

Book reviews . . .

Thomas B. Connery, Book Review Editor
a farewell, page 90

A Woman Scorns

Iphigenia in Forest Hills

by Janet Malcolm

Reviewed by Brian Gabriel 92

A Pox on Your Olympics

Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire: A Confidential Report

by Iain Sinclair

Reviewed by Nick Nuttall 95

The Literary Journalist as Savior

Between Light and Shadow: A Guatemalan Girl's Journey through Adoption

by Jacob Wheeler

Reviewed by Melissa Nurczynski 98

Studs Terkel, Meet Your Chinese Counterpart

The Corpse Walker: Real Life Stories, China from the Bottom Up

by Liao Yiwu

Reviewed by Willa McDonald 101

The Great Migration, Reimagined

The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration

by Isabel Wilkerson

Reviewed by Kathy Roberts Forde. 105

It's a Dirty Job But Somebody Has Got to Tell It

Working in the Shadows: A Year of Doing the Jobs [Most] Americans Won't Do

by Gabriel Thompson

Reviewed by Isabel Soares 109

The Documentary Novel and Its Many Theories

Factual Fictions: Narrative Truth and the Contemporary American Documentary Novel

by Leonora Flis.

Reviewed by John J. Pauly. 113

How to Write a Long-form Story

Storycraft: The Complete Guide to Writing Narrative Nonfiction

by Jack Hart

Reviewed by Mark H. Massé. 116

Literature—What Is It Good For? Absolutely Something

The Use and Abuse of Literature

by Marjorie Garber

Reviewed by Michael Robertson 119

Literary Journalism Studies

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Stepping Down from the Book Watch

Thomas B. Connery,
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This is my last issue as book review editor. As I place the section into the hands of the highly capable Nancy Roberts, University at Albany of the State University of New York, I'd like to share a few thoughts on the nature of the *LJS* book section. As with any book review section, this one provides a heads up, letting readers know what might be worth the read or at least a look. But as *Literary Journalism Studies* first book review editor, I've also tried to establish an identity for the section that clearly fits the mission of IALJS and its journal. So, of course, I've done my best to scan the horizon for books of interest to *this* journal's readers, who teach, study, or write literary journalism. At times it's clear which books apply; at other times, it's important for the reviewer to make that connection or to explain why the book might interest the journal's readers, and it's up to the editor to make sure that connection is made.

I haven't, however, viewed my role primarily as that of gatekeeper, though judgments must be made as to what works touch the field and might merit review, even if that touch is light. In part, the idea has been to provide reviews of works, including non-American books, that might not get reviewed in other journals, or if they are reviewed elsewhere, to always provide a distinct perspective. Overall, I believe that by reading the reviews from issue to issue, one can learn quite a bit about literary journalism as a genre and as a field of study.

The most common books selected are, naturally, works of literary journalism, scholarly works about literary journalism, and books about "doing" literary journalism. So, for example, while there are many reviews of Tracy Kidder's *Strength in What Remains*, the *LJS* review discusses it as a work of literary journalism and places it within a literary journalistic context. Similarly, a review of a work such as Norm Sim's *True Stories* or Jan Whitt's *Settling the Borderland* connects those works to the existing body of research and more properly assesses their significant scholarly impact when compared to a more general review. In the same way, books that have something to say about the practice of literary journalism and the long-form narrative are reviewed with the knowledgeable reader in mind, particularly those who teach young writers

and budding literary journalists. Yet the search for reviewable books doesn't end with those three obvious categories. I've also tried to find books that on first glance may not seem to connect to *LJS* and its readers. For instance, in this issue, Michael Robertson reviews *The Use and Abuse of Literature* by Marjorie Garber. Garber's book explores the purpose of literature and should therefore at least indirectly interest many *LJS* readers. But Robertson also points out one chapter's clear connection to literary journalism, providing an additional service or heads up for *LJS* readers.

The collection of reviews in these categories clearly contribute to the distinctive mission of this journal, and I am pleased and proud to have made a small contribution to IALJS and to the journal and its important work, so skillfully carried out issue after issue by John C. Hartsock, with assistance from Bill Reynolds. I'm fully confident, however, that Nancy Roberts, a first-rate journalism historian and a long-standing teacher and student of literary journalism, will continue to thoughtfully shape the identity of the *LJS* book review section. She brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the task and *LJS* will only be stronger because of her willingness to serve.

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A Woman Scorns

Iphigenia in Forest Hills

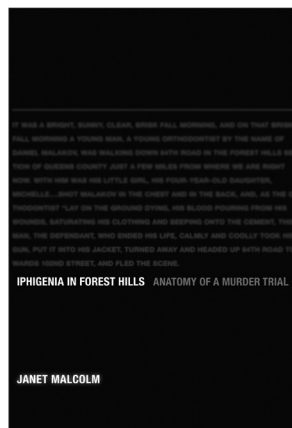
by Janet Malcolm. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011. Hardcover, 155 pp., \$25.

Reviewed by Brian Gabriel, Concordia University, Canada

Janet Malcolm is on a crusade in her latest book, *Iphigenia in Forest Hills*. In it, she writes about a world filled with bad guys—all guys. From the get-go, this seemingly misogynistic mélange of social workers, lawyers, and judges conspire against her protagonist, a Brooklyn doctor standing trial for the murder-for-hire killing of her dentist husband. In this account, Mazoltuv Borukhova's only real crimes may be that she loves her daughter too much and cannot get the jurors to warm up to her. In due course, she is convicted of murder along with her co-conspirator Mikhail Mallayev. Malcolm's task, then, over the book's crisply written 155 pages, is to reveal how such a travesty, abetted by a judicial patriarchy demeaning to professional women, occurred. As told here, this true tale is less about murder than an epic custody battle pitting a loving (if not obsessive) mother against an abusive ex-husband. Malcolm deliberately frames *Iphigenia in Forest Hills* like a Greek tragedy, and like a Greek tragedy, redemption is out of the question. In the Greek legend, Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter Iphigenia to appease the gods only to face the wrath of her mother Clytemnestra. In Malcolm's version, it is the mother who is sacrificed on the altar of justice while the daughter lives but is lost to the mother's enemies.

Because of the book's straightforward narrative—murder, arrest, trial, conviction—Malcolm cannot avail herself to facts that may offer sophisticated plot twists. There are no surprises. Instead, Malcolm engages the reader with her real-life characters, and character studies are what Malcolm does best. Because she is a careful reporter and keen observer, having few peers matching her skills in illuminating character strengths or flaws, Malcolm needs only to harvest the quotes, carefully dispensing them as she sees fit, often using the subjects' own words against them. As she effectively demonstrated in *The Journalist and the Murderer* and *In the Freud Archives*, this is her signature technique. In this book, though, it often comes across as mere manipulation.

As to her main character, Borukhova, Malcolm does not gain access to the woman, nor to her family. They keep quiet. For Malcolm, this works because a lack of quotable material keeps the reader at arm's length from this aloof and strange



protagonist. Instead, Malcolm relies on Borukhova's enemies, such as the woman's in-laws or the legal cabal out to get her to provide a patina formed from their corrosive opinions. Ironically, Malcolm is able to juxtapose their verbal excesses to elicit sympathy for the defendant. Borukhova becomes the underdog, an innocent mother maintaining her dignity against overwhelming odds. In the final showdown, for example, between Borukhova and the prosecutor Brad Leventhal, Malcolm writes, "He was aggressive and accusatory. He could barely contain his contempt and dislike. He called her Miss Borukhova rather than Dr. Borukhova" (59). (Malcolm repeatedly mentions this lack of respect toward Borukhova to score points against the patriarchy.) It is clear where the author stands. In describing the defendant, Malcolm writes metaphorically, "Borukhova wore her white jacket of innocence and kept her head high. She looked regal. She looked like a captive barbarian princess in a Roman triumphal procession" (59). And like a caged princess, she must endure the brute.

But Leventhal gets off lightly compared with two other men that Malcolm targets for special attention and enmity. The first is trial judge Robert Hanophy, a man she describes as "seventy-four with a small head and a large body and the faux-genial manner that American petty tyrants cultivate" (7). He rules the courtroom absolutely while consistently favoring the prosecutor's case. The second is the true antagonist and villain, the child's court-appointed attorney David Schnall. According to the Malcolm, it is Schnall's legal handiwork before the murder that destroyed the family. When the writer asks, "How had this nightmare—every mother's nightmare—become a reality? What malevolent fairy had written its surreal script" (47). The answer is Schnall. His intransigence and hatred toward Borukhova results in his *King Lear*-like moment, forcing the family into a custody hearing nobody wanted. In the book's final words, Malcolm, referring to Schnall's actions, resorts again to metaphor: "And so the curtain rose on the tragedy of Daniel Malakov, Michelle Malakov, and Mazoltuv Borukhova" (155).

Malcolm famously wrote once that a journalist is "a kind of confidence man, praying on people's vanity, ignorance, or loneliness, gaining their trust and betraying them without remorse."¹ Malcolm makes similar points here, readily identifying herself as a member of a tribe, which traffics in "[h]uman frailty" and where "[m]alice remains its animating impulse" (29). She cynically observes: "Journalists attending a long trial together develop a special camaraderie born of a shared good mood: their stories are writing themselves; they have only to pluck the low hanging fruit of the attorneys' dire narratives. They can sit back and enjoy the show" (30). Yet, Malcolm-as-journalist does not just enjoy the show. During an interview with the villain Schnall, she found him delusional: "I had had enough . . . Then I did something I have never done before as a journalist. I meddled with the story I was reporting" (68-69). She notifies the defense attorney who seeks a mistrial, a move that Judge Hanophy quickly dismisses. (Did this action turn the writer against him?)

Other significant actors, such as Borukhova's dead husband or her accomplice, become mere props to move the character study along. About the dead man, the writer presents conflicting anecdotes to further a major theme—reasonable doubt. Is he a pedophile from whom Borukhova will go to any lengths to protect her daughter?

ter, or a loving father wanting time with his child? Does he beat his wife, or is he an exhausted man dealing with an unbalanced spouse and her unbalanced family? Malcolm lets the reader decide. She gives similar treatment to the woman's in-laws and other supporting characters.

Along the way, Malcolm skewers America's justice system. "We go through life mis-hearing and mis-seeing and misunderstanding," Malcom writes, "so that the stories we tell ourselves will add up. Trial lawyers push this human tendency to a higher level" (13-14). After seeing the decrepit conditions under which Borukhova was held during trial, Malcolm writes, "My visit only confirmed the hollowness of the concept of presumption of innocence" (14). Her conversations with jurors show that they intuitively support the prosecutor's case because they believe a defendant would not be on trial in the first place if they had not done something wrong. According to Malcolm, jury deliberations are group-think exercises based less on fact than on emotive preferences. Worse yet, as in Borukhova's case, her likeability mattered more than her presumed innocence. When Borukhova testified, the author observed the jurors' disdain, noting they "kept not looking at her" (59). Malcolm's point: Justice is not about liking a defendant; it is about ensuring the innocent go free.

Iphigenia in Forest Hills is a solid effort, and, given controversies shrouding a Florida jury's recent acquittal of another mother on trial for murder, it is also a timely, instructive book about America's jury system. However, it is an incomplete and sometimes forced work. No matter how Malcolm presents Mazoltuv's story, no matter how the author reveals the biased forces working against her, too many unanswered questions remain. (Is Malcolm holding out on us?) Perhaps this is Malcolm's intention. Still, I enjoyed the book. When I first read *Iphigenia in Forest Hills* in the *New Yorker*, I didn't believe it had enough literary merit to include, for example, in a course packet. In reading this version, I've changed my mind.

NOTES

1. Janet Malcolm, "The Journalist and the Murderer, Part 1," *New Yorker*, 13 March 1989, 38.
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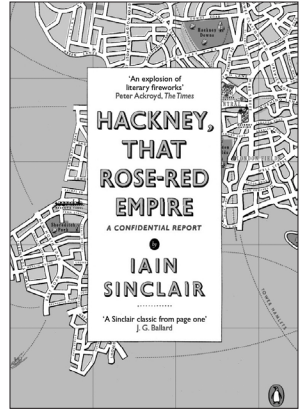
A Pox on Your Olympics

Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire: A Confidential Report

by Iain Sinclair. London: Penguin Books, 2010. Paperback, 581 pp., £10.99.

Reviewed by Nick Nuttall, University of Lincoln, U.K.

The history of London has long been Iain Sinclair's great passion. Often called the "post-punk Pepys," he has recorded with almost obsessive zeal the everyday life of the capital. In *Lights Out for the Territory* he traced nine routes across London as a way of recording its modern urban life; in *London Orbital* he walked the M25 motorway, all 117 miles of it, both physically and emotionally charting its encircling of the capital; in *Downriver* he looked at the remains of London's river life through the lens of a fictional film crew hired to make a documentary in the wake of the Thatcher boom years that laid waste to much of its charm and character. More recently he has written about Hackney—that part of London he calls home. He has walked its streets nearly every day since moving there in 1969. The result is *Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire: A Confidential Report*.



In the book's Acknowledgements Sinclair calls it a "documentary fiction," which is essentially synonymous with Truman Capote's description of *In Cold Blood* as a "nonfiction novel." Where Capote proclaims his prodigious memory, however, Sinclair offers "a story of fallible memory" with the proviso that "where it needs to be true, it is" (579). Sinclair sets out his stall from the get-go: "I'd be happy to hire a pro to take care of the daily grind, the writing, but I want to hang on to the business of gathering material, that's the fun part" (so it was for Capote!). Sinclair's sources are "junk from the road: pamphlets, snapshots, conversations with hangers about, dog walkers" (51). We are in journalism territory then, at least so far as the "newsgathering" side of things is concerned. According to Sinclair, "The story is accidental. It tells itself—if we don't mangle that complex elegance through faulty memory" (51). Again, he seems to be abiding by the traditional journalistic requirement not to misrepresent information, however gleaned. So far, so good.

At the same time, however, there are passages of bravura prose that the purist will call into question when debating literary journalism:

But in the troubled sleep of De Beauvoir Town, monsters crawl and swim; memory-traces of old Hackney beldams, the shit and straw of satanic madhouses lurking beyond the walls of the City. Blotting up damage. Incubi and succubi attend the recently impoverished with garlands of nightswear: final demands, failed commissions, overdue novels. (70)

Are such passages grounded in reality? Are they perhaps just too subjective even for the "fact" expansion allowable on some of the wilder shores of literary journalism?

Sinclair's sinuous prose can become infectious as it mixes subjective and objective telling in a way that defies normal journalistic conventions. Yet these are real events, real people, real places that he has woven into a lexical version of the communal patchwork quilt beloved of American pioneer women.

James Joyce claimed that anyone could reconstruct a map of Dublin by reading *Ulysses* and in the same way a modern reader could almost reconstruct a map of Hackney by reading Sinclair. With one essential difference—here we are confronted not only with factual topography but also with a believable analysis of Hackney's "consciousness." Situationist Guy Debord coined a word for it—psychogeography—as long ago as 1955 in his essay, *Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography*, and Sinclair is one of its masters. According to Debord, psychogeography is the study of "the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals" (Para. 2).¹

The inspiration for this latest volume of London psychogeography would appear to be the impending London Olympics of 2012. Many areas of Hackney and surrounding boroughs are being laid waste in the name of progress or, as Sinclair would have it, in the name of rampant capitalist greed in order to satisfy the demands of the International Olympic Committee and its henchmen. Writing about the Olympics, he has described its effect on the area as one of state-sponsored terrorism. Its blue security fence has become a "cultural defoliant, an Agent Orange of edge-land jungles" (Sandhu 2009: para. 8).² Sinclair's prognosis essentially is that no good will come of this. For he is at odds with modernity to the extent that it becomes a metaphor for all that is ugly, rapacious and grasping about human behavior. The desecration of London's history and heritage on such a scale is too high a price to pay for a few gold medals and some spurious jingoistic fervor. Time, then, to record what is there before it is swept away.

There is plenty of opposition to Sinclair's view. You may wonder why the book is subtitled *A Confidential Report*. Here's why. In 2008 Sinclair wrote a scathing article about the redevelopment of East London for the 2012 Olympics in the *London Review of Books*. A reading he was to give at a Hackney library to launch the book was summarily cancelled when the article was drawn to councilors' attention. According to Sinclair, in a recent interview with Rachel Cooke for the London *Observer* newspaper, his publisher decided to market *Hackney* as "the book they tried to ban," a claim based on Hackney Borough Council's refusal to allow its launch reading because Sinclair was "anti-Olympics." *Hackney* is therefore "a confidential report."

Divided into nine sections with headings such as "British Sounds," "Waste," and "Domestic Exotic," the overall structure is as loose and nonlinear as such titles suggest and the book is laced throughout with extraordinary tales of Hackney life. How many people know that Hollywood starlet Jayne Mansfield "swayed into the low church hall and community centre of All Saints, Haggerston, to declare open a convention of East London budgerigar fanciers, September 1959?" (161). Or that she left behind her white raincoat in the *Black Bull* pub, to be picked up later and flogged to a market trader by gangster Tony Lambrianou. Those other gangsters, the notorious Kray Twins, Ronald and Reggie, get a look in too, surrounded by a retinue of "killer dwarfs, dockers in pink leotards and lesbian nurses who did damage on request around them on Friday nights in the Old Horns" (161). That public house also is no more, the building now innocently used by a local school.

Sinclair litters his story with such small walk-on parts—cameos that constantly

surprise: Orson Welles's unlikely production of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* at the Hackney Empire—the rose-red auditorium of Sinclair's title—with Kenneth Williams and Joan Plowright in the cast (321); Joseph Conrad recovering from “the traumas of the Congo, malaria and imperialism” at the German Hospital in Dalston (120); Julie Christie moving briefly to Hackney in the 1970s and Warren Beatty arriving to pick up his jackets when they split up (387).

Sinclair's interest in oral history is reflected in the numerous interviews that intersperse the narrative. They are generally taped and transcribed, unedited, and mix personal memoir and Hackney anecdotes with his trademark eclecticism. We meet Anya Gris, the architect who has never had one of her designs built (139); ex-oil company man Norman Palmer, who has an antiques stall in Kingsland Waste market (101); erstwhile gangster Lambrianou, just out of prison on license after a fifteen-year stretch for involvement in a gangland killing (188). These are mingled with more familiar names—feminist pioneer Sheila Rowbotham, fellow psychogeographer and author Will Self, and an interview with Astrid Proll, founder member of the Baader-Meinhof gang and the Red Army Faction, on her memories of Hackney in the 1970s (565).

In Sinclair's world places are characters as much as people. He takes us from his own house in Albion Drive to Mortimer Road and its Mole Man, who tunnelled his way into the underground metro system; from the rave music scene at Dalston Junction to the history of Shacklewell Lane, where Sir Thomas More visited and Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts rioted. We learn that Balmes House, on the border between Hoxton and De Beauvoir Town, was once a madhouse where the word “barmy” originated and that Fassett Square was the prototype for Albert Square in the BBC soap opera *EastEnders*.

Despite its highways and byways, *Hackney* has a clearly defined journalistic well-spring and its literary credentials are displayed on every page. Sinclair has produced a unique agglomeration of memoir, interview, travelogue, oral history, comic invention, lyricism, and anecdote in order to tell his story. The final chapter harks back to the driving force of the book's creation. Entitled “The Blue Fence,” it refers to the security cordon around the 2012 Olympic Games site. This chapter confirms what most readers by now will have surmised—regeneration is more backward-looking than leaving things as they are. The horror of the new is not that it's new but that it's invariably horrible. The tension in his books is constructed from this endless “bothering” with what is, rather than endless dreaming about what could be. The capitalist mantra of dissatisfaction has been banished from Sinclair's world.

NOTES

1. Guy Debord (1955) “Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography,” *Bureau of Public Secrets*. <http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/urbgeog.htm>. Accessed 7 June 2011.

2. Sukhdev Sandhu (2009) “Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire by Iain Sinclair—Review,” *Telegraph*, 14 February. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/bookreviews/4613751/Hackney-That-Rose-Red-Empire-by-Iain-Sinclair-review.html>. Accessed 25 July 2011.

The Literary Journalist as Savior

Between Light and Shadow: A Guatemalan Girl's Journey through Adoption by Jacob Wheeler. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2011. Hardcover, 204 pp., \$24.95.

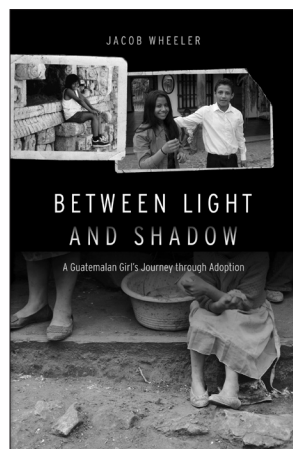
Reviewed by Melissa Nurczynski, Kutztown University, U.S.A.

Literary journalism requires a great deal from its practitioners. Authors must be researchers and reporters, writers and storytellers, showmen and sociologists. Fashioning a novel-like narrative that tells a true story and maybe does some good in the world presents a huge challenge for any writer, and this is why there are so few people who write true literary journalism. Worse still for those who aspire to the genre, greats like Tom Wolfe and Susan Orlean make writing the most complicated and dangerous stories seem effortless and reading those stories is a pleasure.

As a work of literary journalism, Jacob Wheeler's book *Between Light and Shadow: A Guatemalan Girl's Journey through Adoption* does almost everything right. It's well written and reported. Wheeler's prose, peppered with vivid phrases, is clear, elegant, and even literary, especially when he describes the poverty of Guatemala. He describes shacks that have "lost their white hue and succumbed to rot over the years" (17) and a "dirt path, with potholes, piles of burning garbage and sleeping dogs forming a daunting obstacle course" (103). The book also deals with an important subject that few people know or even think about. Yet, reading it was a monumental effort. Instead of fashioning a great story, Wheeler has written a combination lecture and parable about the evils of international adoption.

He focuses on one Guatemalan girl, who at a late age, is adopted by a white American family. Through her reunion with her birth mother, Wheeler attempts to shine a light on what he sees as a cruel and exploitative child- and baby-selling industry.

The subject matter should provide great story. A number of high profile cases have recently shown international adoption to be fraught with legal and ethical issues, including a 2011 court decision returning an adopted Guatemalan child to her biological mother, who successfully proved the child had been kidnapped. A few years before that, the Haitian government's arrest of an inept group of Americans who were attempting to remove children from Haiti without proper authorization was a story that made international headlines. Beyond that, I'm certainly cognizant of the complexities of systemic poverty, corruption, and the moral minefield presented by the trafficking of human beings for even noble reasons. I was primed and ready to read a story that articulates the issues.



However, Wheeler so resents the American women who adopt foreign children that not a few pages go by when he doesn't take the opportunity to shame them. The passages where he reports on people advocating adoption drip with sarcasm. As far as he's concerned all advocates of adoption profit from the industry one way or another.

This attitude is so prevalent throughout that the book contains a three-page foreword by an adoptive parent and writer, Kevin Kreutner, that goes so far as to caution the reader about what is to follow: "Adoptive parents come in all shapes, sizes, colors, religions, philosophies, and mind-sets. In honor of this, I urge some caution to resist the temptation to characterize us all by the limited sample of adoptive parents Jacob Wheeler has touched" (x).

Beyond that warning, Wheeler writes a four-page preface and fourteen-page prologue. While all nonfiction should contain some sort of introduction that explains the nature of its reportage, the cumulative effect of these three sections is a combination of justification and defensiveness that undermines the story that follows. After slogging through these three sections, I knew that I was about to read a morality tale in which Guatemalans were victims and Americans, whatever their good intentions, were greedy, selfish, clueless victimizers.

To be fair, the Guatemalan profiteers who run orphanages are also portrayed as evil. Wheeler over and over again states how complicated the issue is, but he produces a story that is very simple. The poor are pitiable, the rich are cruel and merciless, and adoptive mothers are, in most cases, baby snatchers.

And make no mistake, Wheeler believes that adoption is baby selling/stealing. He does give mild lip service to the idea that some women give up their child for good reasons and that the child might be better off. He brings up the case of a child called McKenna whose birth mother appeared to be happy with her decision, but he spins that anecdote into a slam against the naiveté of adoptive parents: "All adopting parents want to believe that the journey of their little ones mirrors that of McKenna more than it does that of Berenice, who was coerced out of Antonia's hands for the profit of those Guatemalans who facilitate international adoptions" (33). His implication is clear. Adoptive mothers, your precious baby was probably stolen from its real mother. I shudder to think of the letters the publisher will get if it tries to market this book to adoptive families and potential adoptive families looking for a nuanced, sympathetic portrayal of the serious issues at hand.

From a feminist perspective, I was particularly disturbed by the way in which Wheeler portrays the women of color who give up their babies as weak and malleable and the American women who adopt the babies as naive and hysterical. More than once, he describes women whose witnessing of horrific poverty had inspired them to adopt as pathologically obsessed with their role as rescuers. He even describes McKenna, used as an example of a "good adoption," as victimized by her Bible-reading adoptive mother in this way. I have no doubt that this syndrome exists among adopted mothers and should be addressed, but for Wheeler it is merely another reason to deride women who want to adopt. On top of that, Wheeler's seething bias against evangelical Christians actually made me, a left-wing agnostic who disagrees with them on almost everything, sympathetic toward their desire to give adoptive children a better life.

Men, in this story, are shadows. Ellie's biological father has abandoned her. Her adoptive father seems only to go along for the ride, despite his sincere doubts. Early on, Wheeler presents Bob, Ellie's adoptive father, as wise enough to be disgusted by the whole process:

Bob would have no part in the good-bye. He waited among the lush plants and foliage at the greenhouse hotel Quinta de las Floras, a setting more keeping with his comfort level. This trip had already been trying enough for him, as he battled parasites and a headache, and the realization that tomorrow's flight home, with Patty back at the orphanage, was going to be the moral equivalent of a journey through hell (50).

Meanwhile, Bob's wife Janet swallows her doubts and imagines a brown-skinned angel for her to rescue. As Wheeler presents it, Bob and Jane are committing a profound evil, and he never lets his reader forget it.

We see Janet and Bob change their new daughter's name to a more American sounding Ellie without ever bothering to find out what she was called. We hear Ellie's cries at night, wondering why her mother abandoned her. She eventually starts to be Americanized, embracing the trappings of suburban life, something Wheeler portrays as highly regrettable.

From a story perspective, another problem is that all the main players behave exactly as one would expect based on the author's stated agenda. Rather than characters, they are puppets in a morality play with a predetermined outcome. Ellie is a doe-eyed innocent and feels a lot more like the embodiment of white guilt than a person. She's the child seeking her identity. Birth mother Antonia is trapped by poverty, prostitution, and circumstances beyond her control, bullied into giving up her child. Janet, the adoptive mother, seeks to do what is right and fails miserably.

Even Wheeler presents himself as a type. He's the heroic, globetrotting journalist bravely journeying into the bowels of the Guatemalan baby trafficking industry to blow the lid off this story. Moreover, he's going to reunite Ellie and her birth mother, Antonia, and undo the terrible wrong that was done. Wheeler is so enamored of his own role that the last passage of the book is not about Ellie, but about Wheeler. In it, he explains how much better off Ellie and family was for having met him, despite the pain of the reunion between Ellie and Antonia he facilitated in service of his book project.

As a reporter, I think it's best to avoid climbing up on moral high horses. It's just an awfully unstable perch. As Janet Malcolm articulated so well in *The Journalist and The Murderer*, what we do can be morally indefensible. No child should ever have to become a political or moral symbol, and if a writer decides to make that child a symbol, he or she should at least honor the subject by writing a great story. Maintaining a healthy sense of self-awareness also helps. Wheeler, on the other hand, fetishizes poor Ellie. I found myself sympathizing with her not because of her trapped-between-two-worlds identity crisis, but because a writer endowed her with the burden of symbolizing his agenda.

In an earlier passage, there is a character that sparkles on the page. She's Doña Cesy, the tough-as-nails adoption facilitator who pressures Antonia to give up Ellie. Even though she's essentially stealing a child, she is a complex figure that comes off as both sinister and righteous. I kept thinking that someone ought to have told Wheeler that *Oliver Twist* is one of the least interesting things about *Oliver Twist*. Faegan and The Artful Dodger own that book. I don't think I could have put a Doña Cesy book down.

Wheeler clearly has a keen reporter's eye and has done a strong amount of research, but he needed to check his ego, get off his soapbox, and let the story thrive on its own merits. He most certainly aims for literary journalism. He nails the journalism—the book is full of facts—but I kept finding myself longing for the sparkling characters and exciting stories of Dickens and Victor Hugo, or even more appropriately, a Tracy Kidder, a Ted Conover, or an Adrian Nicole LeBlanc. I also kept thinking of Kevin Keutner, the articulate and thoughtful father who wrote the foreword, and wondering what kind of story he had to tell.

Studs Terkel, Meet Your Chinese Counterpart

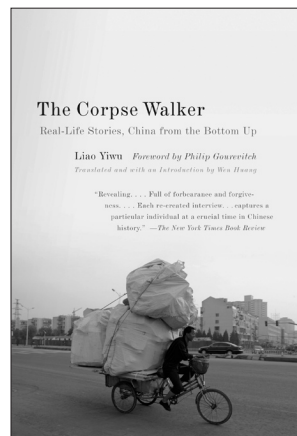
The Corpse Walker: Real Life Stories, China from the Bottom Up

by Liao Yiwu. Foreword by Philip Gourevitch. Translation and Introduction by Wen Huang. New York: Anchor Books, 2009. Paperback, 328 pp., \$15.95.

Reviewed by Willa McDonald, Macquarie University, Australia

It was unsettling to travel around China with a copy of Liao Yiwu's *The Corpse Walker* in my bag. The book has been banned in the PRC since it was first published in Taiwan in 2001, and it's not difficult to see why. It contains a fascinating but revealing collection of interviews with people from the lowest rungs of Chinese society—a stratum not meant to exist under Communism—whose stories show what happens when you run afoul of the powers that be in China.

I confess at the outset that I'm a sinophile. I'm in awe of this country—its culture, its traditions—and how quickly it is developing from a peasant economy, exploited under colonialism, to a global power. As one of Liao's interviewees notes, life for a peasant



is better now than it was before 1949 for a landowner.¹ Yet, the fiscal transformation has been at a cost. Personal freedoms and an open media have been sacrificed to the cause of Chinese independence and prosperity.

The Corpse Walker was first written by Liao Yiwu and published in Taiwan ten years ago. Among the twenty-seven interviews the book contains are stories of people as diverse as a human trafficker, a Feng Shui master, and the father of a Tiananmen protester. In the forward to the book, Liao's translator Wen Huang has drawn parallels between this manuscript and Studs Terkel's *Working*.² The latter, he says, gave many Chinese an understanding of the lives of ordinary Americans when it was published in China in the 1980s. He has similar hopes for *The Corpse Walker* in the western world.³

This book is not strictly literary journalism, but Liao's storytelling skills and the importance of the subject matter, qualify the book for recommendation in this journal. The "Q & A" style Liao adopts is highly readable. Given the time frame the book covers (the sixty-plus years of Communist Party rule) and the dearth of publicly available information in China, it's quite likely that the interview format was the most fitting use of the information Liao was able to gather. The colloquial voices of both the author and his subjects create the effect of a long, relaxed conversation, although a horrifyingly real one. The questions help to move the story along by providing missing information and occasionally notching up the pace.

While critical, the book is not polemical. Many of Liao's interviewees are not likeable people—they sometimes do unspeakable things—but their actions are set against a backdrop of extreme deprivation and political turmoil. These are people surviving in terrible circumstances. Apart from Liao's obvious contempt for the Communist Party, he keeps his judgments in check, refusing to impose simplistic interpretations on his material. He lets his interviewees speak for themselves, only occasionally intruding with an anecdote or comment that betrays his views about the Chinese leadership.

By bringing this moral detachment to his work, he allows the reader more freely to see the impact of the political programs levied by the party. By circumstance, I know first-hand the consequences that can arise when blanket government policy is imposed on ordinary people. I read this book on my eighth trip to China and my second to adopt a child. My girls are two of many thousands of children over the decades who have turned up in orphanages. While poverty, superstition, and gender preference have played their part, the real trigger has been the one-child policy. These abandoned children are part of the underclass that Liao's collection of stories describes, an underclass the Chinese Communist Party would prefer to pretend to the outside world just doesn't exist.

Perhaps the purpose of my journey made me more sensitive, but several of the stories haunted me. The interview with Zheng Dajun, "The Retired Official," stayed with me for days. I couldn't shake Zheng's descriptions of starvation in Sichuan during the Great Leap Forward of 1958-61 in which thirty million people died.⁴ The desperation became so great that in one case recounted by Zheng, the family chose to eat their baby girls, children who would have died soon from starvation anyway.

When the court failed to take definite action against the father, the practice began to spread, only being stopped by the authorities when male children in the area began to go missing. To balance the picture, Zheng also gives harrowing descriptions of the lengths others went to, to clear their systems of the white clay they ate rather than resort to cannibalism.

Liao and his family suffered during that famine, as did most people in China. Because his mother couldn't get enough food for him, he began, at the age of two, to die from severe edema. His body "puffed up like a loaf of bread (121)," but he survived with the help of traditional medicine. His mother was publicly derided and his father, a teacher of Chinese literature, jailed during the Cultural Revolution. He and his friends were forced out of school. "As a boy, my dad would make me stand high up on a table and not allow me to come down until I finished reciting the classics."⁵ His parents divorced to protect the children, reuniting once the Cultural Revolution was over.

Liao first came to the authorities' attention in 1989 with two long poems—"The Yellow City" and "Idol"—that criticized the communist system. Then in 1989, in response to the Tiananmen Square bloodshed and inspired by Allen Ginsberg and Dante's *Inferno*, Liao recorded a poem with friends which he recited using ritualistic Chinese chanting to invoke the spirit of the dead. He called the work *Massacre* and circulated it widely through underground networks in China. Not long afterwards, Liao and his friends made a movie of the sequel, which they called *Requiem*. Consequently, they were arrested in 1990 as counter-revolutionaries. Liao spent the next four years in jail, where he was beaten and tortured, and twice tried to take his own life.⁶

On the twentieth anniversary of the Tiananmen Square protests, Liao wrote an article for the *Paris Review* called "Nineteen Days" in which he described how he had spent each June 4 since the crackdown.⁷ His five-hundred-page memoir, *Testimonials: The Witness of the 4th of June*, is due to be published in Germany soon. The memoir has been rewritten three times. The first manuscript was confiscated in the 1990s during a police search of Liao's home. Police then confiscated a rewritten version in 2001. The third account was smuggled out to Germany last year.⁸ *God Is Red: The Secret Story of How Christianity Survived and Flourished in Communist China*, another Liao book, has just been published by Harper Collins.

Liao's work has been honored with a Human Rights Watch Hellman-Hammett Grant (2003), and a Freedom to Write Award from the Independent Chinese Pen Center (2007).⁹ He has been invited to writers' festivals around the world but only once was given permission to attend—in September last year when he travelled to Germany to read his poetry. In the wake of political protests in North Africa and the Middle East earlier this year, he was threatened with further jail time—like his friend the writer, Nobel Peace Prize winner, and dissident Liu Xiaobo, who is serving an eleven-year sentence—if he continued to speak out against the party. Liao was forced in March to sign a pledge that he would refrain from publishing his critical writing overseas, while at the same time he was prevented from attending literary festivals in Germany, Australia, and North America.

All societies need critics. The importance of this book, to readers and writers of literary journalism alike, lies not only in the insights it provides into modern China, but the example it gives of the power of the written word. It's an extraordinary example of the value of courage in the face of extreme intimidation. In July, with major international publications pending and the certainty of further persecution, Liao escaped to Germany with the help of friends. He told *Paris Review* editor Philip Gourevitch that he left China in search of "personal freedom and freedom to write."¹⁰ It must have been a wrenching decision. Hopefully, one day Liao can return to a China that is strong enough to allow its people to be heard.

NOTES

1. Zhou Shude quoted in Liao Yiwu, "The Former Landowner," *The Corpse Walker: Real-Life Stories, China from the Bottom Up*. Translated by Wen Huang. New York: Anchor Books, 2009, 140-1.
 2. Studs Terkel, *Working: People Talk about What They Do All Day and How They Feel about What They Do*. New York: Pantheon, 1972.
 3. *The Corpse Walker*, xiii.
 4. Although some sources state that the toll was twenty million people or more, I have used the figure Liao cites (121).
 5. Andrew Jacobs, "Dissident Chinese Writer Flees to Germany," *New York Times*, 12 July 2011. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/13/world/asia/13writer.html?_r=1. Accessed 2 September 2011.
 6. Wen Huang, "Liao Yiwu – 'Lunatic' Outcast," *Asia Literary Review*, Autumn 2009. <http://www.asialiteraryreview.com/web/article/en/82>. Accessed, 2 September 2011.
 7. *Paris Review*, Summer 2009, 189. <http://www.theparisreview.org/letters-essays/5929/nineteen-days-liao-yiwu>. Accessed 2 September 2011.
 8. Philip Gourevitch, "Liao Yiwu Unbound," *New Yorker*, 6 July 2011, <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/newsdesk/2011/07/liao-yiwu-leaves-china.html>. Accessed 2 September 2011.
 9. Website, Pen World Voices Festival of International Literature, April 26-May 2, 2010. <http://www.pen.org/author.php/prmAID/549>. Accessed 2 September 2011.
 10. Philip Gourevitch, "Liao Yiwu Unbound," Online Blogs, News Desk, *New Yorker*, 6 July, 2011. <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/newsdesk/2011/07/liao-yiwu-leaves-china.html>. Accessed 2 September, 2011.
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The Great Migration, Reimagined

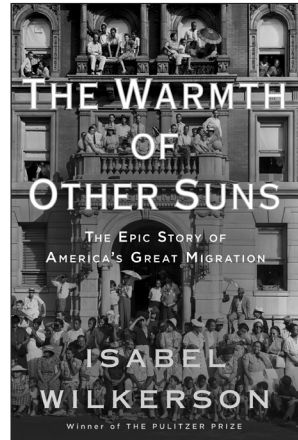
The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration
by Isabel Wilkerson, New York: Random House, 2010. Hardcover, 622 pp., \$30.

Reviewed by Kathy Roberts Forde, University of South Carolina, U.S.A.

Isabel Wilkerson's magisterial book *The Warmth of Other Suns* is a work of both literary journalism and narrative social history, and a profound accomplishment in both genres. It is the story of the Great Migration in the United States, the exodus of more than six million black Americans out of the Jim Crow South and their arrival and survival in urban centers North and West, a mass movement of a common people that spanned six decades, from the 1910s into the 1970s. It is a story at the center of twentieth century American history, and, in many ways, it is a story that is still unfolding.

In the infamous *Dred Scott* decision of the mid-nineteenth century, Roger B. Taney suggested that the Founding Fathers viewed the black race as "altogether unfit to associate with the white race . . . so far unfit that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect." As the brilliant historian Nathan Huggins observed in a posthumously published essay, until the 1960s American history had largely been written from the perspective of the Founding Fathers and Taney himself. It had been written "as if blacks did not exist," as if they "had no word, thought, or act historians need take into account."¹

Since the 1960s, one of the greatest achievements of American social history has been to excavate and to explain the American past through the perspectives and experiences of social groups long marginalized in the American grand narrative. In the case of black Americans, this has meant recovering the experiences, voices, consciousness, and agency of a social group that had suffered what Huggins called "the social death" of slavery and America's racial caste system.² In *The Warmth of Other Suns*, Isabel Wilkerson rewrites the popular narrative of twentieth century American history for a broad reading audience, producing a national story that recognizes and explains an "African-European-American culture" and society based on a racial caste system.³ In doing so, she stands on the shoulders of other historians and scholars whose academic work on the Great Migration has laid the intellectual foundation on which her narrative is built.⁴ Wilkerson's rigorously researched, elegantly written work of historical narrative nonfiction has much to teach us about the American past. It also suggests how America may better confront its present problems.



In her spellbinding account of the massive and under-recognized Great Migration, Wilkerson, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist who previously reported for the *New York Times*, focuses on the lives of three people who left the South in different decades for different destinations and different reasons. She first introduces Ida Mae Brandon Gladney, who left Chickasaw County, Mississippi, in 1937 with her husband and children for the ultimate destination of Chicago. They traveled by Jim Crow train, leaving behind a coercive economic system of debt peonage that systematically deprived black Americans of any chance of achieving financial stability or prosperity. They also left behind a violent local culture that provided no legal protections for black citizens. Shortly before the Gladneys left, a cousin was brutally beaten by a white mob that mistakenly accused him of stealing the white landowner's turkeys. The next day the turkeys came wandering back from their sojourn into the woods while Ida Mae's husband used grease to help peel his cousin's clothes out of the skin on his back.

In 1945, George Swanson Starling left Wildwood, Florida, for New York City to escape a lynch mob of citrus grove owners and police. An ambitious young man whose dream was to attend college, Starling had been forced to work in the citrus fields to make a living. When he attempted to organize his fellow black workers to demand better working conditions and fair pay, he made a quick decision to leave when he learned the grove owners were plotting to give him "a necktie party" (156).

Robert Joseph Pershing Foster, the third of Wilkerson's main characters, left Monroe, Louisiana, in 1953, for Los Angeles, driving his 1949 burgundy Buick Roadmaster on a treacherous journey two thousand miles across the country, not knowing where he would be allowed to buy gas, eat a meal, or lay his head. Educated at Morehouse, Foster yearned for a life of self-reliance and self-fulfillment beyond the Jim Crow caste system, in a place where he would have the freedom to pursue and to achieve professional success and prosperity. And so he went to California as so many African Americans from Louisiana had done before him.

The Warmth of Other Suns tells the stories of three characters leaving different parts of the South in three different decades following well-traveled migration routes to three different urban centers of migration. Wilkerson tells these stories in intimate detail, following the arcs of her main characters' lives from childhood to old age, producing a narrative that spans many generations of American social experience in the twentieth century. In her research for the book, Wilkerson interviewed more than 1,200 people, trying to find three whose stories could represent something of the scope and complexity of a migration involving millions. She then spent many years and hundreds of hours interviewing and researching the lives of her characters, the places they lived, and the historical moments they experienced.

Wilkerson tells the stories of her three main characters with deep historical attention to the details of black life in the South's peculiar racial caste system. To illustrate the breadth and depth of white supremacy over black life in Mississippi as late as 1958, Wilkerson tells how Ida Mae prayed for Arrington High, a black man who bravely and consistently argued for integration in a weekly newsletter he edited in central Mississippi. When he wrote about local white politicians' regular visits to

a black brothel, the local white elite had him committed for life to the Mississippi State Hospital for the Insane. The Mississippi Regional Council of Negro Leadership, an early civil rights group working out of the Delta, devised a daring and ingenious rescue. High slipped into a car one early morning on the way to milk cows, one of his chores at the asylum. The car was part of a five-car processional, with four white drivers and one black driver. The cars traveled together with the black driver carrying High to the Alabama line. There, High walked over the state line where another processional took him to a predetermined safe spot. He climbed into a pine coffin, which was then sealed, draped in flowers, and placed into a hearse. The hearse carried the coffin to a railroad station, where it was loaded onto a train bound for Chicago. It was the 1958 version of the Underground Railroad, and American history is filled with similar stories of black Americans escaping the South and its dangers in similarly ingenious, cooperative ways.

In interviews and public talks about *The Warmth of Other Suns*, Wilkerson has said that, in describing and recreating the world of her characters, she did not want to repeat the familiar symbols of Southern black oppression so common in the national narrative of the civil rights era. Indeed, nowhere in the book will the reader find mention of the signs labeling “colored” and “whites only” bathrooms and drinking fountains that were at one time ubiquitous in public places in the South. Rather, Wilkerson provides other details that seem more powerful and indelible because they are lesser known: custom did not allow black drivers to pass white drivers on the road; courtrooms kept separate Bibles for black and white witnesses to use when swearing in; black patients in desperate need of medical attention were routinely turned away from white hospitals; black doctors were forced to carry their own portable operating tables because they were not allowed to operate on black patients in white hospitals; and the list goes on.

Descriptive, specific detail is simply one of many literary devices Wilkerson uses that make *The Warmth of Other Suns* such a riveting read. She interweaves the stories of her three main characters using thoughtfully crafted scenes to dramatize their choices, hopes, successes, and disappointments, and the end result is literary nonfiction that reads like a novel. Her characters are fully drawn, compelling, and memorable. In describing George Starling as an older man in New York City, she writes:

His face is long and creaseless. He was handsome in his day, a basketball player in high school, good with numbers, a ladies' man. He holds out a crate of Florida oranges like the ones he used to pick and offers you one, says, even after all that picking and all that it cost him, they're better than the ones from California. A smile lifts his face at the absurdities of the world he left, and which, in some ridiculous way, he still loves. Then his eyes well up over all that they have seen. (48)

The Great Migration was a social event of such magnitude and duration that it shaped the entire nation. When the migrants escaped the South, they may have escaped Jim Crow, but they did not escape racial prejudice and deep structural inequalities built into American society and public policy. For many years, researchers have blamed the problems of inner cities in the North and West on the migrants. The migrants, poor, and illiterate, it was claimed, brought the social ills of joblessness, welfare de-

pendency, and out-of-wedlock childbirth to their new cities. Recent research using newly available census data overturns this narrative. As it turns out, these migrants were as well educated as Northern-born blacks, less likely to be on welfare, and more likely to earn higher wages and to be married and to remain married.

Wilkerson's narrative—interspersed with contextual discussions of political and social history and sociological studies of cities and migration routes—demonstrates the profound personal courage exercised by millions of migrants in their decision to leave the South. In that leaving, they pursued freedom and citizenship rights that had been their right all along. As Wilkerson writes, the Great Migration “was a step in freeing not just the people who fled, but the country whose mountains they crossed” (538).

NOTES

1. Nathan I. Huggins, Introduction, “The Deforming Mirror of Truth,” *Black Odyssey: The African American Ordeal in Slavery* [New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1990 (orig. 1977)], xvii.

2. Ibid.

3. Huggins, “The Deforming Mirror of Truth,” xlv.

4. See, for example, James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); and Kimberley L. Phillips, *AlabamaNorth: African-American Migrants, Community, and Working-class Activism in Cleveland, 1915-1945* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

It's a Dirty Job But Somebody Has Got to Tell It

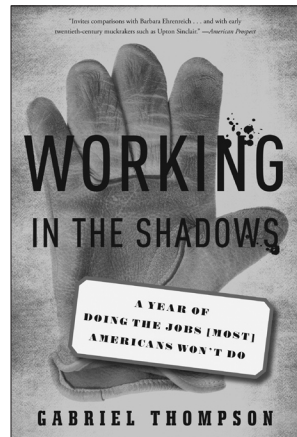
Working in the Shadows: A Year of Doing the Jobs [Most] Americans Won't Do by Gabriel Thompson. New York: Nation Books, 2010. Hardcover, 298 pp., \$24.95.

Reviewed by Isabel Soares, Universidade Técnica de Lisboa, Portugal

I was halfway through Gabriel Thompson's *Working in the Shadows* on a long transcontinental flight from Europe to the United States when it dawned on me that the lettuce in the salad being served might have been picked by the same immigrant Mexicans Thompson worked with in the Yuma region of southwestern Arizona. If ever a piece of literary journalism were to materialize in my day-to-day life, it was then. And just as Thompson, working undercover as a lettuce cutter, thought that after his hands, the next to touch the lettuce he had just cut would be the consumer's (34), I too felt like a link to those laborers about whom I was reading.

My acquaintance with Thompson's work dates back to another of his incursions into the world of undocumented workers and their fight for a better life: *There's No José Here: Following the Hidden Lives of Illegal Immigrants* (New York: Nation Books, 2006). Thompson's ability to speak fluent Spanish has allowed him to delve deeply into the lives and communities of Latino immigrants, voice their problems, and experience their struggles first-hand. In *There's No José*, he combined his skills as a reporter with his work at New York's Pratt Area Community Council, where he was confronted on a daily basis with the problems faced by illegal immigrants—evictions, landlord harassment, unsanitary housing conditions—and was able to penetrate the sweatshop-like universe sustained by the parallel economy generated by illegal labor. A world of countless Josés earning one-fifth the minimum wage for endless hours of repetitive work painting fake jewelry or “pulling off labels like ‘Made in El Salvador’ or ‘Made in China’ and replacing them with tags that read ‘Made in the U.S.A.’” (86) on t-shirts that are later sold in posh shops.

In *Working in the Shadows*, Thompson, whose gripping reports from the underworld of immigrant labor have earned him the Richard J. Margolis Award, the Studs Terkel Media Award and a collective Sidney Hillman Award, gives us more than a piece of long-form journalism that unveils the grueling, low-wage, low-skilled jobs that immigrants and very poor Americans take and we are hardly aware of. It is a



book about all people working at the bottom of the economy. It might be said that, in a long tradition of immersion reporting, often cataloged as literary journalism, Thompson writes about "Otherness": ethnic, social, and economic Otherness. What is so intrinsic to literary journalism and what is central in Thompson's work is, as Norman Sims puts it, "a focus on ordinary people."¹ He shines a light in the shadows and gives voice to voiceless and marginalized people. In *Working in the Shadows*, these "ordinary people" are the invisible immigrants whose lives are materialized when Thompson writes them, instead of writing "about" them. Also, more than a conventional journalist, who merely reports a story, Thompson is a part of the story. Just as Ted Conover in *Coyotes* is the narrator and the researcher as participant-observer but also a character in his tale of Mexican farm workers, so is Thompson the character whose feet ache and whose hands are swollen from so much heavy work. As a literary journalist, he is a reporter on a mission: that of raising awareness to social problems and chipping away at our indifference.

Throughout 2008, Thompson sought employment in three industries that rely mostly on low-skilled, Latino labor: agriculture, poultry processing, and kitchen restaurant work. His goal was to let non-immigrants know, via first-hand experience, what it's like to do the backbreaking jobs they will not do. And by choosing to work in the lettuce fields of Arizona, a poultry plant in Alabama, and as a delivery person in New York, Thompson had a unique opportunity to travel around the United States and experience different realities from those he encounters in his own Big Apple neighborhood. *Working in the Shadows* is an insightful report on labor conditions in diverse fields and locales that range from the neglected rural south to an affluent, cosmopolitan northern center.

Working shoulder-to-shoulder with the impoverished, marginalized Other, Thompson comes into close contact with them while never losing his status as the other Other in the equation. In this he resembles earlier literary journalists who went down into the unknown world of the underdog and reported from there. In *Working in the Shadows*, Thompson acknowledges the influence that George Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) played in his being "drawn to chronicles of immersion journalism [as] they have a unique ability to explore fascinating and sometimes brutal worlds that are usually kept out of sight" (xiv). I would go further than this and suggest that Thompson's journalism is deeply rooted in the pioneering generation of turn-of-the-century journalists and writers represented by the likes of Jack London's *The People of the Abyss* (1903), an account of his descent into the city of London's East End labyrinth of poverty and crime as a vagrant among its huddled masses, but also by a number of American writers and journalist before London, including, as Thomas Connery has pointed out, the tramp stories of Josiah Flynt, *Tramping with Tramps*, and Walter Wyckoff's accounts of doing menial labor across American, *The Workers: An Experiment in Reality*.²

Both London and Thompson venture into the territory of the Other, and try to live similar lives of hardship and deprivation. They can never completely blend, though, because the I and the They are dissimilar, and Thompson is the first to admit that his immersion into the universe of the Other is not an attempt to "walk in

their shoes" (xvi). And while it was relatively easy for Jack London to dress down in rags to resemble the East End dwellers of early twentieth-century London, Gabriel Thompson's Caucasian ethnicity makes his efforts to be hired in industries associated with immigrant labor much more complicated. The paradox is thus insurmountable: amongst the Other, Thompson's ethnicity is a conspicuous element of otherness. However, both journalists tried to hide their true identities and, most notably, the fact that they were journalists conducting research on the Other they observed, and among whom they found themselves living.

The first stop on Thompson's year-long journey was Yuma, Arizona, the winter capital of the billion-dollar lettuce farming industry, where he would join the ranks of lettuce cutters and work alongside them for two months. As was recurrent throughout his project, finding a menial job as a white American was a challenge in itself. At Dole, the multinational that eventually hired him, Thompson was offered instant promotions on account of his skin color. But he wanted the fields, so he would know what it was like to get out of bed at 5:30 in the morning, work through long shifts cutting three thousand heads of iceberg lettuce with swollen hands, and earn \$8.37 an hour. What he discovered was a tight-knit community of workers, most of whom were legal commuters from across the Mexican border, ready to welcome him after overcoming their natural initial suspicion of the white guy. Accepted by the workers, Thompson learns their individual stories, written down after returning home from his days in the fields—when he had the energy to do so. He also learns that the average life expectancy of his coworkers is forty-nine years, and that annually between ten thousand and twenty thousand of these farm workers are diagnosed with pesticide poisoning, a figure grossly underestimated because many do not seek medical care. In Yuma, Thompson experiences perhaps the best part of his year as an undercover worker. Before departing, a special meal is held in his honor, and he says: "I'm tempted to tell them about my book . . . But I hesitate; in the end, I suppose I keep my secret because as we're sitting, eating, and reminiscing, I enjoy feeling like a member of the crew" (93). That is, the "I" feels the nostalgia of the "We" to which he never belonged.

In Russellville, Alabama, the second stop in his low-skilled, low-paid job tour, Thompson learned more about a time-encapsulated South, where most jobs at Pilgrim's Pride, the largest employer for miles, are taken either by African Americans or immigrants in an area where meetings and rallies of the KKK or the CCC (Council of Conservative Citizens) now target the new "invasion of aliens' from Mexico" (105). As in the chapter about the lettuce cutters of Yuma, Thompson goes to great lengths to describe the arduous jobs in the poultry plant, the impossible working conditions, the seemingly segregated work places—with immigrants, mostly Guatemalan, and African Americans, performing the most dangerous or strenuous jobs in the slaughterhouse and the debone section—and, of course, elaborate on several occasions on the topic of animal cruelty. (Being himself a vegetarian, one can only imagine what it must have been like for Thompson to work at a place where live animals are killed, eviscerated, and turned into nuggets).

If, when writing about Yuma, there was a place for an almost romanticized notion of rural bonding that glued the teams of workers together, the chapter about Russellville makes for painful reading. The plant is the equivalent of a dark, cold “underground lair” (124), sleep deprivation alienates the workers, and “high turnover prevents the development of solidarity” (183). In the end, being discovered as a journalist and then fired is a relief for Thompson. In Russellville, he found out what it is like to be at the heart of “America’s appetite for chicken” (188): a bad script for an even worse horror movie.

Finally, there is home. New York does not have any particular industry for which it is known, so finding a job in a field associated with immigrant labor is even more difficult here than it was in Yuma or Russellville. Thompson works at a flower shop, mostly sweeping and deciphering orders involving bales of pear trees or maple branches. He is fired two days later, apparently for smiling “like a happy chicken” (234), in the words of his employer. Making deliveries for an upscale restaurant, his next job, is as strenuous and low paying as his former experiences cutting lettuce and processing chicken. But what Thompson concludes is that physically exhausting or mind-numbing unskilled and low-paid jobs are not exclusive to undocumented immigrants. On the contrary, they “reveal the ways in which many businesses, when unfettered by labor unions and given free rein by the government, prefer to treat their employees: as cheap and disposable” (289).

In these days of global economic uncertainty, Thompson’s book is a clarion call that our economy is sustained by those “working in the shadows,” and that their miseries should be brought to light so the next time we order a salad, we understand we are the last link in a larger chain that probably started on a sun-scorched lettuce field.

NOTES

1. Norman Sims, *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 6.

2. Thomas B. Connery, *Journalism and Realism: Rendering American Life* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011), xviii, 186-189.

The Documentary Novel and Its Many Theories

Factual Fictions: Narrative Truth and the Contemporary American Documentary Novel

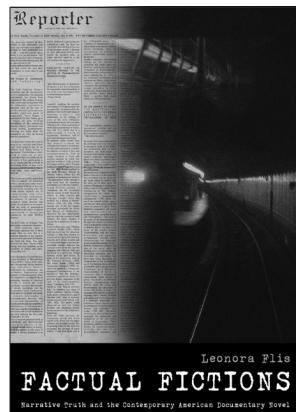
by Leonora Flis. Newcastle on Tyne, U.K.: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010. Hardcover, 254 pp., \$59.99.

Reviewed by John J. Pauly, Marquette University, U.S.A.

One of the intellectual pleasures of literary journalism is that it offers endless opportunities to reflect upon the philosophical, social, and ethical complications of human storytelling. Leonora Flis plunges into this discussion with a sense of verve, determined not so much to resolve any of those complications but to lay them side by side, so that the reader might ponder their interconnections.

There is much terrain to cover. Literary theory has exploded over the course of the last half century, moving far beyond its ancient methods for analyzing writers' strategies, intentions, and biographies. Each new style of scholarship—structuralism, poststructuralism, fabulism, postmodernism—has left behind traces of its origins and theoretical ambitions, multiplying the possible vocabularies of interpretation. Flis's book demonstrates an acquaintance with the most important and relevant literary scholarship as well as a grasp of the issues at stake.

Ultimately, Flis hopes to unsettle and then remake our sense of how and why we create and enforce categories of "fact" and "fiction." Much of her book can be read as a wide-ranging review of the scholarly literature relevant to this task. She briskly calls out interlocutors from every corner of the intellectual world: Barthes, Dickstein, Hassan, Hutcheon, Iser, LaCapra, Scholes, and White from the literary critical establishment; Bakhtin, Derrida, Gadamer, Habermas, Lyotard, and Ricoeur from philosophy; Barthelme, Barth, Coover, DeLillo, and Gaddis from the fraternity of postmodern novelists; Foley, Hellmann, Hollowell, Lehman, and Zavarzadeh from students of the New Journalism; and Slovenian writers and critics such as Debeljak, Jovan, Kos, and Kovačič, whose work she finds relevant to the discussion. Ultimately, Flis wants to bring this scholarly apparatus to bear upon a group of books that she would characterize as "documentary novels": Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, Norman Mailer's *The Armies of the Night* and *The Executioner's Song*, and John Berendt's *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*.



Issues of great human importance play into these discussions. Twentieth-century thought (and experience) steadily eroded our confidence in fact as an indisputable realm of truth. We have come to recognize that writers necessarily choose some facts rather than others when constructing their stories; that we cannot easily ground our truth claims in an imagined domain of factual, objective reality that stands outside human thought or action; that “facts” might themselves be understood as part of the literary performance by which writers establish their credibility with readers; and that factual forms of literature come into existence as part of a contract between writers and readers that is being continuously renegotiated in the marketplace (i.e., fact as a guarantee of the veracity of a particular genre of writing).

Flis notes a similar set of complications that deflect our sense of what is “fiction.” The factual content of a story seems to have little to do with the narrative strategies employed by writers. Literary techniques generate their own sense of reality as they go, regardless of the kinds of stories in which they appear. All stories, whether “true” or not, or based in “fact,” are constructed objects. If one accepts the claim that language operates as a field of differences, in which concepts and narratives take on meaning only in relationship to each another, then our assumptions about texts and authors begin to disappear. Fact and fiction come to make sense only as oppositional terms in a fluid discourse. Seen from this perspective, the categories of fact and fiction help establish the rules of the game for group conflict. Groups embedded in historical, political, and cultural circumstances assert the fact-fiction distinction in order to enforce their misunderstandings of one another.

All this is heady stuff—absolutely relevant to the study of literary journalism but covered rather breathlessly in Flis’s book. In the end, she does not attempt to resolve these philosophical, critical debates (nobody else has, either), and her own claims on behalf of one or another position tend to be modest. In that sense *Factual Fictions* feels like the book of a young writer, anxious to display her command of the literature but not yet fully at home in her own voice or claims of authority. To her credit, Flis does recognize some of the practical and ethical complexities of the documentary novel. Both writers and readers often hope that a book will engage the world in order to make it intelligible. “I believe,” Flis writes, “that the New Journalism, the documentary novel, and fabulist experimentation all represent different types of response to the ambiguities and pressures of the present-day reality.” (62)

Flis tends to work the literary side of the literary journalism discussion more heavily than the journalism side. This is understandable—we all work within our own traditions—but in Flis’s book it leads to some gaps in the literature review. Scholars like Norman Sims, Thomas Connery, and John Hartsock have documented encounters between literature and journalism in the United States that date back many decades before the turmoil of the 1960s. Similarly, Lennard Davis wrote a book by the same name, *Factual Fictions*, in 1983, where he argued that the English novel emerged from an 18th century fact-fiction discourse, a view that supports many of Flis’s arguments. Most surprising was the lack of any mention to the work of David Eason, most notably his 1980s essays, “The New Journalism and the Image World,” and “On Journalistic Authority: The Janet Cooke Scandal.” Eason’s interpretations,

much influenced by the literary critical revolution Flis describes, have continued to shape American journalism scholars' views on these issues. Flis's references to the Slovenian scholarship on these issues will be helpful to many readers as a signal that all societies confront questions of textual authority, although she never fully explains the value of incorporating that scholarship into her argument.

Flis sometimes acknowledges the ethical complexity involved in reporting on or being reported on, but does not emphasize those issues in the same way that journalism scholars would. For journalists, texts never quite float free of their moorings. Subjects care about their portrayal and about the effect stories can have upon their friendships, careers, and sense of personal identity. Journalists write within a system of relationships—with sources, editors, fellow reporters, critics—that both enable and constrain their work. The organizations that publish journalists' work make a civic claim on their own behalf, and every other institution in society finds itself compelled to acknowledge that claim (whether they believe it or not), and to tailor their routines to its demands.

Every day groups battle over fact, fiction, and truth. Flis does not deny this fact; indeed her own analysis seems to affirm it. If the truth of a story cannot be established by reference to an autonomous outside force—a set of facts that exists apart from the stories in which they are embedded—then Flis argues that all we have left are the social negotiations by which we establish provisional truths in specific cases. That said, Flis seems more interested in how texts work than in how groups struggle.

The value of Flis's book, for me, was that it reminds us of how much we leave unspoken when we talk about literary journalism as a form of storytelling. Literary texts are contradictory and unfinished in exactly the ways that Flis notes, and we would do well to approach them with the philosophical and ethical caution she recommends. The fact is that we enchant ourselves with works of our own making, and truth has nothing to do with it.

How to Write a Long-form Story (Revised)

Storycraft: The Complete Guide to Writing Narrative Nonfiction

by Jack Hart. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011. Hardcover, 266 pp., \$25.

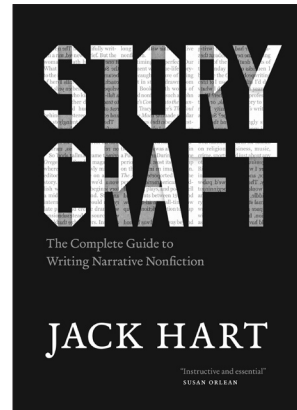
Reviewed by Mark H. Massé, Ball State University, U.S.A.

Successful literary journalists know that dramatic structure is essential to crafting informative and compelling stories. They enjoy discussing their narrative models and methods. Most importantly, they take the time early in the writing process to ask the tough questions, to analyze their material, and to employ the most appropriate organizational techniques. In the 1995 text *Literary Journalism*, edited by Norman Sims and Mark Kramer, noted author John McPhee comments on the challenge of storycraft: “It entrances me. It may take weeks to form this structure, to know where it’s going to end, to know why it’s going to end there, to know how it’s going to get there.”¹

Narrative nonfiction scholar Jack Hart understands McPhee’s passion and appreciates his dedication to form and function, and has for a long time. I still use his *Editor and Publisher* column from November 28, 1998, p 40, “The Ethics of Narrative and How to Safeguard Them,” in my graduate classes in literary journalism at Ball State University.

Hart, a longtime writing coach, former managing editor and university professor, has published a new book, *Storycraft*, which is arguably the most important guide to writing literary journalism in some twenty-five years (since the 1980s publication of *Writing for Story* by Jon Franklin and *Writing Creative Nonfiction* by Ted Cheney). The book’s fourteen chapters cover: story, structure, point of view, voice and style, character, scene, action, dialogue, theme, reporting, story narratives, explanatory narratives, other narratives, and ethics.

Hart employs a conversational style, utilizing multiple points of view, as he comfortably cites from a pantheon of literary journalists—Capote, Conover, Didion, Franklin, Kidder, Larson, Mailer, McPhee, Orlean, Talese, and Wolfe, legendary fiction writers and historical influences (from Aristotle to Shakespeare), plus colleagues such as Pulitzer Prize winners Tom Hallman and Tom French. He shares lessons from other notable writing teachers (of fiction and nonfiction), including Donald Murray and Janet Burroway. His ecumenical approach to dramatic writing crosses genre boundaries as he illustrates how to construct characters, cull dialogue and develop plot lines using a variety of techniques from literature, the stage, and screen.



But Hart's forte is the world of print, understandable considering the decades he worked at the *Oregonian*. Early in his book, he echoes Tom Wolfe's prophetic voice from the 1973 text *The New Journalism* when he writes: "Newspapers are going down to their graves filled with a stuffy institutional tone that strips humanity from content. Journalese drowns individual voice in an institutional swamp of passive voice, stilted vocabulary, indirect syntax and weak verbs" (65). Hart writes about narrative nonfiction as a light through this darkness. "Instead of news values like timeliness and proximity, which reflect broad social concerns, storytellers emphasize dramatic values that concern us as individuals, such as coming of age or coming to terms with our handicaps" (58).

Hart states that the goal of a storyteller should be to "master a wide variety of narrative forms" (3). But this book is not simply filled with platitudes. On page twenty-five, Hart introduces a vital tool to producing dramatic stories: a narrative arc. The classical story model includes exposition, rising action (plot points), crisis, climax (resolution), and falling action (denouement). Hart's nonfiction story template is a variation of (Gustav) Freytag's Pyramid, which was created by a nineteenth-century German novelist who developed the diagram to analyze common plots of fictional tales. Hart refers to the narrative arc in assessing and dissecting stories, including several written by accomplished *Oregonian* reporters, who worked in concert with Hart when he was managing editor and the newspaper's writing coach. One of these notable stories was "Collision Course," a five-thousand-word account written by Tom Hallman. Hart states, "That story launched a lifelong love affair with narrative nonfiction" (1).

Storycraft also includes references to the structural techniques mastered by two-time Pulitzer Prize-winner Jon Franklin. (As Franklin's former graduate assistant at the University of Oregon, I am well versed in the influence of authors such as Anton Chekov, the Russian short-story writer and playwright, in the application of the four-part, complication-development-point of insight-resolution model, employed by a host of accomplished and aspiring literary journalists in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.)

Throughout the book, Hart utilizes an engaging mix of metaphor and simile, e.g., "The crisis is the peak of the breaking wave that is a narrative arc" (36); analysis, e.g., "The crucial part that reporting plays in all storytelling, whether in novels, films, or nonfiction, is something that is not so much ignored as simply not comprehended" (qtd Tom Wolfe, 146); and tips and techniques, e.g., "When you're reporting thought or conversation based on more distant memories, you can attribute with phrases such as 'he recalled thinking' or 'his memory is that,' or 'as he would later remember'" (134). In Chapter 3 ("Point of View"), he includes an excellent discussion of the pros and cons of author viewpoints and stances, supported with examples from fiction (*The Great Gatsby*) and narrative nonfiction (*The Devil in the White City*). This chapter also draws an important distinction between the role of summary and scenic narrative in a work of literary journalism.

At times, however, Hart's thoroughness may confuse readers as he has a tendency to fill paragraphs with multiple author and text references and occasional abrupt transitions, e.g., "Mark and I discussed the possibility of an *in media res* opening" (35); and "Remember the opening Stuart Tomlinson produced for my newspaper . . ." (108). Similarly, in Chapter 11 ("Story Narratives"), Hart's very detailed analyses of award-winning stories by *Oregonian* writers, seven, ten, and thirteen pages, respectively, are informative but quite long. Another subtle criticism is Hart's lack of a target reader. Is *Storycraft* intended for the working journalist, the aspiring narrative nonfiction author, the college student, or all of the above? One minor glitch: On page 144, Hart refers to MasterCard in regard to the old ad campaign ("Don't leave home without it"). However, the late Karl Malden was hawking American Express cards, not MasterCards. But I *digress* (another topic well covered in Hart's book).

Several chapters in *Storycraft* are outstanding in their content and commentary. Consider this key sampling of subheads from Chapter 10 ("Reporting"): Immersion, Access, Interviewing, Character, Scene, Action, and Theme, e.g., "A narrative writer's notebook . . . should be filled with visual details, anecdotes, action sequences, smells [sensory details], and the like" (159). In Chapter 13 ("Other Narratives"), Hart explains that it is important for writers and editors to understand the application of narrative nonfiction techniques to stories of varied length, complexity, and function.

My favorite chapter was the last (Chapter 14, "Ethics"). Here, Hart shines in the cleverness of his writing, e.g., "It's equally outrageous that John Berendt's *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* squatted on the *New York Times*' nonfiction best-seller list for 216 weeks, even though when questioned about some of his facts—Berendt admitted, "This is not hard-nosed reporting, because clearly I made it up" (226); his self-disclosure, e.g., "I'm even antsy about slight modifications to direct quotations" (235), and his admonitions (e.g., "But you can't secretly mix fiction's reliance on imagination with nonfiction forms, no matter the temptation" (234). Near the end of this valuable and timely text, Hart provides a final tool for literary journalists, "Questions for Nonfiction Storytellers," by Chip Scanlan and Bob Steele of the Poynter Institute. Their nine questions comprise a checklist covering such critical issues as: scene reconstruction, independent verification from documentary sources, attribution, and author disclosure. But the book's resonant closing phrase belongs appropriately to the literary journalism sage named Hart, who writes: "Ultimately, the best reason for ethical reporting and writing is the power of truth" (240).

NOTES

1. Norman Sims and Mark Kramer (eds.), *Literary Journalism: A New Collection of the Best American Nonfiction* (New York: Ballantine, 1995), 15-16.

Literature—What Is It Good For?

Absolutely Something

The Use and Abuse of Literature

by Marjorie Garber. New York: Pantheon, 2011. Hardcover, 320 pp., \$28.95.

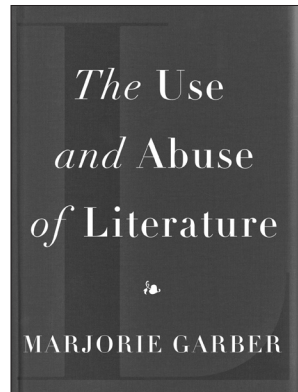
Reviewed by Michael Robertson, The College of New Jersey, U.S.A.

One can imagine the earnest young copywriter at Pantheon, visions of the *New York Times* bestseller list dancing in her head, composing the jacket copy for *The Use and Abuse of Literature*: “As defining as Christopher Lasch’s *The Culture of Narcissism*, Allan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind*, and Dinesh D’Souza’s *Illiberal Education* were to the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, respectively, Marjorie Garber’s *The Use and Abuse of Literature* is to our times.”

That perfervid sentence is at the head of the bookjacket’s inside flap. Fortunately, it has nothing to do with Garber’s book, which is not at all polemical in the mode of Lasch, is completely lacking in Bloom’s conservative ire, and is the farthest thing possible from D’Souza’s flailing screed. Instead, Garber—a Harvard English professor and widely acclaimed Shakespeare critic of stunning erudition and appealingly diverse interests (the topics of her fifteen books include cross-dressing, dogs, and real estate)—offers here a generally wise, temperate, and graceful guide to literary reading. Forget Lasch, Bloom, and D’Souza; imagine a contemporary version of Mortimer Adler’s 1940 bestseller *How to Read a Book*.

What’s literature good for? That’s the implicit question underlying Garber’s book. Suavely surveying the history of literary theory and criticism from Plato to the present, she discerns two principal schools of thought. The first is morally utilitarian: literature makes us better persons/family members/citizens. The second school, which Garber labels the “affective,” is composed of those who value literature for its emotional charge, its ability to deliver “a pleasurable jolt to the system” (9), in her words.

Garber offers a third answer to the question of what literature is good for: literature in itself is not good for anything. Rather, what’s important is the mode of reading that literature, carefully attended to, promotes. Literary reading ignores questions of the text’s utility and, though it may be pleasurable, does not take pleasure as its goal. Garber values the ways of reading—of thinking, really—that we bring to a literary text: deep attention to allusion, to metaphor, to language itself; a valuing of both text and context; a sense of ease with ambiguity and openness; an appreciation of diverse interpretations. Garber is an enormously sophisticated critic, and she



cites approvingly postmodern heroes like Jacques Derrida and Paul deMan, but she's equally hospitable to mid-twentieth century New Critics like Cleanth Brooks. New Historicists, feminists, Freudians, Lacanians—Garber, a Big Tent theorist and critic, sees value in them all. In both her summaries of literary theory and her brief readings of texts, Garber models the sort of open, eclectic approach that she champions.

The book itself is eclectic, a collection of elegant, loosely connected essays. Her subjects range from the pleasures of literary allusion to the power of figurative language. Two chapters are of particular interest to scholars of literary journalism. In "What Isn't Literature" she traces the history of the word *literature*, which began as a term for any printed matter, a meaning it still retains, as when a pharmaceutical rep offers a physician the literature on a new drug. She also discusses the attempts, beginning in earnest in the late nineteenth century when "English" became a university subject, to define literature as an art. From the time of the establishment of European universities in the medieval era through most of the nineteenth century, literature meant the Greek and Roman classics. Literature in English was allowed only grudgingly into British and American universities, and until the twentieth century the dominant approach was a dreary philological trudge through Shakespeare and Milton. Methods became more varied in the twentieth century, and gradually the canon expanded chronologically, moving past the Renaissance and edging into contemporary times. Expanding the canon beyond the bounds of poetry and poetic drama proved more controversial; there was great reluctance to take prose fiction as an object of serious study. Ian Watt, author of the celebrated classic *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), was discouraged by Cambridge dons from writing about Defoe and Fielding in his dissertation; no serious scholar paid attention to *novels*.

Post-World War II, Defoe and Fielding—even (*gasp!*) Fitzgerald and Hemingway—became common fare in literary studies. Following the political, social, and cultural upheavals of the 1960s, the canon expanded to include Zelda as well as Scott, Gertrude Stein and Zora Neale Hurston along with Hemingway. Eventually, issues of genre, as well as of race and gender, came to the fore. Why limit *literature* to poetry, drama, and fiction? Couldn't diaries be literature? Letters? Journalism? To return to Garber's chapter title: What isn't literature?

In response to that question, Garber avoids answers that rely on generic distinctions, on aesthetics, or on inevitably subjective judgments of quality. She argues that the category of *literature* depends not on texts themselves but on reading practices. "To say that a text or a body of work is *literature* means that it is regarded, studied, read, and analyzed in a literary way" (116), she writes. In other words, the best way to know whether a piece of journalism can be called "literature" might be to see whether it gets written about in *Literary Journalism Studies*.

The other chapter of particular interest to literary journalism scholars takes up the issue of truth claims in literature. After a brief nod to *In Cold Blood* and the nonfiction novel, Garber turns to the phenomenon of the faux-memoir, exemplified by James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces*. Journalistic commentators reacted with outrage to Frey's generic deception; the erudite Garber ponders the parallels with the eighteenth-century novels *Moll Flanders* and *Pamela*, both of which claimed on their

title pages to be memoirs. Garber is an analyst, not a polemicist; she's more interested in dispassionately exploring the history of memoir and biography and deconstructing the fiction/nonfiction binary than in summoning Oprah-like indignation at the deceptions of Frey and his fellow hoaxers. She abandons the stance of dispassionate analyst only at the chapter's conclusion, when she discusses Alain de Botton's *How Proust Can Change Your Life* and Pierre Bayard's cheeky *How to Talk about Books You Haven't Read*. Writing a novel and claiming it as memoir merits only a raised eyebrow from the urbane Garber, but treating *Remembrance of Things Past* as a self-help manual or reducing celebrated works to plot summaries brings on the full force of her wrath.

Bayard's book perhaps merits her ire, but Garber's dismissal not only of Botton's book but of the very idea of looking to literature for life lessons raises questions. What exactly is so terrible about drawing from literature an insight into morality or psychology or your relation with your mother-in-law? Garber ends her book's introduction with these lines: "We do literature a real disservice if we reduce it to knowledge or to use, to a problem to be solved. If literature solves problems, it does so by its own inexhaustibility, and by its refusal to be applied or used, even for moral good. This refusal is literature's most moral act" (30). We're all against reductive readings of literature; however, in what way does literature "refuse" to be applied to moral problems? Surely, literature cannot "refuse" a reading, any more than it can "endorse" one. In the more than two thousand years since the beginnings of written literature, millions of readers have used literature to understand themselves and others, and countless works of literature have been used by movements for social change. Were the abolitionists who distributed *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to encourage readers' revulsion against slavery doing a "real disservice" to the novel? Were the African Americans who found a renewed sense of self-worth in works of the Black Arts movement, or gay men who discovered a validation for their innermost feelings in Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, perverting poetry from its proper function? Garber's insistence that drawing lessons or inspiration from literature is invalid comes as a surprising pronouncement from a critic who's generally so temperate and inclusive.

Garber's hostility to moral and political readings of literature may be off-putting, but her book is redeemed, at least for this reader, by its beautiful final chapter, "The Impossibility of Closure." The chapter undercuts her own previous distinctions between "right" and "wrong" ways of reading, gracefully demonstrating the open-endedness of literary works and our readings of them. No reading is ever finished, no interpretation is definitive; what Garber writes of Wallace Stevens's "The Man on the Dump"—that its emblem could be the *ouroboros*, a snake with its tail in its mouth—might be said of all poems and all readings. Garber seems as reluctant to end this wise and elegant essay as Stevens was to end his poem. She piles on examples: from Herbert, Yeats, de Quincey, Shakespeare and even, unexpectedly and movingly, from *Charlotte's Web*. "Some Pig," writes Charlotte; "Some Book," say I.

