniques raise questions about the purposes to which they are being put. Thomas Leitch has observed that

> [n]arrative sequence is at once 'the great mnemonic' and the silencer of
> 'awkward questions'; hence historians characteristcally prefer narrative as
> more authoritative than explanation. (1986: 13)

3. When and why the feature form gets used

This thesis has raised two central questions. One: Why, given a certain set of facts, does a reporter write a hard-news story or a feature? What lies behind reporters' and editors' choices about genre? Second: What purposes does the feature story, with its personalization, realism and strong narratives lines, serve?

Most of the reasons that reporters or journalism textbooks give do not really answer some of the apparent contradictions. The time orientation is not the answer. Although the

feature form is the form used for future-oriented, predictive stories, it is also used for many

stories that have taken place in the immediate past. Nor is the "event" explanation really

satisfying. Looking at news from a different perspective, all "events" are part of a larger

process and all processes are composed of a series of events. Why is it, then, that some

processes (day-to-day government, the courts) are reported as hard news, while other events

are glossed over in a feature story that reports only on the general narrative theme. And the

goal of "public service," while admirable, is erratic. Why do journalists work to make some

stories more appealing to the reader through narrative techniques while others, equally

important and difficult to access, are not? These are particularly interesting questions when

one looks at the decisions made about genre in the news sections of newspapers, where there

is a mix of the two storytelling types.

This section will outline what I see as the underlying sets of dynamics in genre

choices. These dynamics may work in tandem on a single story or there may be one

particular one that is the deciding factor in choosing genre. I stress here that these dynamics

do not always operate at a conscious level. In fact, most frequently they do not. I have

drawn from a wide range of media writing to get examples for this section, which is also an

examination of the implications of each of these types of rationales for feature-writing.

a.   The hierarchy of people and issues

A number of media scholars have amply documented that news provides readers

with a map of who has the authority to speak and define issues and who does not. Similarly,

the choice of genre acts as a map that indicates where people and issues are placed in a

hierarchy. This hierarchy is not just a ranking of the socially legitimated, although that is

part of it. Stories concerning elites are more likely to be reported in a hard-news format. The

hierarchy also is defined by location and cultural knowledge. Stories that are close and

familiar are more likely to be reported in a hard-news form. Stories that are distant or about

cultures considered foreign are more likely to get narrative treatment. I should add that this boundary-marking is the most evident when there is only one story on a particular issue, that is, when the reporter has made a choice between reporting in a hard-news or narrative form. Feature stories that accompany or amplify hard-news stories can actually be an indicator of the subject's high status.

To illustrate the way hierarchies influence genre, let us look at the topic of death – something one would assume is unambiguously serious and frequently tragic. In Chapter Two, we heard that journalists believe that narrative techniques should not be used for serious or tragic events. That prohibition is certainly actualized in some instances. For instance, the account of the death of a prominent Seattle politician was reported as a hard-news story, beginning: "Former Seattle City Councilman Sam Smith, the grandson of a slave who rose to political power in Seattle at the height of the Civil Rights movement, died in his sleep early yesterday at his home in the Seward Park neighborhood." (Higgins, PI, 17 Nov.: A1) Other obituaries of prominent people in the two newspapers I studied were reported in a similar hard-news format, beginning with the fact of death, an assessment of the person's accomplishments by other prominent people, and a chronological accounting of their lives. Murders were reported in a hard-news, inverted-pyramid format as well. Yet there were also stories in the two newspapers where stories about death were given feature treatment. For example, two stories that were given feature treatment in the PI during the week studied were about people's deaths. One was an obituary about a Seattle man that began: "George Dick Adams, an electronics engineer who loved people and felt most at home on snow or water, was a study in courage." (Beers, PI, 19 Nov.: B3) The story does not report his death until the seventh paragraph and it also diverges from the standard obituary form in quoting his wife and sister. Another was a story about an 81-year-old ex-cowboy who decamped from his nursing home to return to life on the range, where he was

killed by a bull. It began: "WIMER. ORE. -- Cecil "Bill" Batman had been a cowboy all his life, breaking horses and riding rodeo bulls around Eastern Oregon." ("Bull kills cowboy," PI, 19 Nov.: B3) A third story in the Victoria paper looked at the scientific use made of an ex-convict's body. It started:

> NEW YORK -- Joseph Paul Jernigan spent many of his 39 years as a drug abuser, alcoholic, robber and killer. In 1993, he was executed in Texas for murder.
> His body then began a most unusual odyssey that has made h¹m into something life couldn't -- a productive member of society. (Anthony, TC, 13 Nov.: A6)

This hierarchical treatment of death even extends to animal stories. Typically, animal stories are accorded feature treatment, even when there appears to be serious or certainly not laughable issues behind them. A story about a New York woman's struggle to get someone to pay for her cat's cancer treatments was written as a mini-short story that combines irony and pathos (Lipsyte, PI, 19 Nov.: A7). A story about fundraising attempts for an endangered species of monkeys frames the issue with irony and humour:

> SAN ANTONIO -- Embraced by animal lovers, threatened by trigger-happy hunters and now on the brink of eviction from their brush country home, the fabled Japanese snow monkeys of Dilley may have found a savior in the King of Croon, Wayne Newton.
> Newton, whose glitzy act has been knocking out the Las Vegas double-knit crowd for decades, has offered to do a benefit concert in San Antonio for the hard-up monkeys. (MacCormack, PI, 15 Nov.: A4)

However, stories about the death of a baby gorilla in the Seattle zoo were reported in the straightest of hard-news forms: "A male baby gorilla that was born last week at the Woodland Park Zoo died with little warning yesterday, stunning zoo staff and causing his mother to retreat into a corner and cry." (Jamieson, PI, 14 Nov.: B1)

As these examples illustrate, stories about death that involve low-status people (or animals) and that are distant from the newspaper market are more likely to be reported in a feature form. The impact of geographic location and low status was also evident in the PI's reporting during the week on a sex-abuse trial of a local minister in a small town in

Washington, which consisted of features or featurized news stories that focused on the trial's impact on small-town life. It is doubtful that that kind of feature treatment would have been used for the sex-abuse trial of a prominent or local figure.

The judgments made about the audience's social, cultural and political knowledge are particularly interesting. In Chapter Three, I outlined Jon Franklin's theory of hard news and features. He talked about hard-news stories as being bulletins within a narrative framework that readers are already familiar with. Reporters need to do less work to explain the context, background or significance of the story because readers are already familiar, through extensive media coverage, with the essentials of the story. Features, he said, are required when readers are less familiar with the narrative framework of the story, when they need background, explanation and context.

Franklin, like many journalists, appears to assume that there is a common understanding of which stories audiences already have narrative frameworks for (and therefore only need bulletin updates on) and which they do not. For some stories, the choice is clear. Certain types of scientific research are outside the general public's narrative framework and need a lengthy, explanatory story for anyone to understand their significance. At the other end, a person would have to have an exceptionally hermetic lifestyle not to have a basic understanding of the narrative to date with England's Prince and Princess of Wales. However, journalism involves decisions about thousands of more ambiguous cases. A likelier explanation is that news workers make assumptions, based on their own news values, interests and social position, about which stories the public already has or should have a narrative framework for and which ones they do not. A story that it is assumed to be not of general public interest, therefore, will need to have more narrative structure supplied for it. William Ruehlmann, for example, talking about the need for concrete examples in feature stories, says that "[t]he best writing will be concrete, because it

is more interesting to read specifically about the 10-year-old kid down the block who built a nuclear reactor than it is to read about "gifted children" in general." (1977: 26) That kind of judgment reflects Ruehulmann's particular viewpoint and interests, although it is presented as some kind of general principle. Previous studies mentioned indicate that readers with no intrinsic interest in a topic may be attracted to read about it if the story's style and presentation are made more interesting, but readers who already have an interest in something do not need that kind of incentive. Parents or teachers of gifted children, not to mention the gifted children themselves, read for information, not entertainment purposes. They will read the latest report about what makes gifted children successful in later life, an account of a speech from an expert in gifted education, or just a list of what not to do with gifted children. They are likely tired of reading stories about "the kid down the block who made a nuclear reactor" – the media's latest simplification of their issues as being about "child geniuses." What Ruehlmann's advice, which typifies the kind of advice writing coaches and editors give, really says is: The general public is not interested in this. Therefore, you need to emphasize the sensational and the narrative over the content to try to attract readers not familiar with the issue. What this approach does, ultimately, is draw a map that shows the boundary between topics that news workers believe are or should be part of general public social and political knowledge and those they believe are of concern only to very specific portions of the audience. The former will be more likely to be reported as hard news; the latter will be more likely to be reported in a feature form or at least in a featurish way.

One striking example of this phenomenon – the use of feature techniques on issues judged to be outside readers' social or political knowledge – was in certain types of political stories. A noticeable trend in the week's reporting was featurization of stories on municipal issues, especially budget items. Some of the leads on stories: "How much might the Seattle

City Council want to spend in the next six years on civic improvements? Try $700 million ...” (Higgins, PI, 18 Nov.: B1); “More dollars and few options. That’s how some members of the Metropolitan King County Council see the budget process ..” (Penhale, PI, 13 Nov. 13: B1); “About the only method a Seattle City Council committee didn’t use yesterday to balance a $430 million budget it approved for 1996 was passing the hat for loose change.: (Higgins, PI, 18 Nov.: B1) “With the Metropolitan King County Council scheduled to take a final vote on a 1996 budget Tuesday, there are no threats to shut down the government.” (Schaefer, PI, 19 Nov.: B1)

There was a time when reporting on municipal affairs was considered to be a basic, an area where the public’s knowledge of the issues was assumed. In small towns and villages, that is still the assumption. Newspapers serving small and well-defined communities continue to report council and school board issues at length, primarily in the hard-news format. However, both municipal and school board coverage at metropolitan newspapers has undergone changes as newspapers struggle to serve a mass market that is judged to be unfamiliar with or uninterested in local issues. The problem has been partially resolved by having reporters write more stories about municipal issues that use narrative techniques – a tendency that is evident here. Other types of political stories in the two newspapers that received feature treatment included, from Seattle, the upcoming Russian elections; the post-referendum situation in Quebec; protests against the sinking value of the Mexican peso; issues involving trade with Asia. From Victoria, political stories that got feature treatment included those on: the link between the U.S. and Israel’s far right; the American federal government shutdown; the political situation in Nigeria; and the controversy created by the case of American soldiers who raped an Okinawa girl. Again, it is clear that the use of the feature form is linked to evaluations of readers’ political knowledge and interest.

Obviously, this boundary will change from newspaper to newspaper. A tabloid newspaper is more likely to see its readers' narrative framework for political issues as being rather limited. Therefore, it will incorporate more narrative techniques into its political stories. Stories about day-to-day dramas, however, will require fewer narrative techniques since presumably its readers are already familiar with and interested in stories of marital disputes, problems with children, and injustices created by government or business. Quality newspapers, on the other hand, will see their readers as being politically sophisticated and familiar with the narrative framework of politics. Therefore, its political stories will be less likely to use feature techniques. However, partly because of the moral shame associated with reading about the drama of daily life and partly because of the tendency of educated people to look for pattern and generalization, they will be more likely to be interested in explanatory feature-style stories about social issues like marriage, parenting and lifestyle than hard-news stories about an individual messy divorce, manifestation of domestic violence or account of a child's accidental death.

b. Deviance, legitimate debate, consensus, hegemony

Another way of analyzing the use of the feature form in newspapers is to consider it in relation to the schemata Daniel Hallin uses for categorizing media coverage. Hallin divides all media coverage into three main categories. There is the sphere of consensus, the sphere of legitimate controversy and the sphere of deviance. The sphere of legitimate controversy is distinguished by two characteristics: its issues are the issues that have been defined as legitimately debatable by the major established actors of the political process. I would add to this by saying they are defined by the major actors of the established social institutions. Secondly, this sphere is the one where the methods of objectivity are used the most rigorously, where journalists will scrupulously seek out both sides of the issue at hand. The sphere of consensus, according to Hallin, are those areas where there is major social

agreement. Here, the rules of objectivity are suspended and journalists "do not feel compelled either to present opposing views or to remain disinterested observers." Outside these two is the sphere of deviance, where journalists play the role of "exposing, condemning, or excluding from the public agenda those who violate or challenge the political consensus." (1980: 117) Clearly, this is linked to ideas of hegemony. Dominant groups will have a significant interest in defining what constitutes issues of legitimate debate, deviance and consensus. In fact, if the hegemonic process works through social institutions like the media, in the manner delineated by critical-theory scholars, we would expect to see noticeable patterns of reinforcement of dominant frames.

Looking at the newspaper samples studied, it is clear the feature form is used in all three of these areas. However, its use varies in the three spheres. In the sphere of legitimate controversy, the feature form amplifies existing coverage. It takes on fewer characteristics of the fully narrative feature form, instead retaining many of the qualities of hard-news journalism: a balancing of opposing points of view, a somewhat neutral tone, the use of institutional sources. Stories involving debates of legitimated political figures are especially likely to see this kind of feature.

The feature form is used to its maximum potential in stories about consensus or deviance (essentially similar categories because "deviance" really means consensus about deviance). Because the form naturally tends to a development of a one-sided narrative line, it is an efficient and acceptable news form to use for stories where there is an assumption of one-sided opinion. Some of the characteristic areas where we see consensus-oriented feature stories are in the typical feature sections -- travel, entertainment, lifestyle, homes, sports -- or in sections that provide information for a particular community, like business. While some of these stories may be extensions of advertising, not all of them are. These features presented a benign and one-sided view of their subjects. In the business section, for example,

the features for the week included several about computers, the Internet and/or Bill Gates, one on Weyerhaeuser mills for recycling paper (Virgin, PI, 13 Nov.: B4), and a "little company that could" kind of feature about a booming Seattle-based cracker company (Virgin, PI, 17 Nov.: B1). None of these stories raised any serious challenges to the underlying assumption, that any profitable and growing business is a good thing. The cracker-company and recycling-mill stories relied primarily on the statements of company owners, whose views were corroborated by quotes from industry experts.

The news sections of newspapers, however, provide the most interesting examples of the way stories move into feature-form reporting as they are assumed to express consensual social values. Robert Hackett has noted that when the news media first reported on the annual Vancouver peace walk in 1980-81, it was seen as a political protest and its coverage was of the "hard-news, single-event genre." (Hackett, 1981: 232) However, as the peace walk became more and more of a "consensus event," where it was not seen as a potential site for riots or marginal groups acting out, the news frame changed and it was reported more as a "human interest" or color story (1981: 235), with descriptions of some of the more noticeable participants and quotes from "average" people in the walk.

It is at this point that I return to my question about why some feature stories make use of "average" people and others do not. Looking again at those stories, it is apparent that "average" people are used to illustrate features where there is an assumption of consensus. Some of the stories that made central characters of average, representative people include the following:

- A feature about the new legal definition of self-defence battered women who kill their husbands, with a sympathetic and emotional portrait of one woman in prison who might be eligible to be released under the new definition. (Cox, TC, 15 Nov.: B4)

- A feature about the difficulties multiple sclerosis sufferers have, with extensive references to the society that helps them, the clinic it runs and the fact that it is supported by charitable donations. (Young, TC, 14 Nov.: B2)

- A feature about how distance education is helping people who live in remote areas. (King, PI, 19 Nov.: A1)

- A feature about a woman who provides a matchmaking service for seniors. (The story leads with an anecdote about "John": "79, fit, handsome, well off and looking for love." (Creighton, TC ,19 Nov.: B7)

- The feature that summarized public response to the American federal budget impasse as politicians acting like babies. ("Area residents," PI, 17 Nov.: A1)

Most of these examples are relatively innocuous. But occasionally newspapers appear to be using features to reinforce one particular news frame or interpretation of events, when there is, in fact, not consensus, but a public struggle over interpretation. One example, from the *Vancouver Sun* is the feature treatment of protests about tax changes introduced by the government of the day in 1993. The tax story was debated publicly for several months, with one perspective being that it had provoked a generalized tax revolt and another being that it had generated protests from a relatively small group of people and that group was being manipulated by the political opposition in government for its own political ends. This story, headlined "Faces of a revolution: Broad cross-section of public rising up against higher taxes," appeared about two weeks after the original news event:

> They are as disparate as snowflakes, plump and well-fed or wrinkled, with sunken cheeks. They are faces filled with pain or with self-righteous anger.
> They are young faces, old faces and middle-of-the-road faces.
> Louise Amysano, 82, stands outside a church in the rain, wearing worn woollen mittens and carrying a rickety umbrella with spines that stick out at all angles like old bones. Part of the overflow crowd at a protest meeting, she says she was forced to move out of her house on West 13th this week because she lost her homeowners' grant in the provincial budget brought down March 30.

She says Finance Minister Glen Clark has broken her heart."
(Fitterman, *Vancouver Sun*, 10 Apr.: A1)

There are two assumptions one could make here. One, working from the liberal-pluralist perspective, is that this issue and the other personalized features we gave as examples are truly matters of public consensus that newspapers wish to reflect. If a particular feature story sparks public debate, the explanation would be that the writer and the newspaper simply misjudged the level of public consensus.

The other is that these features represent an attempt to reinforce a particular news frame, using the personalization, realism and narrative techniques that produce an emotional response in readers and influence their opinions, as we noted in Chapter One. In some cases, especially when an issue has been the subject of considerable public discussion and should theoretically be in the camp of legitimate debate, one has to seriously consider the possibility that the newspaper is actively working to strengthen a dominant-group frame. Or, when the feature story generates a public struggle for control over the narrative that will be told, one has to consider that the newspaper was, again, actively working to impose a dominant-group frame on an emerging issue. Certainly, that second set of explanations seems to be more credible one, looking at the kinds of feature stories that have generated controversy in the past: stories that focus on race and culture to explain domestic murder-suicides, rising house prices or tree-cutting or the features on sexual harassment that appeared within days of Anita Hill's testimony at the Clarence Thomas hearings, appearing to accept that Thomas was a harasser.

So far, I have talked about how stories fall into the three spheres Hallin described. However, there are frequently moments that arise in day-to-day news production when events arise that are difficult to classify. (I stress here that, although editors and reporters are not consciously aware of categorizing stories as "consensus" or "legitimate debate," their assumptions do in fact slot stories in that way.) At those moments, there is a confusion

about what kind of meaning should be imposed. I would argue that news features are particularly likely to be produced under those conditions, when there is some kind of instability or absence of existing news frames.

One of the interesting uses of the feature form is that reporters have a certain amount of flexibility in how they frame the story. Hard-news stories are hard-news stories precisely because they corroborate and advance the established news frame. The feature form allows reporters to move outside the established news frame for a number of reasons. In some cases, there has been no significant amount of hard-news reporting on the subject so there is no rigidly established news frame (although there will likely be certain preferred ways of reporting a story that reporters' sources will direct them to). Editors and reporters may have observed "something happening out there" but there are no fixed ideas about it yet and the reporter is given a fair amount of freedom to report.

This appears to be the case with, for example, the first news feature that was written about the New Left. Todd Gitlin's history of media coverage of the new left documents the fact that the first significant story on the movement was a *New York Times* feature story. As he put it:

> Only the longer, more exploratory background story, extending beyond the
> newsworthy "peg," contains even the technical potential for overcoming the
> fragmenting, denaturing effect of the topical, single-event, single-issue piece.
> The background story serves to place on the agenda a social change, a
> "trend," a "phenomenon," and automatically – since the background piece is
> relatively rare – confers on it a certain importance. Such was the background
> piece by Fred Powledge which began on page 1, column 1, of the Times of
> Sunday, March 15, 1965, headlined: 'THE STUDENT LEFT SPURRING
> REFORM: New Activist Intelligentsia is Rising on Campuses.'" (1980: 35)

The story that followed is a classic feature: It begins with a description of students at a party and, within the second sentence, brings out the ironic teaser: "There was no liquor and no dancing and no talk about basketball, student politics, or sex." It also gave the student activists a voice and treated them respectfully. In Gitlin's book, Powledge observed that

once a newspaper invests a significant amount of time and money in a feature like that, editors run it and prominently, whether they agree with it or not. Significantly, however, he was not assigned to any of the subsequent news coverage that followed, in which the movement was increasingly portrayed as radical, marginal and violent. (1980: 38-39)

A similar case is the early feature story done on Greta Rideout, the Oregon wife who had her husband charged with assault. Helen Benedict's study of the news frames that the media assign to sexual assault victims -- virgins or vamps, depending on a number of factors, including their age, race, class and relationship to their attackers – observed that media stories framed Greta Rideout at different times as a pawn of feminists, as a sexual tramp and, when she reconciled with her husband, as a hysteric. But in the first feature story done by Betty Liddick, a Los Angeles Times feature writer, Benedict notes that "[i]n contrast to the plain and unemotional language of the other reporters, Liddick used some New Journalism techniques to set a scene, create a mood, and to draw a sympathetic picture of Greta as a long-suffering, lonely and poor single mother – a victim." (1992: 49)

But sometimes features are done when there is already a running stream of hard-news coverage. In the case where features amplify current-event coverage, it is frequently the case that editors "order" features when the event is so unusual and outside the scope of normal predictions that existing news frames do not seem to explain what is going on. As S. Holly Stocking noted in her study of journalists' cognitive processes, there are more attempts at explanations when outcomes are unexpected or when journalists are reporting on failures, as opposed to successes. In that kind of "developing market" where new news frames are being sought and tested, reporters are allowed more room to search out explanations for unusual events.

One example of that is the change in coverage of abortion in the early 1960s.

A study by Marvin and Susan Northway Olasky documenting abortion coverage noted that, until 1962, articles favoring abortion were completely absent from American newspapers. The news frame for all coverage was that "abortion is murder" and news stories generally referred to "criminal abortionists." In July 1962, Sherry Finkbine, a middle-class, suburban mother of four from Arizona who had taken Thalidomide announced publicly that she wanted an abortion because she was worried her baby would be born deformed . This was not someone reporters and editors could categorize as a marginal who had gotten herself in trouble because of her own irresponsibility. The Olaskys noted the way the vocabulary for ongoing coverage (hard-news stories) changed to reflect a different news frame that developed for the case. Abortion became baby surgery; baby became fetus. However, it was through features and analyses that the new news frame was explicity worked out. For example, on Aug. 20, two days after Finkbine got her abortion, the New York Post ran a six-part feature series titled: Unwanted Birth. Debate Begins Anew. Are American abortion laws realistic? Are they humane?" (1986: 36)

Finally, the feature genre, in spite of all its limitations, is a form that gives reporters some room to move. For those who have found the analysis so far oppressively deterministic, this is the ray of hope. Because the feature form is by definition outside the standard objective-story, inverted-pyramid news frame, it allows any reporter some opportunity to give an apparently trivial subject some depth or to break away from existing hard-news frames. Although current newspaper dogmas fosters the belief that feature writers should discard the contradictory in favor of a tightly unified theme, reporters are free to ignore that and to explore narrative's possibility for incorporating other voices, to explain, to develop sub-themes and to detail subtleties that the hard-news story has no room for.

Mark Lule's examination of the news coverage following the 1989 death of Huey Newton, co-founder of the Black Panthers, observed the way almost all media accounts fit

his death into a common established news frame. Lule noted the way the media used three main strategies in reporting his death. Most accounts mentioned that he died in the same neighborhood where he started, a neighbourhood that was still drug- and violence-infested. They gave descriptions of his dead body in the kind of detail usually reserved for mob murders. And they quoted extensively from critical sources and cited his lengthy police record. Lule noted that the strongest exception to this pattern was a feature in the *Los Angeles Times*, which reported the unusually strong and emotional response that Newton's death evoked in the community, prompting people to set up an impromptu shrine around the spot where he was killed. That kind of feature "departed from the antagonistic portrait of Newton to report the devotion on the street and allow a more complex picture of Newton to emerge." (1990: 293)

It would be naive to say this kind of feature reporting is the rule. It is not. However, it does give an indication that the conventions and constraints of news production do not entirely predetermine the uses of the feature form.

This thesis has examined a great deal of material to analyze the feature form. Ultimately, what does it mean? Why does it matter that newspapers have two storytelling genres or what qualities the feature genre has?

These questions are important only in the context of what kinds of goals we have for mass communication. Those who critique mass media, including its practioners, do not always articulate very clearly what they believe is the ideal for mass media communication. But through the critiques, it is possible to discern the ideal: That everyone have equal access to the information they need to make sense of their lives: as social beings, as members of a political system, as actors in an economic system. Dennis McQuail, who has done extensive work on the normative expectations of mass media, has sorted through the goals articulated by both journalists and public-interest groups to distill six basic qualities of mass media that serve the "public interest." He stresses that those qualities are (again, ideally) always in a state of negotiation and evolution through democratic debate and decision-making. Those six normative ideas focus on media freedom, media equality, media diversity, information quality, the media's role in fostering a social order that takes account of alternative groups, and the media's role in maintaining cultural quality (1994: 135-153). One of the points he mentions, in he context of cultural quality, is that media content "should reflect and express the language and contemporary culture of the people which the media serve" and it should be "relevant to current and typical social experience." (1994: 151)

However, this is an oblique and glancing reference to an essential goal that mass communication must have if it is to be successful at any of other objectives. This final goal – which gets less attention from the academy, journalists and the general public as they focus on, for example, the restriction of viewpoints, the influence of commercialization, or the

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lack of financial support for in-depth reporting in media -- is that information should be presented in a way that engages people, that encourages them to understand its importance and relevance for their lives. A newspaper or television station may be exemplary at being open to different worldviews and at covering the important social and economic issues of the day thoroughly and without succumbing to the reductionist and stereotyping tendencies that news production routines and ideology so often produce. But if it does not engage citizens beyond those who are already informed on a subject, it will have failed. That is why we need to examine forms of journalism that have the potential to meet that goal.

The feature-story form, unlike the hard-news story, has the capacity to perform two essential functions. It can not only inform, it can engage. This last is not something that can be dismissed as "the entertainment function." The fact that story journalism has been used primarily as a marketing device does not mean it is limited to that. Nor is journalism the only field where communicators are looking for ways to combine story with information. In an essay on how to introduce sociology into public discourse, Claude Fischer observed that medical researchers, psychologists, and economists have been successful in transmitting scholarly perspectives to the public through combining accessible storytelling with information. He wondered why sociologists could do the same, referring to the sociological study *Habits of the Heart* as a potential model.

> [One] reason *Habits of the Heart* succeeded, I think, was its literacy. For
> example, the authors used the effective rhetorical device of personal
> portraits. Biographies of paradigmatic individuals dramatized cultural
> typologies and made vivid abstract analyses. (1990: 57)

In the mass media field, as well, it is not only journalists influenced by the better-writing movement who have been arguing for a journalism that uses narrative to engage readers. Academic theorists who are interested in finding solutions to the structural inadequacies and hegemony-fostering tendencies of present-day journalism have argued that moving to "story-based journalism" would work some fundamental changes. In a book that

explores potential improvements to current journalis 'c practice, Rob Anderson, Robert

Dardenne and George Killenberg include a chapter that encourages a move to story-based

journalism as a more democratic, public-sensitive and public-serving form of

communication. It also deplores the dichotomization of news into one where information is

relegated to report forms filled with facts, while entertainment is relegated to story forms

with no facts.

> Serious journalists, researchers and readers who abandon the story form to
> superficial entertainment use, such as television shows that build sensational
> stories around crime, debauchery, and human misery, contribute indirectly
> to a debasement of narrative journalism. ... By relating story to
> sensationalism, or by undervaluing and misinterpreting the sensational
> nature of story, legitimate news organizations have allowed others to co-opt
> this most culturally powerful and communal news form. (1994: 165)

I agree with them that mainstream news organizations and far too many journalists have

allowed themselves to be trapped by that dichotomy and have not seriously explored the

ways in which narrative journalism -- the feature form -- can be used to both engage and

inform readers. However, I see two significant challenges that proponents of story

journalism are not addressing. One is the way that the journalist-driven move to story

journalism does not address the deep and historic antipathy that newspapers and, in fact, all

professional discourse has towards narrative and rhetoric, two essential components of story

journalism. They are also overlooking their own profession's strongly held ideology about

the need for public service in journalism. The second is the way in which both journalists

and academics advocating story journalism do not examine the potential weaknesses of this

form, the ways it can be exploited or misused under the pressure of newsroom production

demands and ideology by reinforcing dominant frames through personalization and

emotional appeals, and the ways to overcome that potential exploitation.

Referring to the first challenge, journalists who advocate story journalism likely

believe they are validating this form of news storytelling. But, in fact, I see them

perpetuating the existing dichotomy, confirming the hierarchical thinking of those in newsrooms who cannot escape their ingrained belief that news is news and features are emotional fluff. That is because the discussion about better writing focuses almost exclusively on the techniques and strategies for improving writing. There is rarely any discussion about the information that needs to be the foundation of this kind of journalism, if it is not to be relegated yet again to the category of "nice writing, not really news." Nor is there any significant discussion of what the social purpose is of improving writing. While those leading the better-writing movement may believe that the information-gathering and public-service aspects of journalism are so engrained that they go without saying, it is my belief that, because of the long newspaper tradition of devaluing story journalism, both those who disdain it and those who are attracted to it will find themselves falling into an unconscious pattern of relegating story journalism to stories where the informational component is considered to be secondary or unimportant.

Journalists also have failed to understand or explain how deep the tradition is to separate information from story. The conflict between the "objective," hard-news form and the feature form in newspaper writing echoes debates that have been heard in many other fields about the use of narrative, about rhetorical writing, and about the storytelling style of popular culture in general. Walter Fisher, in an article on the narrative paradigm, has concisely summarized the centuries-old pull between *mythos* and *logos,* imagination and thought, oral and literate expression, subjectivity and objectivity, story and information. Prior to the pre-Socratics, Plato and Aristotle, people did not categorize "truth" as something that could only be conveyed through rational, information-oriented, objective discourse. Truth could come through stories or it could come through facts. But Plato's and Aristotle's theories on how to conduct human life created a new perception whose effect was

to establish the rational superiority of philosophical (technical) discourse; to relegate *mythos* to myth (meaning fictional); and to downgrade rhetoric and poetic. Dispensations were made for rhetoric and poetic; they had a place in the life of the community but they were not to be considered serious intellectual arts. ... [W]hile Aristotle recognized the value of different forms of human communication in different domains of learning and life, he established a configuration that enabled later, and often lesser, thinkers to insist that their mode of discourse was superior to others and call on him for support. (1985: 77)

This kind of hierarchy was reinforced in the seventeenth century, when Francis Bacon's attempt to define proper scientific method led to the elevation of scientific, technical, expository discourse over all other forms of expression, including philosophy. That was furthered by other prominent thinkers of the Enlightenment period, like Descartes and John Locke. We see the continuing effects of this ranking of discourse today. Objectivity and technical discourse continues to be valued, not only in newspapers but in science research, academic journals and any form of communication among professional groups. Communication that shows signs of rhetorical or narrative strategies is suspect, considered opinionated, subjective, or manipulative. It should be added that this stratification reflects the bias of the literate over oral-based forms of communication. Narrative, after all, is the great inventive strategy of oral cultures, allowing them to preserve and pass on information by packaging it in a memorable way, through strong characters and plots. Literate cultures, on the other hand, with their ability to retrieve written information at any time, place less value on narrative's power to imprint information in memory and more on the information itself.

Added to that, there has been considerable academic debate about the implications of narrative and storytelling. Historians and philosophers in particular have spent considerable time assessing the epistemological role of narrative. There is one argument that narrative, when used to describe "real" events, falsely imposes a structure and meaning on those events that they did not have at the time they were happening. A counter-argument is

that the human condition, where all knowledge is structured through language, requires

narrative: Except at the most basic levels, we do not operate by instinct but by an

imaginative, language-based ordering of our pasts and our futures. All human knowledge

and action, in fact, can only exist through the narratives we tell ourselves as individuals and

as groups. But, still others argue, narrative is used by dominant groups to moralize, to

extend their authority, and to impose their meanings on past events and, by extension, on

considerations of future solutions. As Hayden White has said:

> [O]nce we have been alerted to the intimate relationship that Hegel suggests
> exists between law, historicality, and narrativity, we cannot but be struck by
> the frequency with which narrative, whether of the fictional or the factual
> sort, presupposes the existence of a legal system against which or on behalf
> of which the typical agents of a narrative account militate. And this raises
> the suspicion that narrative in general, from the folktale to the novel, from
> the annals to the fully realized "history," has to do with the topics of law,
> legality, legitimacy, or, more generally, authority. (1987: 13)

This leads directly to what I referred to as the second challenge of story journalism,

which is the need to recognize its potential weaknesses. I have concerns about adopting too

naive or idealistic an attitude about what this form is capable of. Anderson et al. talk about

story journalism as being able to cover the same information as the hard-news story, "but

usually with an impact that is more lasting, solid, human, warm, full, emotional, creative,

round, free. Story touches us in a way that conventional news does not." (1994: 147) Their

intuitive judgment that story journalism has more impact certainly seems to be supported by

other research. The studies I have cited in this research and others confirm the idea that

people retain information better and form stronger opinions when they are presented with

concrete examples, rather than just abstracts, when they are given information through

narratives, rather than as fragmented facts, particularly if their social and political

knowledge is low. But the writers also attribute qualities to story that go beyond this.

> Story approaches to news are powerful and potentially rewarding, but define
> an attitude more than a technique or tool. Story is invitational, not only
> inviting people to read or receive, but to become part of the story. Story-

based reporters, by definition, cannot be arrogant or possessive. They know they do not possess the Truth, to be transmitted to an audience of readers or sold to a consumer market. They know they share something beyond facts gathered daily, the ephemeral flotsam from faceless officials at countless bureaucracies. They know the people who read their stories share those stories, partly as their creators. Stories do not spring up anew from each day's murders, elections, accidents, disasters, corruptions, and triumphs. Details do, and stories feed off facts, creating and recreating themselves, growing up out of the culture, our common depths. They are part of us all, and we are part of them. (149)

I believe it is an error to take such a benign view of newspaper use of daily events as elements of consensual social mythology or to think there is something about the story-journalism that works an organic effect on reporters, enabling them to supersede the conditions they work in. The temptation to see daily life as part of a universal pattern, a constant reworking of inevitable, unchangeable myth is a seductive one – and that is precisely why, White has observed, dominant groups have such an interest in

controlling what will pass for the authoritative myths of a given cultural formation but also in assuring the belief that social reality itself can be both lived and realistically comprehended as a story. [But m]yths and the ideologies based on them presuppose the adequacy of stories to the presentation of the reality whose meaning they purport to reveal. (1987: x)

As for story-telling form, narrative journalism is subject to many different dynamics, all of which influence its creation and use. Narrative journalism cannot force journalists to adopt new attitudes to truth, information and readers. But it can permit those who are interested in exploring alternatives to standard news-production practices and ideologies some room, as I tried to show in this thesis by examining the factors involved in the social production of narrative journalism in mass-media newsrooms. By looking at the frameworks that surround storytelling journalism – news production practices; news ideology; the tradition of literary realism; narrative and rhetoric in newsmaking; and audience responses to news forms – it was evident that this form of journalism had significantly different rhetorical strategies from information journalism and that those strategies of personalization, realism, and narrative structuring could be effective ones for engaging

people. But it was also evident that storytelling journalism was likely to violate journalism's professional ideologies of public service and objectivity, that it relied on a tradition of literary realism with its own problematic origins and practices, and that its primary function in bureaucratic newsroom organization would be to facilitate production and market control. In the process, that would perpetuate news-production practices that would only serve hegemonic processes. Looking at the historical development of story journalism, it was apparent that this form's origins were in a competitive strategy aimed at attracting mass readers, primarily working-class ones and that recent moves to encourage story journalism, with the exception of the brief and highly contested era of New Journalism, were not grounded in any kind of new vision that would challenge that. The examination of the working practices of journalists confirmed many of the dynamics already outlined. Journalists are most comfortable with story journalism when it helps them attain public-service goals, but the feature form continues to hold second-class status and create tensions among journalists because it frequently violates norms of objectivity, in spite of efforts to contain it. Finally, a close examination of features stories in print showed that, while it is a form that allows reporters some latitude because it operates outside standard news values, it all too frequently reinforces dominant frames.

Through all of this, I have tried to establish the strengths and weaknesses of this story journalism. It is less constrained by the news values that dominate hard news. It is an effective story form for complex news, for "positive" news (by this, I do not mean bright, human-interest stories), for reporting on processes and trends, rather than events, for providing more than stereotypical news frames about events.

However, the feature form also has many potential failings. Reporters need to understand what kind of loaded gun they are working with and audiences need to understand how the feature story can be misused so that, instead of being used to

communicate complexities about an issue or event, it is used to reinforce a single dominant-group idea about that issue or event. It is subject to the same kinds of time constraints that turn the hard-news story into a formulaic, decontextualized, stereotyping piece of writing. It can not only fail to create new, more complex and subtle news frames for a particular continuing story, it can actually reinforce and extend the stereotyping and simplistic news frames that the hard-news stories relied on. Under pressure or in the hands of an uncritical reporter, the feature story will do nothing more than perform the routinized functions assigned to it, functions that serve only the purposes of minimizing newspaper production problems, ensuring marketplace monopoly, and maintaining a hegemonic process that ensures an unequal status for ideas from different groups. It can be the source of the most biased writing in the newspaper. It can be superficial and it can be reduced to a form that is used purely for its entertainment, emotion-inducing functions.

Even without time pressures, there is an aspect of story journalism that should be noted with caution. That is the way that story journalism aspiring to be literary runs the danger of being transformed in a kind of artifact, as Phyllis Frus has observed happening to literature and literary journalism: "[S]tories that become too aestheticized also risk doing a disservice to the reader because they become beautiful objects that seem to be apolitical and removed from reality." (1994: 83)

However, I do not believe the solution to any of these limitations is a return to "objective" journalism. If it is narrativizing that we are concerned about in story journalism, there has been ample research done by media scholars to show that whatever narrativizing takes place there is equalled by the dominant-frame narratives that infiltrate every "objective," hard-news story. In fact, the advantage of story journalism is that those narrative frames are made more explicit. Instead of working at a level where their assumptions pass almost unnoticed, they are elaborated on, catching the attention of those

who have different readings and provoking enough disagreement that they will complain and provoke some public discussion. One only has to remember the public debates that have been triggered in British Columbia and Canada by feature stories in the past about the Asian "invasion" of Vancouver, the materialist-oriented culture of Hong Kong, or the ethnocultural factors involved in domestic disputes that end in murder-suicides.

The challenge for journalists and theorists is to look for ways that story journalism's potential strengths can be used and its potential weaknesses minimized, always recognizing that the force and ideology of established processes is deeply entrenched and that attempts to create change will be strongly resisted.

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B3.

Briggs, David. "Bishops decry gap between rich, poor." 15 Nov.: A3.

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Foster, David. "The tale of Joe and Enid: From D.C. to disaster." 19 Nov: A1, A18.

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Higgins, Mark. "'Passing of a legend': Sam Smith dies at 72." 17 Nov.: A1.

Higgins, Mark. "City goes all out to balance the budget." 18 Nov.: B1.

Higgins, Mark. "Council is considering $700 million civic plan." 18 Nov.: B1.

Hughes, Candice. "Cynicism, apathy, antics define Russian election." 18 Nov.: A2.

Jamieson, Robert L. "5-day-old gorilla dies at Woodland Park Zoo." 14 Nov.: B1.

King, Marsha. "Furthering education from afar: Technological advances mean time and place are no longer obstacles to earning a college degree." 19 Nov.: A1.

MacCormack, John. "Vegas crooner Newton to do benefit to help unprotected monkeys." 15 Nov.: A4.

Malik, Adnan. "Five Americans among six killed in Saudi blast." 14 Nov.: A1.

Miletich, Steve. "Couple, two children dead in apparent murder-suicide." 13 Nov.: A1

Paulson, Tim. "Just what some eggs-pected: 2 eggs daily may not be so bad." 15 Nov.: A1)

Penhale, Ed. "Kingdome repairs drive up budget." 13 Nov.: B1

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Virgin, Bill. "Old paper feeds new mills for Weyerhaeuser." 13 Nov.: B4.

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