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The Literary World According to Munsey's: Epistemic Style in US Mass Magazines around 1900



Alexander Starre is assistant professor (wiss. Mitarbeiter) of North American culture at the John F. Kennedy Institute at Freie Universität Berlin, Germany. He is a former Alexander von Humboldt Foundation fellow and has previously taught at the Universities of Göttingen, Münster, and Duisburg-Essen, as well as at Brown University. His research interests include American cultural history, knowledge production, media theory, literary institutions, and print culture. He is the author of *Metamedia: American Book Fictions and Literary Print Culture after Digitization* (2015) and co-editor of several essay collections and special issues, among them *The Printed Book in Contemporary American Culture: Medium, Object, Metaphor* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), *Culture²: Theorizing Theory for the Twenty-First Century* (transcript, 2022), and *American Literary Institutions around 1900* (special issue of *College Literature*, 2025). He is currently finishing a book on knowledge institutions and epistemic styles in the United States around 1900.

Alexander Starre

John F. Kennedy Institute, FU Berlin

During the magazine revolution of the 1890s, in which new business and marketing strategies triggered an explosion in the American print-marketplace, several magazine entrepreneurs tested out new forms and formats for literary writing that led to unique inter-institutional constellations. At *Cosmopolitan* magazine, editor John Brisben Walker hatched a plan to turn the magazine itself into a new type of American university—a democratic-minded institution that would facilitate modern education with a pragmatic view of literature's place in it. Elsewhere in the booming magazine market, Frank Munsey and S. S. McClure offered up the pages of their periodicals to novel forms of literary discourse, expressed in recurring columns such as "Literary Chat" and "Human Documents." Surveying roughly a decade worth of "Literary Chat" installments from *Munsey's Magazine* (1893-1903), I aim to show how such formats produced proto-sociological knowledge about the actors and institutions that dominated the US literary scene. The talk also develops the notion of "epistemic style" to reframe the years around 1900 as an experimental phase regarding the place of literary culture within a capitalist knowledge economy.

This talk presents preliminary results of the DFG-funded project "From Patronage to the Mass Market: Institutionalizing Literary Knowledge Cultures in the 19th-Century United States," collaboratively undertaken by the John-F.-Kennedy Institute for North American Studies (FU Berlin) and the English Department at the University of Heidelberg.