James L. W. West III

THE MAGAZINE MARKET

It's all a question of how much a writer can stand to compromise

— Elizabeth Nowell to Vardis Fisher (1935)

During the 1880s and 1890s, modern mass-circulation magazines came into being in the United States. For the author they provided an important outlet for work and a major source of income. Before 1880, serious authors had only a few respectable magazines in which they could publish -Saibner's, Harper's, the Century, and three or four others. Such magazines were usually allied with book publishing firms and addressed a relatively well-educated and genteel audience. They tended, in editorial philosophy, to pattern themselves after such British models as Blackwood's, the Edinburgh Review, and the Fortnightly. In the 1890s and early 1900s, however, editors and publishers like Frank Munsey, S. S. McClure, John Brisben Walker, Edward Bok, and George Horace Lorimer began to produce mass-circulation magazines for a vast middle-to-lowbrow American readership that hitherto had not been addressed successfully. Advances in printing technology - especially in the reproduction of illustrations - made it possible to manufacture visually attractive magazines in huge printing runs and to price them at fifteen cents or a dime, well within reach of these new audiences. During this same period, America was making the final transition from a largely agricultural economy to a predominantly industrial one. Urbanization, growth in average income, better public education, and an increase in leisure time combined to produce a ready audience for magazines that published popular fiction and articles of general interest. During the first half of the twentieth tentury the American author could publish stories and serialize novels in an unprecedented number and variety of such magazines.

The great boom in national retailing and the growing importance of brand names made mass-directlation magazines the ideal advertising medium for American business. Indeed, it was the partnership between advertising and magazines that made possible the enormous growth of the periodical industry in the United States. Magazine publishers could sell their magazines for less than production costs and still take substantial profits from advertising revenues. Magazine publishers thus became intermediaries between specific groups of businessmen and homogeneous groups of readers. A publisher had to devise an editorial philosophy that would appeal to a particular body of readers and acquire material to fit that philosophy. Then space had to be sold to advertisers who wanted to present their products to that segment of the retail market. Almost every magazine was

designed for a well-defined public, large or small, within the total population. As a consequence, the magazine publisher came to be a dealer both in reading matter and in consumer groups.

The great success of magazines such as the Saturday Evening Post, Ladies' Home Journal, Redbook, Munsey's, Collier's, Woman's Home Companion, the Delineator, Cosmopolitan, McCall's, Liberty, the various McClure publications, and many other magazines opened up high-paying markets for fiction writers and began to make the services of a good literary agent indispensable. Agents became brokers between magazines and authors, guiding writers to editors who could use their work and introducing editors to authors whose writing would fit the needs of their magazines. Not coincidentally, advertising agencies began to spring up in New York and in other publishing centers at about this time. Such agencies facilitated dealings at another 'interface': they brought businesses in touch with magazines that would reach their particular markets, helped these businesses with copy-writing and layout, and carried out elementary experiments in market analysis.¹

The important role played by advertising in the magazine industry had an effect on content. A magazine like the *Smart Set*, which addressed a limited and sophisticated readership, could afford to be risqué or controversial because it charged a high price per copy and did not court advertising from name-brand national firms. The drawback for the author was that the *Smart Set* and other magazines of its kind paid low fees — from one hundred to four hundred dollars for a short story and even less for nonfiction. Writers who wanted to publish in mass-circulation magazines and enjoy the financial rewards and wide exposure of such publication had to be ready to tailor their work for those markets. That usually meant turning out a relatively bland product. Much of the material in mass-circulation magazines was written to order. Experienced authors like John P. Marquand and Eric Ambler would receive specific instructions from editors about subject matter, structure, tone, and length. The editor might even dictate the point of the article, story, or poem; the author would write to these specifications for an agreed-upon price, negotiated by the agent.

One writer who worked well within this system was Booth Tarkington, who for over thirty years received top prices for his short fiction and serials from national magazines — particularly from the Saturday Evening Post. The editorial philosophy of the Post was pro-business and pro-success. The hero of a typical Post story used his inborn resourcefulness to overcome difficulties and to achieve high standing in business and fulfillment in love. This philosophy originated in the personal beliefs of George Horace Lorimer, editor of the magazine, who liked to call himself 'The Old Hard-Boiled Self-Made Merchant'. Few deviations from pattern were allowed in the Post and an author had to be willing to conform in order to publish there.²

Most of the stories Tarkington submitted to the *Post* were readily and even enthusiastically accepted, and Lorimer regularly raised Tarkington's story fee in order to bind him more securely to the magazine. By 1939, Tarkington's price had reached four thousand dollars per story. The self-effacing Gentleman from Indiana was so embarrassed by Lorimer's generosity that he asked, in January 1939, to have his price *cut* – a suggestion that Lorimer laughed down. Tarkington sometimes had to alter his work for the *Post*, however. Political themes, for example, were *verboten*: the *Post* returned Tarkington's story 'Ripley, Try to Be Nice' in April 1939 because 'it is patent anti-New political references and sold the manuscript to the *Post* on a second try.³

Near the end of his life, Tarkington's fiction — heretofore relentlessly upbeat — began to take on slightly darker tones. His novel *The Man of the Family* was turned down for serialization by the *Post* is the fact that it is depressing up to the end that makes us doubt it 'very depressing reading, and it For almost the first time in the long history of his dealings with the *Post*, Tarkington was moved to not persuaded. 'I am not prepared to argue with you when you say that none of our lives has a happy

ending, she wrote him. Then she added with incontrovertible commercial logic: 'Isn't that perhaps ending,' she wrote him. Then she added with incontrovertible commercial logic: 'Isn't that perhaps ending,' she wrote him. Then she added with incontrovertible commercial logic: 'Isn't that perhaps ending,' she wrote him. Then she added with incontrovertible commercial logic: 'Isn't that perhaps ending,' she wrote him. Then she serial be early March 1940 was revising his serial. He still retained his happiness?' Tarkington gave in and by early March 1940 was revising his serial. He still retained his happiness?' Tarkington gave in and by early March 1940 was revising his serial. He still retained his happiness?' Tarkington in the told Tarkington, with no apparent irony: 'We have all publication. In her congratulatory letter she told Tarkington, with no apparent irony: 'We have all publication. In her congratulatory letter she told Tarkington, with no apparent irony: 'We have all publication. In her congratulatory letter she told Tarkington, with no apparent irony: 'We have all publication. In her congratulatory letter she told Tarkington, with no apparent irony: 'We have all publication. In her congratulatory letter she told Tarkington, with no apparent irony: 'We have all publication. In her congratulatory letter she told Tarkington, with no apparent irony: 'We have all publication. In her congratulatory letter she told Tarkington, with no apparent irony: 'We have all publication. In her congratulatory letter she told Tarkington, with no apparent irony: 'We have all publication. In her congratulatory letter she told Tarkington, with no apparent irony: 'We have all publication. In her congratulatory letter she told Tarkington, with no apparent irony: 'We have all publication. In her congratulatory letter she told Tarkington, with no apparent irony: 'We have all publication. In her congratulatory letter she told Tarkington, with no apparent irony: 'We have all publication in her congratulatory letter she told Tarkin

Even a willingness to compromise would not always guarantee a sale, especially if the material Even a willingness to compromise would not always guarantee a sale, especially if the material in a prospective serial involved a woman of doubtful moral behavior. Zona Gale's novel Light Woman dealt with an actress who refused to marry the man with whom she had been living because, after the fashion of the time, she was opposed to the idea of marriage. The manuscript had another drawback as well – it contained a suicide. Ladies' Home Journal turned down Light Woman in 1934 as did Cosmopolitan, even after Gale had offered to change her ending and have her heroine marry the man. Edwin Balmer at Redbook stalled, then asked for a new ending; Gale rewrote her conclusion, but Balmer still rejected Light Woman. Through Paul Revere Reynolds the novel was offered in succession to Woman's Home Companion, Pictorial Weekly, Harper's, Scribner's, McCall's, the Delineator, Colliers, and even the New York Herald Tribune, which sometimes printed first-run serials. At that point, Reynolds gave up and returned the manuscript to Gale, who, through a friend, played a long shot and sent the novel to Liberty. That magazine, to Gale's great relief, bought the serial rights. Gale had learned a hard lesson about the kind of behavior expected of heroines in popular magazine fiction.⁵

Money from the magazines was extremely important to writers before 1940. Indeed, they often made a good deal more from serial rights than from book royalties. Between 1919 and 1936, F. Scott Fitzgerald earned some \$225,784 for his magazine fiction as opposed to only \$66,588 for his novels. Theodore Dreiser, in the early 1920s, was still relying heavily on fees for magazine work to meet his day-to-day expenses. Dreiser was by then in his early fifties and was the author of five novels, including Sister Carrie, Jennie Gerhardt, and The Financer, but those books brought him little in the way of dependable income. And Edith Wharton, to take one final example, left Scribners for Appleton in part because the latter house offered more profitable arrangements for serializing her novels in magazines. 6 Serial money, collected in advance, could make it possible to complete a book. A dependable writer whose work was in demand could often contract for serial rights on the basis of a manuscript that was only about one-fourth complete. If an editor liked the finished chapters and the accompanying synopsis of the rest of the story, the magazine would buy the serial rights for a stated figure, payable in installments. An advance of perhaps one-third of the money would be made initially. The author lived on these funds while composing subsequent chapters and collected further checks as later chapters were delivered against specific deadlines. Often the early chapters were running in the magazine before the final chapters had been composed. When these last chapters were delivered, the author received the remainder of the money and was free to begin revising the novel for book publication.

Frequently, however, the author had to pay an artistic price for serial publication. Some novels lend themselves more readily to serialization than others: an episodic story with a chronologically arranged plot, for example, can easily be presented in coherent segments over a five- or six-month period. On the other hand, a novel written within a twenty-four-hour time frame or a narrative with frequent flashbacks and dislocations in chronology will not appear to best advantage in monthly installments. A Farewell to Arms, for example, is a relatively straightforward narrative; it was a simple matter for Scribner's Magazine to serialize the book in six segments from May to October of 1929.

Tender Is the Night, by contrast, has a complex time frame and employs a major flashback sequence that takes up the middle third of the book. By splitting this three-part novel into four installments, Scribner's Magazine made the potentially confusing narrative structure quite difficult to follow. Fitz. gerald was convinced that most reviewers of Tender had read it as a serial and that they had gotten a negative first impression of the book in that medium.

Authors who were interested in selling serial rights obviously needed to write their novels with serialization in mind from the beginning, taking care to structure the narrative in installments suitable for monthly magazine publication. James Boyd's first novel, a historical adventure about the Revolutionary War entitled *Drums*, had not been written in this fashion, however, and Robert Bridges, editor of *Scribner's Magazine*, turned it down for magazine publication in 1924 because of Boyd's technique of delineating character. 'The very excellence of your method which reproduces the character through a succession of episodes, rather than through the development of a strong story, seems to me to stand in the way of that impelling interest which is necessary in a serial', wrote Bridges to the young author. In composing subsequent novels, Boyd took care to tailor his manuscripts for the serial market. For example, when he sent the first installment of *Roll River* to Maxwell Perkins ten years later, he noted: 'The action is sustained, and the break is logical. I have an idea that the succeeding installments will not only be briefer but more rapid in movement and therefore satisfactory from a serialization standpoint'. ⁷

Concessions to taste and decorum also had to be made. Scribner's Magazine had to persuade Hemingway to omit numerous words and lines from A Farewell to Arms because they were judged too strong for magazine presentation. Pregnancy, even within wedlock, was a delicate subject: Fitzgerald's 1926 novella 'The Rich Boy' was made fit for appearance in Redbook by a bumbling editor who removed from the text, without Fitzgerald's permission, all references to the character Paula Hagerty's swollen shape during her pregnancy. One can imagine the confusion in readers' minds when Paula dies in childbirth a few pages later, without its having been mentioned that she is with child. By 1939 Fitzgerald had learned to anticipate such problems. While drafting The Last Tycoon, he realized that some of his material would be potentially censorable. He wrote Kenneth Littauer, editor of Collier's, that he would compose the central seduction scene two ways: 'Now we have a love affair between Stahr and Thalia, an immediate, dynamic, unusual, physical love affair – and I will write it so that you can publish it. At the same time I will send you a copy of how it will appear in book form somewhat stronger in tone.'

Some authors saw serialization as undignified. Ellen Glasgow, who was much concerned about her literary reputation, all but forbade her agent Paul Revere Reynolds from offering serial rights for her novels to mass-circulation magazines. 10 More business-minded authors simply saw serialization as a source of additional income. In answer to a query from agent Carl Brandt about a serial feeler from England, John P. Marquand sent a simple two-word telegram: 'How Much?' An author, however, often lost some control over the text in return for serial money. After purchasing North American serial rights to Marquand's Point of No Return for sixty thousand dollars, Ladies' Home Journal made it clear to Brandt that some cutting and editorial rewriting might be done. 'It is understood', they wrote, 'that we must of necessity be the final judges as to what goes into the magazine.'11 Even when novels had been written to specifications, authors could end up with maimed novelist Arnold Reports and Close enough to New York to oversee publication. In 1921, English novelist Arnold Bennett wrote angrily from London to Eric Schuler of the Authors League that the Delineator had butchered the first four serial installments of Mr. Prohack, a one-hundred-thousandword novel that he had written for the magazine, as directed, in seven installments of some fourteen thousand words each translation of the magazine, as directed, in seven installments of some fourteen thousand words each. From the first four installments, totaling fifty-seven thousand words, the Delineator had cut more than twenty-six thousand words. Bennett was furious, but there was nothing he could do. 12 A year later Fitzgard 11, he could do. 12 A year later, Fitzgerald's second novel, The Beautiful and Damned, was treated similarly by Carl Hovey at Metropolitan Magazine. Fitzgerald was unhappy, but the only satisfaction he received by Carl Hovey at Metropolitan Magazine. Fitzgerald was unhappy, but the only satisfaction he received by Carl Hovey at Metropolitan Magazine. Fitzgerald was unhappy, but the only satisfaction he received by Carl Hovey at Metropolitan Magazine. Fitzgerald was unhappy, but the only satisfaction he received by Carl Hovey at Metropolitan Magazine. Fitzgerald was unhappy, but the only satisfaction he received by Carl Hovey at Metropolitan Magazine. Fitzgerald was unhappy, but the only satisfaction he received by Carl Hovey at Metropolitan Magazine. Fitzgerald was unhappy, but the only satisfaction he received by Carl Hovey at Metropolitan Magazine. Fitzgerald was unhappy, but the only satisfaction he received by Carl Hovey at Metropolitan Magazine. Fitzgerald was unhappy, but the only satisfaction he received by Carl Hovey at Metropolitan Magazine. Fitzgerald was unhappy, but the only satisfaction he received by Carl Hovey at Metropolitan Magazine. Fitzgerald was unhappy, but the only satisfaction he received by Carl Hovey at Metropolitan Magazine. Fitzgerald was unhappy, but the only satisfaction he received by Carl Hovey at Metropolitan Magazine. Fitzgerald was unhappy, but the only satisfaction he received by Carl Hovey at Metropolitan Magazine. Fitzgerald was unhappy, but the only satisfaction he received by Carl Hovey at Metropolitan Magazine. Fitzgerald was unhappy, but the only satisfaction he received by Carl Hovey at Metropolitan Magazine. Fitzgerald was unhappy, but the only satisfaction he received by Carl Hovey at Metropolitan Magazine. Fitzgerald was unhappy at Metropolitan Magazine. Fitzgerald was unhappy at Metropolitan he was at Metropolitan Magazine. Fitzgerald was unhappy at Metropolitan Magazine. Fitzgera

Authors who wrote regularly for mass-circulation magazines sometimes found themselves Authors who wrote regularly for mass-circulation magazines sometimes found themselves typecast by previous material. After the great success of her two-volume Early Life of Abraham Lincoln typecast by previous material. After the great success of her two-volume Early Life of Abraham Lincoln, so in 1900, Ida Tarbell found that there was virtually no way she could stop writing about Lincoln, so in 1900, Ida Tarbell found that she do follow-up articles on incidents from his life that she had insistent were magazine editors that she do follow-up articles on had observed him would contact not treated in her biography. People who had known Lincoln or had observed him would contact not treated in her biography. People who had known Lincoln or had observed him would contact not treated in her biography. People who had known Lincoln or had observed him would contact not treated in her biography. People who had known Lincoln or had observed him would contact not treated in her biography. People who had known Lincoln or had observed him would contact not treated in her biography. People who had known Lincoln or had observed him would contact not treated in her biography. People who had known Lincoln or had observed him would contact not treated in her biography. People who had known Lincoln or had observed him would contact not treated in her biography. People who had known Lincoln or had observed him would contact not treated in her biography. People who had known Lincoln or had observed him would pay a percentage her with requests that she was a first request of her magazine fee to the source of the material. She probably could have made her way easily for the rest of her career by manufacturing little else but spin-off articles on Lincoln, but she very much was a factor of the magazine sometimes. The people was a factor of the probably could have made her way easily for the rest of her was a factor of the rest of her was a factor of t

Stephen Vincent Benét's short story 'The Devil and Daniel Webster', published first in the Saturday Evening Post on 24 October 1936, brought wide notice to its author and was quickly anthologized in numerous high school textbooks. The story was also adapted for radio and the movies; later a stage play and a television production were mounted. Benét found a ready market thereafter for short fiction based on incidents in American history, but eventually he tired of the material. He complained in a letter to his agent, Carl Brandt, and asked that Brandt try to interest magazine editors in something else. Brandt, however, did not seem to understand the problem: 'I am much interested in the spread of your patriotic writing', he wrote Benét. 'In all seriousness, I don't see how you can get out of it or think you should.' Still, Benét felt trapped by his own success with 'Daniel Webster'.

Something similar happened to William Faulkner in his dealings with Scribner's Magazine during the early 1930s. Faulkner sold a cut-down version of 'Spotted Horses' to Scribner's in February 1931 and thereafter had difficulty selling them anything else for a time, so determined were they to have another Flem Snopes story. K. C. Crichton, assistant editor of the magazine, wrote Faulkner, 'We regret that it has not been possible to accept more of the stories you have offered us, but on Flem Snopes we are clear. He is our character and we think that in your hands he will become one of the great characters of literature'. Faulkner was probably flattered, but unfortunately for Scribner's he had found a higher-paying market for his Flem Snopes material — the Saturday Evening Post. In the meantime he sent other stories to Scribner's, including 'Rose of Lebanon', 'Idyll in the Desert', and 'All the Dead Pilots', but all were turned down. 'We have become so hipped on the thought of Flem Snopes', wrote Crichton, 'that we are confining all our prayers in the hope that George Horace Lorimer will be struck with lightning just at the time those pieces of yours reach him.' 16

Fitzgerald must have felt similarly trapped in 1937 when, down on his luck and living in a seedy hotel in Tryon, North Carolina, he was desperately attempting to manufacture amusing love stories, in his old style, for the Post. Fitzgerald was heavily in debt to Charles Scribner's Sons, his publisher, and to Harold Ober, his literary agent. He had been in debt before — indeed it was almost a perpetual condition for him after 1920 but he had always been able to rescue himself by writing short fiction for the Post and other mass-circulation magazines. In fact he had even tried to have himself declared 'virtually an employee' of the Post in 1932 for income tax purposes. This situation was caused in part by his inability to write convincingly about his prototypical Fitzgerald heroine. Young, beautiful, and willfully independent, she had been a feature of nearly all of his magazine fiction since 1919. By 1937, however, Fitzgerald was no longer much interested in her, and his repeated attempts to recreate her in his post-1935 stories were unsuccessful. These

stories are puzzling: the familiar matter of his earlier *Post* fiction is there, but the manner is lacking. The heroines are curiously diminished versions of their more engaging, vital sisters from Fitzgerald's earlier stories. As a working author, however, he had to meet the demands of his market, which, as he interpreted it, still wanted his heroine.

In March 1937, living in the Tryon hotel, the weary Fitzgerald began a story of young love entitled 'A Full Life'. The manuscript opened with an improbable incident in which his heroine, named Gwen Davis, donned an inflatable flying suit and floated out the window of a Manhattan skyscraper. This was to be the first occurrence of a motif Fitzgerald wanted to work into the story, a motif of flying and falling. Gwen flies and falls first from the skyscraper window, later from the deck of an ocean liner, and finally from a circus cannon. Had he been able to inject his writing with a suitably light tone, Fitzgerald might have brought off this little fantasy, but as one reads through the surviving draft of the story, one sees that his heart was not in the work. Plotting is artificial, characters are wooden, and motivations are unclear.

About midway through the draft, Fitzgerald apparently realized what was happening and, in disgust, worked a freakish detail into the story. He quite literally filled his heroine with dynamite. Gwen leaves her childhood home because she does not want to 'raise the roof'. Later she marries the son of a gunpowder manufacturer because she has 'always belonged to him'. Still later she becomes a circus daredevil who makes her living by being shot from a cannon. Gwen's performing name is symptomatic of Fitzgerald's dislike for her: he dubs her 'The Human Shell' — and indeed she is an empty character. Discouraged by his inability to bring his dynamite-filled heroine to life and tired of trying to manufacture yet another light romance for the *Post*, Fitzgerald made a macabre private gesture in his manuscript. He blew Gwen up. The explosion killed a man standing next to her and was heard as far away as New York City. This grisly little tale reveals much about Fitzgerald's state of mind during his famous Crack-Up period. He felt victimized by his previous success, locked into writing one kind of story about one type of character — a heroine about whom he no longer cared. In

Many authors of novels and short fiction chafed under the formal and structural limitations imposed on them by mass-circulation magazines. They disliked the simplistic, undeviating pattern of the 'formula' story: it began typically with action or dialogue in order to capture the attention of a reader paging through an issue; it was rigidly plotted and moved relentlessly toward an artificial climax; and it ended with a 'final suspiration', often faintly saccharine in tone, usually in the advertising pages at the rear of the magazine. 19 Some writers (Sherwood Anderson, for example) could not adapt to these limitations. Other authors — Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and Dreiser among them - learned to work more or less within the formula and eventually turned out some very good short fiction for the big-audience slicks. Writing for high-paying magazines, however, was not a predictable business. Editors and staff readers changed with some frequency at the various magazines, and editorial requirements fluctuated. Writing for the magazines took patience, adaptability, and a thick skin. There was no sheet of dos and don'ts for prospective authors to follow; length, subject matter, tone, language, plot, characterization – all had to be negotiated by a complicated system of trial and error, inference and suggestion, submission, rejection, and submission. The work could be frustratively the natural of the submission of the submission of the submission of the submission. war I saw the magazine world rewards were large. In fact, most American authors before World War I saw the magazine market as virtually their only source of big money. After the war, however, different ways of publishing one's work, or adapting it to other media, began to emerge. Books could be serialized or abridged or distributed through book clubs or reprinted as paperbacks; story material could be adapted for presentation on the radio, stage, screen, or lecture circuit. Even translation rights could violation of the radio, stage, screen, or lecture circuit. translation rights could yield significant amounts of money for some books. The author set about tapping these new sources of its author set about tapping these new sources of income and learning how to exploit the full earning potential of what was now beginning to be collected to the was now beginning to be called a 'literary property'.

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