

INTRODUCTION

American Children's Literature, the "Yellow-Kid Reporter" Era, and Artifice

Pretend it's 1896. You live in New York City. It's Sunday.

That means today is the day for the supplement edition of *The World* newspaper, and *that* means *Hogan's Alley* and the Yellow Kid. In the days when the printed newspaper defined the world for the reading public, Joseph Pulitzer's *World* attempted to report and reimagine it in bold, innovative ways, including through the use of color and comics. *Hogan's Alley*, a one-panel illustration starring the uncouth Yellow Kid and his gang of street children, became one of the pioneers of this daring, fledgling form that had discovered a new way to—well, what exactly *did* it do? The introduction of bright visual hues and irreverent characters made it a novelty feature and popular amusement. But it also functioned as biting political satire and cultural commentary, and it did so through the figures of children. Whether young or old, it's not unlikely that you would have eagerly sought out a copy of *The World* on Sundays. But what "news" of the world would you have absorbed? What was the Yellow Kid reporting to his readers?

If you had picked up the Sunday *World* on July 26, 1896, you may have skipped straight to the supplement to see the new raucous *Hogan's Alley*. It might not have been giving its audience new information about the latest happenings in New York or Washington, but in some fashion, it was usually saying something *about* those happenings. And something about American childhood. And something about storytelling. And something about race, gender, and class in an America that was growing more urban. But you probably wouldn't have thought about that. You would have been more interested in the fact that *The World* was now publishing this strange, funny drawing every Sunday—in color.

That was news. Turning to the July 26, 1896, installment of *Hogan's Alley*, you would have been dazzled by the tints and tones of the elaborate scene, which, in this particular edition, appears to take place at a theater. And you possibly would have chuckled at the thought of street kids taking on dramatic performance. Now that would be something, wouldn't it? But what about the actual news of that particular Sunday? What was the distinction between the news of *The World* proper and the "news" of *Hogan's Alley*?

During the summer of 1896, American journalists kept themselves busy—and entertained—chronicling the latest developments of the upcoming presidential election. The front page of the Sunday, July 26, edition of *The World* announced recent events arising out of the Populist Party Convention in St. Louis. The predominant headline indicates that presumptive candidate William Jennings Bryan "Is in Doubt" and that "His Acceptance of the Populist Nomination for President Depends 'Entirely Upon the Conditions Attached'" (New York *World* 1). But the political theater and the growing complexity of the American party system evidenced on *The World's* front page had to compete against other embellished renderings of daily life, including headlines detailing "ONE BURGLAR FLOORED. Young Mr. Minnot Grappled With a Cracksman and Captured Him" and "RESCUED TWO GIRLS. They Were Locked Into a Factory Building and Screamed" (New York *World* 1). The most sensational story, that of a physician's rapid mental collapse once he believes his wife dead, sits under a multideck headline that introduces new titillating information with each sentence, spaced out to force readers further into the article while simultaneously providing just enough of the story to satisfy a superficial news perusal:

GRIEF TURNED HIS BRAIN.

Thinking He Had Killed His Wife, Dr. Maximilian M. Weil Attempted Suicide.

DRANK CARBOLIC ACID FIRST.

But the Poison Did Not Act Quickly,

So He Gashed His Throat with a Razor.

HIS YOUNG WIFE HAD ONLY FAINTED.

He Had Given Her Morphine for Hysteria—Strong Constitution May Enable Him to Recover. (New York *World* 1)

Each subsequent line functions as a new scene that heightens the drama of this *Romeo and Juliet*-like incident, exquisitely crafted to entice readers away from the other Sunday-edition competition in the crowded New York newspaper

market. Certainly, the stage for this extraordinary domestic drama, as well as that of the grand spectacle of American political theater, is the newspaper, the “public institution and a public teacher,” according to *The World’s* publisher, Joseph Pulitzer (657).

Indeed, the newspaper—journalism—succeeds and sells using the art of artifice. But this is not another condemnation of “fake news,” the popular epithet so favored by President Donald Trump to discredit mainstream-media reporting in the wake of his surprise 2016 electoral victory. And, of course, journalism depends on the principles of verification, transparency, and accuracy. But that is not the focus here. No, *Cub Reporters* seeks to embrace and reclaim artifice by looking at some of its greatest champions—children. More specifically, children as rendered in children’s literature, but this book also considers flesh-and-blood children, those young people who inspired and were inspired by the Golden Age of American children’s literature during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The years between the Civil War and World War I also approximate a “golden age” of the newspaper, a time when “the American newspaper rapidly became a cultural institution of undeniable force” and is eventually “universally accepted as one of the foundation stones of American social life” (Douglas 7, vi). Yet, returning to the front page of *The World*, with those shrewdly crafted headlines and narrative revisions of political and domestic life, it evidences the *artifice* of the newspaper; it is a constructed form requiring skill, thought, and purpose. Of course, this is no secret, but the artistry of the news can be easy to overlook when presented and packaged as natural fact. *Cub Reporters* explores the relationship between young people and the hegemony of the newspaper as depicted in children’s literature and other texts of the era, and it considers how children destabilize ideological narratives of truth, news, and fact—predominantly in the literary world, but sometimes in the actual world.

My critical methodology relies on historicism to illustrate the influential exchange between American culture and its texts—literary, journalistic, and ephemeral forms of communication. In this model, the literary, political, social, and economic components of culture exist together in a web, and thus the events occurring in one area affect the entire web. As such, the fundamental structure of my study draws from Stephen Greenblatt’s New Historicism tenets: “The notion of culture as a text” with “[m]ajor works of art remain[ing] centrally important” (Gallagher and Greenblatt 9), or what Louis Montrose has called the “historicity of texts, the textuality of history” (8). Michael McKeon describes “the basic tool of historical method” as being “the strategic dialectic between the division and the conflation of categories” (49). Categories, here,

can refer not only to academic disciplines, but to varied textual artifacts. In historicist approaches to literary studies, this means considering not only texts outside the canon, but outside of traditional literature—newspaper articles and advertisements, printed ephemera, photographs, and images—in order to destabilize the hegemonic cultural narrative. Variety and difference allow for a “dialectic of opposition,” which McKeon calls “a tool of discovery, a way of opening up possibilities for the interpretation of historical phenomena” (49). *Cub Reporters* employs such an approach in an attempt to “ope[n] up” these “possibilities” found in works of children’s literature that address the creative processes of narrativizing, making meaning, and selling reality through the venue of the newspaper, processes I collectively call *artifice*.

Regardless of their categorization under what Hayden White characterizes as “real events” or “imaginary events” (23), the discourses found in literature, history, and journalism seek to tell stories—they narrativize. Historical or literary narrative “might well be considered a solution to a problem of general human concern,” offers White. This problem, he states, is one of “how to translate *knowing* into *telling*” and “fashioning human experience into a form assimilable to structures of meaning that are generally human rather than culture-specific” (1). Roland Barthes explains that it is simply human to do this; it is how we utilize knowledge to make sense of the world, because narrative “ceaselessly substitutes meaning for the straightforward copy of the events recounted” (119). “Narrative,” Barthes explains, “does not show, does not imitate,” but reveals “meaning, that of a higher order of relation which also has its emotions, its hopes, its dangers, its triumphs” (124). There is an expectation that fictions of “imaginary events” should do this, but White posits that we want the same of our accounts of reality. He thinks the “value attached to narrativity in the representation of real events arises out of a desire to have real events display the coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary” (23).

Communication theorist James W. Carey depicts the juncture between narrative and the “real events” of journalism in rather eloquent terms, writing that in studying the history of the profession, scholars can “grasp the form of consciousness, the imaginations, the interpretations of reality [that] journalism has contained” (27). He views journalism history as “the story of growth and transformation of the human mind as formed and expressed by one of the most significant forms in which the mind has conceived and expressed itself during the last three hundred years—the journalistic report” (27). Similarly, communication scholar Barbie Zelizer describes journalism’s narrative tendency as an asset because of its ability to resonate with and matter to readers. “Journalism

as narrative is another way to account for journalism's commonality," Zelizer writes (26). Additionally, journalistic narrative "helps us construct our view of the world, by allowing us to share stories within culturally and socially explicit codes of meaning" (26).

Essential to giving power over to these journalistic "codes of meaning" is the understanding or awareness of the constructive process that Zelizer discusses, and the same rings true with children's literature, which has provided "codes of meaning" for American culture. American children's literature has shaped ideals and standards for what childhood "should be," ideals and standards that have generally emanated from middle- or upper-class white cultural backgrounds and ideologies. In her crucial contribution to the field of children's literature, *Kiddie Lit: The Cultural Construction of Children's Literature in America*, Beverly Lyon Clark says, "[W]e tend to assume that what it means to be a child, what it means for an adult to understand a child—never mind what it means to write from or for a child's perspective—is unproblematic" (9). This "unproblematic," uncritical means of digesting human experience—a means often applied to popular, widespread culture such as journalism and children's literature and media—not only flattens its complexity and richness, it risks oppression and dehumanization. However, exploring the process and product of the ways in which "codes of meaning" come to fruition invites readers to engage. Kim Reynolds writes that children's literature has the potential to "expose, critique, and adjust the schemata by which we interpret the world" and can "sow and nurture the seeds of social change" (5). How might American children's literature have sown these seeds during the golden age? And what are the implications of the newspaper's presence in the genre at this time? Turning to Michel Foucault and his work on resisting discourses of power, how are readers asked to begin "looking at things otherwise" (328)?

Artifice and the Golden Age

Because of significant social, cultural, and technological changes after the Civil War, American children's literature proliferated in the late nineteenth century and introduced more narratives that explored imaginative pursuits instead of (or in addition to) emphatic moral or didactic objectives. Education reform and advances in printing allowed for innovative publishing possibilities aimed at a larger audience of young readers. During this period, "the ability to reproduce photographs" and "the mass production of color images . . . led to lavishly produced and illustrated books for children [that] . . . helped make best-selling authors of Robert Louis Stevenson, Rudyard Kipling, Mark Twain, Frances

Hodgson Burnett, E. Nesbit, Beatrix Potter, Louisa May Alcott, and A. A. Milne” (Zipes et al. xxviii–xxix). Children’s literature as a genre influenced more than children, as all ages read books now considered children’s classics. Novels such as Twain’s *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) “appealed to both children and adults and were reviewed by leading literary critics in magazines with wide circulation” (Zipes et al. xxviii–xxix). Young people also entertained themselves with “sensationalized fiction offered by the stories of ‘Oliver Optic’ and dime novels, the latter of which were filled with the exploits of western heroes, and (from the 1880s) with stories about detectives” (Carpenter and Prichard 553). In other words, American children’s literature became more ambitious in scope and theme in addition to reaching a wide audience of assorted readers, and in doing so, helped fashion American culture’s ideas about children and childhood—not unlike the ways the newspaper helped shape the public’s ideas of the country and world.

Postbellum children’s literature also offered a cultural space for writers to engage with and respond to the journalism industry and its means of reporting (and selling) news, or fact. Yet given the newspapers’ growing use of new storytelling methods through sensationalized writing, stunt reporting, and even comics such as *Hogan’s Alley*, the challenge of what I call *artifice* arises. How can the newspaper or journalism industry tell truth when it is inherently a creative endeavor? This is an old question on which much has been written, and I’m not attempting to answer it. Instead, I’m interested in exploring how writers of the time grappled with this question through children’s literature. *Cub Reporters* contends that in American children’s literature of the golden age, children function as reporters of artifice. The genre responds to the rise of the newspaper by challenging the authority of news through the actions of young people; it acknowledges journalism’s consequential influence but critiques its power in the newspaper-centric works that I consider. Ultimately, through the newspaper worlds depicted in the works discussed in *Cub Reporters*, children reveal the overriding truth of *artifice*—and they relish it. If the newspaper—which structures the general public’s understanding of the nation—is shown as crafted, then *all* is artifice, and thus young people have the power to recreate “truth,” particularly in terms of how culture understands the constructs of childhood and youth.

Cub Reporters shows children’s literature of the Golden Age subverting the idea of news; journalism, in these works, is not a reporting of fact, but a reporting of artifice—cub reporters report the truth of artifice. In general, I use “report” and “reporter” in a broad sense. Some examples have child characters

literally engaging in journalistic behavior, and in other instances, the text works as a symbolic “reporter” by showing the process of artifice. I demonstrate this idea by analyzing works of children’s literature from this period that specifically address newspapers or the journalism industry in order to contextualize the relationship and influence between children’s culture (or, more inclusively, youth culture) and journalism. The texts discussed signal an embrace of artifice as a means to access individual agency. This is significant because such a move encourages child (and adult) readers to deconstruct and create the world anew for themselves—to find agency through artifice.

Artifice, as I employ the term in *Cub Reporters*, broadly refers to human-made apparatus—artistic, technological, psychological, cultural, or otherwise—devised and used to both communicate ideas and compel others to acknowledge those ideas. It can refer to works of individual invention or the production of larger social constructs: gender, race, class, childhood, adulthood. Generally speaking, artifice exists in contrast to the natural, biological world and showcases the human power of creativity. That is a lot of work for one word, but by allowing *artifice* to serve as an umbrella term for human creativity in all its senses, I hope to erase the adverse implications of the word that associate it with mendacity and malicious intent. Instead, I aim to use the term’s wide reach to reinforce individual agency. Throughout the book, I focus on more “local” manifestations of artifice—artistic and creative choices or actions by writers, characters, reporters—to show how larger concepts that are often deemed “natural” or “absolute” also reflect artifice, and are therefore available for revision. As such, *Cub Reporters* investigates how depictions of young people in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America use artifice to dismantle preexisting narratives.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides one definition of *artifice* as “[h]uman skill or workmanship as opposed to nature or a natural phenomenon,” and similarly, “[t]echnical skill; artistry, ingenuity” (“artifice”). Artifice is that which we *purposefully* create and which requires or displays a level of imagination, curiosity, or originality. It showcases the very human capacity *to create*, and thus the word *artifice* often conflates the skill and that which the skill produces. But thinking of art in the classical sense as that which mimics nature, successful artifice should, according to this line of reasoning, obscure artificiality. In that sense, the *OED* gives definitions of *artifice* that refer to “[s]kill in devising and using expedients; artfulness, cunning, trickery” and “an ingenious expedient, a clever stratagem; (chiefly in negative sense) a manoeuvre or device intended to deceive, a trick” (“artifice”). Here, I am interested in exploring how

and when artifice is acknowledged—when its craftsmanship is ignored, when it is embraced, and the consequences of this exposure and concealment in regard to American children’s literature and journalism. In looking at the two together, we see how artifice can be reclaimed and reconfigured. Rather than hold merely negative connotations because of its associations with deception, artifice can serve as a form of liberation. When embraced, artifice functions as a call to arms, to action. It reminds us that we write and create and craft the news around us, and that we can have the power, if not the responsibility, to change the headlines.

However, I do want to underscore the double-edged sword of artifice, particularly given this cultural moment and the democratization of news through social media. When I allude to “changing the headlines,” I use the phrase to connect artifice and action, writing and being. And while I use this connection to promote ideas of human understanding, acceptance, and equality, artifice can indeed be used in ways that obscure, erode, or ignore widely accepted truths in order to tyrannize and persecute. Artifice always exists in a nexus of power, and it is a tool of power. There’s a popular quotation generally attributed to Pablo Picasso—“Anything you can imagine is real.” This is both exhilarating and terrifying.

Susan Sontag’s famous articulation of camp undoubtedly influenced my conception of artifice. In “Notes on ‘Camp’” (1964), Sontag proposes that camp is “[a] sensibility (as distinct from an idea),” and for Sontag, “the essence of Camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration” (259). More than an artistic mode or “sensibility,” I’m concerned with the “idea” of artifice from which camp stems. Artifice itself doesn’t exhibit a “love” for the “unnatural.” Rather, it provokes examination of what constitutes naturalness.

Using the term *artifice* addresses and links together the inherent contradictions found in children’s literature and journalism. In each, the act of creation defies, or at least somewhat complicates, its mission; adults establish the world of children’s literature, and in journalism, curated stories attempt to accurately mirror reality. In regard to children’s literature, David Rudd aptly states that “the child is necessarily both constructed and constructive, and this hybrid border country is worthy of exploration” (25). That is, the idea of childhood comes from adult imaginings primarily delivered through the vehicle of children’s literature, and these imaginings inevitably alter, edit, or enhance actual childhood experiences. “Constructing literary childhood, adults often replay the patterns of their own early lives,” writes Anne Scott McLeod, “sometimes romanticizing, sometimes justifying them, sometimes bringing them to a more

satisfying conclusion than they achieved in reality” (13). In this process, literary childhood shapes ideas of “reality,” the ideas of what childhood is for readers and the culture at large. But as Rudd posits, the child is also “constructive,” and a process of redefinition can take place in a “hybrid border country,” that psyche-space of give-and-take where the reciprocal processes of creation and reception occur. This practice of invention constitutes artifice, and as such, reality requires artifice—or, as the “cub reporters” throughout this book evidence, reality is a reworkable piece of artifice.

Artifice, as I see it, conflates notions of the vague conceit of the non-“natural” with the notions of human-produced creativity and reinvention to force reconsideration of preexisting truths. In nineteenth-century America, active experimentation with and interest in artifice manifests throughout literature and journalism, with writers questioning the boundaries between fact and fiction, creation and deception. In his exhaustive *Bunk* (2017), Kevin Young argues that during this time, America was preoccupied with (and is still preoccupied with) what he collectively calls “bunk,” or “hoaxes, humbug, plagiarists, phonies, post-facts, and fake news,” which certainly could be considered extensions of artifice, particularly artifice as understood in the traditional sense of counterfeiting and duplicity. “Nineteenth-century America regularly reveled in the contradictions of what famed showman P. T. Barnum called *humbug*, his many audiences taking pleasure in hoaxing and being hoaxed,” Young says, subtly hinting at the historical similarities between that moment in time and our own present one (7). Young sees “humbug” or “hoaxes” as a means for the country “to marvel at its mysteries, question its hypocrisies, and express contradictions of freedom and slavery, exploration and faith,” and asserts that American literary paragons Edgar Allan Poe and Mark Twain “questioned truth rather than questing after it” (11). Indeed, Mark Canada finds that nineteenth-century American writers questioned truth through exploring the power and reach of the newspaper, noting that while many authors of this period also worked or started in journalism, “even more wrote *about* journalism” (5). Canada looks at how “American writers respond[ed] to the *phenomenon* of journalism, develop[ed] their own sense of truth-telling in opposition to journalism’s example, and craft[ed] their own ‘news’ about the world” (5). Extending from and synthesizing certain elements of these projects, I claim that examples of Golden Age children’s literature use the newspaper to promote artifice as a means to upset unquestioned power narratives and expose the instability of “truth” and that which is deemed “natural” by society. Truth and nature, according to the texts I consider, rest in the human capacity to create.

The Yellow Kid

Looking at artifice's interplay between children's literature and journalism at the turn of the last century illuminates how we think about not only children's literature and journalism, but also American childhood, national identity, creative and intellectual pursuits, and the power dynamics implicated in the policing of knowledge. The figure of the child has reliably been "seized on as a vehicle for nostalgia or as a symbol of the future's promise" dating back to the earliest days of the young republic (Griswold 24). As Jerry Griswold notes, "[F]rom the beginning of American history through the nineteenth century, Americans consistently saw their political history in terms of the development of a child," thus rendering the child and children's literature important political tools (13). When it exposes and engages with artifice, whether intentionally or unavoidably, American children's literature celebrates the potential of the child reader (and the adult reader) to be an artificer—that is, a producer and critical thinker as opposed to a passive, subjugated consumer.

By means of political theater and sensationalized drama, *The World's* front page on July 26, 1896, effectively employs artifice to report current affairs and sell newspapers. But the publication focuses on the reporting of these current affairs; its focus is generally not the artifice itself. Flipping to the *Hogan's Alley* panel, the child characters focus on the artifice. They bring the news of artifice through questioning the boundaries of not only theater, but also childhood. This newspaper comic and its central figure, the Yellow Kid, distill the relationship between journalism and children's literature during this period. *Hogan's Alley*, at the intersection of journalism and children's literature, underscores the artifice of its surrounding newspaper pages by reveling in the strangeness and process of its own construct.

By the late nineteenth century, the American newspaper had become a well-established cultural and social institution, incorporating artifice seamlessly, albeit, at times, sensationally. A census report from 1902 states that in 1900, the number of published daily newspaper titles in the fifty largest American cities totaled 451 (Rossiter 17). Between 1890 and 1900 alone, the number of daily morning and afternoon newspapers in major cities increased by nearly 60 percent (Rossiter 17). According to David W. Sachsman, the newspaper of early America shifted the focus of its coverage over the course of the nineteenth century, gradually concerning itself more with "crime and corruption, filth and freaks, and gore and guts," with some publications including "sensationalized coverage [that] was fabrication" (xxii). In regard to the eventual development of the yellow journalism, W. Joseph Campbell maintains that even though

American history castigates it, much of today's journalism remains indebted to its industry advancements, such as "distinctive . . . typography," "lavish use of illustrations," and "aggressive newsgathering techniques" (2). "For all its flaws and virtues," Campbell writes, "yellow journalism exerted a powerful influence in American journalism at the turn of the twentieth century" (2). He asserts that today's news media could be thought of as "'reformed' yellow journalism" (2).

The innovative, bold maneuvers of the late-nineteenth-century press introduced a variety of stunts and features in the attempt to attract and build readership, one of these novelties being the comic panel and comic strip. Of *Hogan's Alley's* "Yellow Kid," Mike Benton says he "proved to be such a circulation booster for the newspaper that the future of the comic strip was assured" (14). The outrageously popular comic created by Richard Outcault consisted of one large panel and featured a group of tenement children—including Mickey Dugan, the "Yellow Kid." The character typifies an impoverished street waif through his bald head, presumably shaved because of lice, and oversized utilitarian dress-shirt. *Hogan's Alley* installments often commented on the very events that filled the surrounding newspaper pages, albeit recast with raucous youth and relocated to the poor, working-class section of the prototypical American city. These shrewd, offensive youths simultaneously challenged and indulged ideological assumptions of class, youth, race, and gender. Indeed, in terms of race and ethnicity, Sari Edelstein points out the problematic legacy of *Hogan's Alley* and other early comics, affirming that "while newspapers cultivated their immigrant readerships, they published and circulated cartoons in which immigrants were caricatured and vulgarized" (122). In this process, the children of *Hogan's Alley* display their artifice, as well as the permeability of childhood and the absolutism of creative and social construction.

The figure of the Yellow Kid symbolically renders the relationship I discern between American children's literature and journalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The *Hogan's Alley* published in the same July 26 *World* issue carrying the spectacle of the Populist Party convention and the hyperbolic rhetoric describing Dr. Maximilian M. Weil's unfortunate incident presents a theater scene, "The Opening of the Hogan's Alley Roof Garden" (Outcault Plate 28) (see figure I.1). This illustration presents multiple layers of metanarrative and cultural criticism through the image of coarse, crude city children performing the roles of adult stage actors and members of refined theater society. It underlines the performative, constructed idea not only of American childhood and adulthood, but of white society and the newspaper itself through the artifice of the colored panel and the theater setting. A girl clad in a large Gainsborough hat and balletic costume sings out to the

audience from the stage while, unbeknown to her, her tutu catches fire from a stage candle. Next to the smoldering singer, two boys in ridiculously oversized suit coats and fake beards appear to be imitating politicians, indicated by the American flag propped atop one of their heads. The artificiality of each performance stands obvious and unmasked for the audience. Indeed, it is someone from the audience who yells to the girl that her skirt is on fire, thus breaking any pretense of an authentically rendered reality. Rather than lending a sense of authenticity to their roles, the stage costumes worn by the boys only further signal that they are actively creating absurdist entertainment. “The Opening of the Hogan’s Alley Roof Garden” successfully erodes presupposed barriers between make-believe and truth, fact and fantasy. Moreover, ignorance of artifice’s naturalness and nature’s artifice will burn you—just as it does the smoldering singer engrossed in song. Underscoring all this is the Yellow Kid himself, Mickey Dugan, positioned in the forefront of the panel wearing a dress-shirt that partially reads, “Say! If me and Liz cant git no seat we kin git upon de stage an do our little turn . . .” (Outcault Plate 28). Faced with exclusion or marginalization because he cannot obtain theater tickets, the Yellow Kid shrugs it off knowing he can recast and redirect the production, and knowing that there is no real wall between the worlds of the actors and the audience.

The seemingly outlandish, irreverent behavior of the Yellow Kid and his fellow street urchins so resonated with New Yorkers that its “multitudes . . . snapped up the growing numbers of Yellow Kid toys, games, cigars, chewing gum, candy, and comic pins to be found in novelty stores, tobacco shops, street carnival booths, and other outlets” (Blackbeard 46). American journalism legend maintains that the Yellow Kid helped spur the great newspaper war between Pulitzer’s *World* and William Randolph Hearst’s *Journal* after Hearst lured Outcault away from the *World* to ink a new Yellow Kid strip for the *Journal*. Though it is disputed, the Yellow Kid often receives credit for inspiring the term *yellow journalism*, a phrase often used disparagingly to describe progressive-era reporting.¹ Indeed, in 1897, amid the rising turmoil between Spain and Cuba and the growing media presence covering the situation, famed reporter Richard Harding Davis wrote to his mother from Cuba lamenting the “new school of yellow kid journalists” and the ethics of “yellow kid reporters” (Davis, Letter to Mother, Jan. 16, 1897). Academic scholarship often revisits and recontextualizes the “yellow” component of yellow-kid reporting—the bold, sensationalistic maneuvers enacted by turn-of-the-century newspapers—but what about the “kid” part?

Newspaper reporters, as Mark Twain has written in his journals (281), tell our most durable stories, and in children—and literary representations of

THE WORLD: SUNDAY, JULY 26, 1896-COLORED SUPPLEMENT.
THE OPENING OF THE HOGAN'S ALLEY ROOF GARDEN.



Figure I.1. "The opening of the Hogan's Alley roof garden." The New York World published this Hogan's Alley panel in its July 26, 1896, edition.

children—we find our most curious reporters. I appropriate the popular journalism term “cub reporter,” a rookie journalist, to signify the cross-section between children’s literature and the newspaper during a time period considered to be a golden age for both, and to show how children function as reporters of artifice.² In addition to considering American children’s literature as a response, in part, to the rise of the newspaper, I also discern the reciprocity between journalism and children’s culture, highlighting how these two realms inform one another through the period’s children’s literature. In other words, a national ethos finds expression through American children’s literature, and children—and our ideas of children—react to and revise these texts. My study looks at work from writers such as Horatio Alger, Jr., L. Frank Baum, and Richard Harding Davis, in addition to examining the children’s page of the *Chicago Defender*, first published in 1921. In analyzing selections of the era’s children’s literature through a contextualization of journalism history, I hope to show how children’s literature can operate as social-change agent through its depictions of young people as reporters of artifice.

Journalism and the American Newspaper

The idea of journalism and objective news, the conceit of the newspaper as messenger of fact—these are notions that evolved slowly over the centuries. Indeed, in Europe as far back as the sixteenth century, many eyed the advancement of news *as an industry* with skepticism. Andrew Pettegree points out that “for those traditionally in the know, the industrialization of news, the creation of a news industry where news was traded for profit, threatened to undermine the whole process by which news had been traditionally verified—where the credit of the report was closely linked to the reputation of the teller” (5). Yet this was also the appeal and the power of the news; it democratized knowledge. And for the young democracy of America, the newspaper played a crucial role in establishing a sense of community and national identity. The great strength of the prerevolutionary press in the United States, writes Mitchell Stephens, “was its ability to enfranchise and unify Americans” (190). According to Stephens, the “role of the news in the American Revolution is best understood . . . as an entirely characteristic exercise in animating and binding a new society, in producing ‘a junction’ of a majority of the American people” (190). From the 1775 beginning of the war through its six-year stretch, thirty-five newspapers started publication alongside the preexisting thirty-seven outlets (Fellow 59).³

After the Revolution, the country continued to “bind” together, to use Stephens’s term, through the newspaper, producing a sense of national

consciousness. But the press also legitimizes itself through America's formation. "Both the press and the country became established and intertwined during the nineteenth century," assert Betty Houchin Winfield and Janice Hume, who note that the American "press established a separate identity from that in British journals and periodicals" in the century's first decades (129). The century also saw substantial growth in newspaper circulation and outlets, increasing from 235 newspapers in 1801 to 2,600 in 1906 (Winfield 129). Important to understanding the social impact of the newspaper and its reporting choices is the evolution of the press from elite weeklies that served primarily as organs of political parties to the advent of the more accessible penny papers, beginning in the 1830s with the *Sun* and the *Herald* in New York, the *Daily Times* in Boston, and the *Public Ledger* in Philadelphia. Anthony Fellow goes as far to say that after September 3, 1833, the day of the *New York Sun's* first issue, "a line was crossed in media history, a line that sharply divided the past from the present" (85). "What these papers did," writes Frank Luther Mott, "was to make newspaper readers of a whole economic class" who were previously ignored (*American Journalism* 241). However, as Mott explains, criticism arose that "for the uneducated draymen and porters," newspapers were forced to become more "sensational" than they were for their audiences of "rich merchants" (*American Journalism* 242).⁴ With the ostensible democratization of news through the penny press, the newspaper became a means of education and entertainment for families, circulating between parents and children. A contemporary observer remarked of the newspaper, "Thus the important visitant passes from hand to hand, till every member of the family has gratified his ... curiosity, down to the little children, who ask permission to look at the ships, the houses, or the pictures of the wild beasts that are for exhibition in the menagerie" (qtd. in Canada 33).

Moreover, the advent of the penny press "changed ... the idea of what news is" because the audience changed, and thus changed the style and content of coverage (Mott *American Journalism* 243). As Karen Roggenkamp astutely points out, "Penny papers of the 1830s and 1840s introduced a new fluidity between literary and journalistic forms in the daily newspaper, a fluidity that functioned even more dramatically two generations later" when the newspapers of Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst secured national prominence (1). Over the course of the century, the newspaper required increased craftsmanship and became a form of art in and of itself.

Michael Schudson demonstrates this art from the perspective of reporting, elucidating the way in which our understanding of events, news, and history intersect by detailing how journalistic coverage of the presidential inauguration

has changed, a shift that begins to happen in the second half of the nineteenth century. “The changes have to do not with the accuracy of the reporting but with the form in which the report is presented,” writes Schudson, explaining that “[e]arly newspapers did not report so much as record” (“Why News Is the Way It Is” 109). The newspaper presented speeches with no interpretation or foregrounding of themes or central issues, “just the full text of the president’s message” (109). As the century moved forward, coverage of inaugurations became more of a journalistic endeavor and less one of transcription. “What changed was not recognition of the president’s importance,” Schudson says, “but rather the idea of what a news story should be and what a reporter should be doing” (110). In doing so, a shift occurred that “reflected not merely a changed political reality” but a reality the newspaper “helped to construct,” leading to “a new political world that accepted the news reporter as an interpreter of political events” (“Why News Is the Way It Is” 110).

In addition to the increasing scope of the news reporter’s role, the role of advertising took on more weight in the late nineteenth century, with Pulitzer’s *World* becoming a business model for other newspapers. “The *World* had become the most profitable newspaper ever published” (Mott *American Journalism* 436) and had “affected the character of the entire daily press of the country” according to one observer in 1887 (qtd. in Mott, *American Journalism* 436). But the growing dependence on advertising, as well as the growing industrialization of the country, inevitably altered how newspapers operated and how publishers represented their product. Amy Kaplan writes that because of the success of the department store and a push toward manufactured-goods marketing, newspaper revenue from advertising increased to 55 percent by 1890, up from 44 percent in 1880 (27). “This change meant that the newspaper had to become a kind of advertisement for itself,” Kaplan asserts (27). “If the paper’s primary goal was to increase circulation in order to sell more products for its advertisers,” she says, “it had to present the news in such a way as to advertise itself as a *desirable product*” (Kaplan 27–28; emphasis added). The news became well-coordinated artifice, a choreography between the shrewd talent of reporters and the business savvy of publishers.

In the growing world of journalistic publications in late nineteenth-century America, a variety of genres existed, including dailies, weeklies, and monthlies, each with its own tone and agenda. Into the 1880s, Jonathan Barron notes, a cultural divide appeared between the large metropolitan dailies and some of the prominent weeklies and monthlies (*The Atlantic*, *Scriber’s*, *Harper’s*). Barron argues, “By 1880 the magazines, weekly and monthly, as well as the weekly editions of certain city papers mailed to national subscribers, had created national

publications dedicated to genteel values” (20). Using their journalistic positions as opportunities to help shape the nation through a kind of idealism, those in power at these weeklies and monthlies “deliberately and self-consciously asserted their self-appointed role as custodians of character, virtue, and duty,” Barron says, writing that the editorial leadership “engaged in a massive campaign of ‘cultural evangelism’ to promote their ideals through poetry, fiction, and drama” (20).⁵

American journalism itself reacted to the growing power and business of the newspaper. Muckraking journalism both responded to and helped define yellow journalism with its exposés and investigative reporting. Publishers established independent ventures that sought to provide intelligent, thoroughly documented news accounts and narratives; one such was S. S. McClure, who launched *McClure's Magazine* in 1893. *McClure's* featured the groundbreaking work of Ida Tarbell, Lincoln Stephens, William Allen White, and Willa Cather, among others. “The *story* is the thing,” said McClure, according to historian Doris Kearns Goodwin (qtd. in Goodwin, xii; emphasis added). “As they educated themselves about the social and economic inequities rampant in the wake of teeming industrialization,” Goodwin says, they also “educated the entire country” through their long-form narrative journalism (xii).⁶

The “new journalism” movement of the late nineteenth century endorsed the narrative traditions that Goodwin, Michael Schudson, Karen Roggenkamp, and others describe. Indeed, as Roggenkamp argues, new journalism models itself after fiction, “appropriat[ing] popular literary genres to frame the news for readers” (xv). In recasting “current events into stories laced with the familiar motifs of hoaxes, scientific and travel adventures, mystery and detective tales, and historic romances,” newspaper editorial staffs were “in effect revising and resurrecting these popular fictional forms as news items” (Roggenkamp xv). Similarly, the figure of the reporter takes on new cultural significance. In essence, the reporter becomes both the writer and main actor of the ongoing American drama. Schudson describes the shift from the image of the uneducated, hard-drinking “old reporter” to that of the dedicated, spry “new reporter,” who usually had attended college (69). The popularity of certain reporters in the 1880s and 1890s—Nellie Bly, Henry Morton Stanley, and Richard Harding Davis, among others—“added greatly to the esprit that attracted young men and more and more young women to the world of journalism” but also showed that “[r]eporters were as eager to mythologize their work as the public was to read of their adventures” (Schudson 69). In the process, the boundaries between artifice and fact become blurred, if there ever were any such distinct boundaries.

Realism and Children's Literature in America

Journalism's prominence in American life during the nineteenth century inevitably embedded itself within literary culture, from Romanticism to realism. "Journalism's presence in the era's literature reflects its presence in American culture," Mark Canada affirms.⁷ Canada specifically explores how this presence found expression in antebellum literature, in which newspapers can be found "in the lap of Poe's narrator in 'The Man of the Crowd,' in a volume in Hawthorne's sketch 'Old News,' in the living rooms of Senator Bird and Augustine St. Clair in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," and "[j]ournalists . . . appearing in works ranging from Cooper's *Home As Found* to Davis's 'Life in the Iron-Mills'" (31). Near the end of the century, the connection between American literature and journalism evolved into literary realism, a movement that endeavored to accurately depict the experiences and emotions of both the working class and the wealthy, stressing reality and observation over imagination and the ideal.

The shift from the antebellum American romance—described by Nathaniel Hawthorne in his preface to *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) as a work that should "mingle [in] the Marvelous . . . as a slight, delicate, and evanescent flavor" (vii)—to realism occurs in the wake of war and its subsequent scar on the national psyche. This literary transition occurred during a time that saw an economic market produce the ascent of the corporation and the alienation of the wage earner (Wiebe 47). Journalism scholar Thomas B. Connery, who argues that literary realism grew out of a close relationship to journalism through the many realist writers working in both genres, asserts that realism, "a paradigm of actuality," derived from "the observation of life being lived" (15). And "[a]s the century unfolded," Connery explains, "observation involved looking, seeing, and documenting the urban landscape, which became central to the paradigm of actuality" found in realism and journalism (15). Michael Schudson examines the historical changes in journalism and how those changes have affected American perception of reality, in addition to challenging contemporary traditional journalistic conventions, stating that "[w]hile the news story claims to be mimetic, it is in many respects close to the formulaic pole of literary forms" ("Why News Is the Way It Is" 122). "In producing newspapers and television news programs," says Schudson, "journalists are telling stories, and journalists, like everyone else, tell stories according to certain formulae" ("Why News Is the Way It Is" 122). As a result, "Newswriting is governed by narrative patterns imposed not by organizational necessity or ideological purpose but by narrative traditions" (Schudson "Why News Is the Way It Is" 122). As such, journalism *requires* trafficking in artifice.

By the 1880s, the United States saw “an unprecedented market for newspapers” and had “six times as many papers as there had been in the 1860s” (Fishkin 87). Realism as a literary form ostensibly established itself and its concerns for “documenting” an idea of the real lives of Americans with the 1885 publication of former *Atlantic Monthly* editor William Dean Howells’s *The Rise of Silas Lapham*. In the realist novel, as opposed to the newspaper article, “slavery, prostitution, racism, economic inequality, and exploitation, the Spanish civil war, political prosecution” could be investigated “with greater freedom” (Fishkin 7). Shelley Fisher Fishkin contends that only “as poets and novelists” could former newspaper writers such as Twain, Theodore Dreiser, and John Dos Passos “transcend” the confines of the newspaper format, enabling them to produce stories that resonated with audiences “in ways their journalism never could,” intellectually or emotionally (8).

American literary realism as a means to access Connery’s idea of “actuality” demonstrated its own limitations. Indeed, Amy Kaplan illuminates realism’s ability to contour reality, describing how “the perceived failure or impossibility of mimesis has led . . . critics to chart a more dynamic relation between social and literary structures, one that does not place the text outside society as an imaginative escape, a static window of observation, or a reflecting mirror” (6). Literature and media are not only echo chambers, but also means for mapping and creating meaning in society. Kaplan posits realism’s centrality in a “broader cultural effort to fix and control a coherent representation of a social reality that seems increasingly inaccessible, fragmented, and beyond control” (8). Certainly, both realism and the newspaper attempt to help Americans navigate a quickly changing landscape in the late nineteenth century. Their aims sometimes bolstered one another, sometimes vied against each other. “The realist’s project to construct a public sphere faced serious competition from the development of the mass media in the 1870s and 1880s,” says Kaplan, noting that “Howells’s utopian vision of a ‘common reality’ was already being put into effect by the press, which claimed to purvey ordinary life in the daily newspaper through new categories of reporting such as the ‘human interest’ story” (25–26). Thus, concurrently answering and guiding economic, social, and technological shifts, novels such as Howells’s *Lapham*, which chronicles the rapid financial decline of a fifty-five-year-old Civil War veteran born poor to a farmer in rural Vermont, and later Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* (1900), project an urban America founded in a morality of the market rather than of the heart. But while “[t]he rise of the modern newspaper is often seen as a popular counterpart to the genesis of literary realism” (Kaplan 26), there is another variable in this cultural equation.

While American realism may have been responding to journalism's ascendancy and limitations, I propose that American children's literature of the time reacts to the newspaper by way of its "cub reporters," or young persons who explore the power and process of artifice through journalism and ventures relating to journalism. Under the guise of mimetic fiction, realism reacts by attempting to further investigate social and psychological realities excluded from journalism's representations. But the texts of children's literature take a different approach by mining journalism's artifice and experimenting with its potential to change social realities. In this, these young persons render themselves reporters of artifice.

The focalization of American anxieties and ideologies through the child during the nineteenth century and beyond repackaged the era's dominant social concerns. In the case of my project, the anxiety is elicited by the newspaper, but scholars have similarly analyzed the ways that other cultural anxieties manifested through the child during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For example, in *Racial Innocence* (2011), Robin Bernstein tackles race, deftly arguing that "[c]hildhood innocence . . . characterized by the ability to retain racial meanings but hide them under claims of holy obliviousness—secured the unmarked status of whiteness, and the power derived from that status." (8). These "racial meanings" can be found in children's literary and material culture, Bernstein suggests, from Raggedy Ann dolls to Shirley Temple to the relationship between Eva and Topsy in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Like Bernstein, I see the child and childhood, through the vehicle of children's literature, responding to broader national conversations while at the same time helping shape and solidify new conversations. In other words, Golden Age children's literature did not exist in a vacuum. It was not passive and was not simply *a response* to cultural anxieties. This relationship was a reciprocal dialogue, and it continues to be so today. Through examining one distinct component of this dialogue, I hope to introduce constructive new ways to think about children's literature. In particular, with the idea of artifice, I want to examine its ability to liberate and activate individual agency when its procedural development is openly acknowledged.

Within the fields of childhood studies and children's literature, productive conversations are happening that force reconsideration of not only what it means to be a child, but also what it means to be human. In her introduction to *The Children's Table: Childhood Studies and the Humanities*, Anna Mae Duane argues that "the study of children . . . allows us to rethink the very foundations underlying" our means of social organization, and that "studying childhood requires a radically altered approach to the questions of what constitutes knowledge and what animates the work of power and resistance" (1). Current