

# Book reviews . . .

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## The French, and Polish Literary Journalism

*La Fin d'Innocence: La Pologne Face à Son Passé Juif*

by Jean-Yves Potel. Paris: Autrement Frontières, 2009. Paperback, 284 pages, €22.

*La Vie Est Un Reportage: Anthologie du Reportage Littéraire Polonais*

edited by Margot Carlier. Montricher: Les Editions Noir sur Blanc, 2005. Paperback, 264 pages, €20.

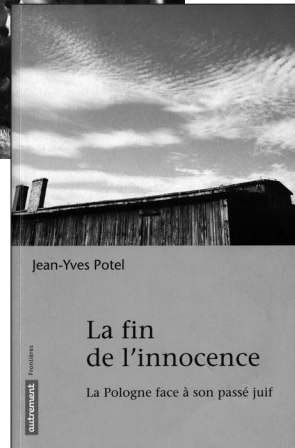
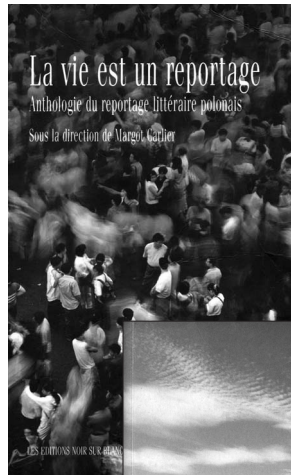
Reviewed by Susan Greenberg, Roehampton University, U.K.

There are many reasons why it makes sense to have a conversation about literary journalism in English. But if one is committed to making that conversation an international one, the problem of how to access the many authors unavailable in translation remains. To fill the gaps, we need correspondents to report on developments in the field.

At first, Poland does not seem in great need of such mediation. The presence of large expatriate communities in the United States and interest in a strategically important country has ensured a sizeable literature. Furthermore, the name of at least one Polish literary journalist, Ryszard Kapuściński, has entered the English-language canon. But this particular two-way discussion, like any other, can become stale and predictable. Why not eavesdrop on the conversation taking place in other languages, where publishers have a much stronger tradition of producing work in translation?

The French press is a good place to start. France has longstanding ties with Poland (think Chopin) and still invests a good deal in its coverage of the region. One of the writers who did more than most is Jean-Yves Potel. His on-the-spot experiences during the birth of Solidarity in 1980 resulted in a book of reportage.<sup>1</sup> Since then his interests, explored in several books and a series of articles in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, widened to include the whole of central Europe and the Balkans, but Poland remained his first love.

From 2001 to 2005 Potel served as the French cultural attaché to Warsaw and it was in that role that he was able to note, and foster, the country's efforts to reckon with its past. Like all the countries of the region, Poland had become frozen in time; the ideological demands of one-party Communism and the need to maintain a rictus grin of approval for Soviet rule made it impossible to process the collective memories of the twentieth century, encompassing precarious independence, war



and occupation. In the process, Poland remained fixed in the role of eternal victim,<sup>2</sup> unable to acknowledge responsibility for its own actions; particularly a long record of anti-Semitism, and at least partial collaboration with Germany in the Jewish holocaust.

In the English-language conversation about Poland, it is the latter topic which has dominated, often following predictable lines: Poland is a courageous opponent of foreign oppression, and its accusers are blackening its name; or it is a culture with an unchanging hatred of Jews, and anyone reporting signs of change is naïve or misguided. Potel picks a delicate path through this terrain, remaining open but critical. After summarizing in cogent detail the history of Polish-Jewish relations and the controversies surrounding it, he takes the reader across the country to see and hear—in real time, over a period of several years—the conversations and events that led to a series of increasingly innovative commemorative actions.<sup>3</sup> The detail makes the difference: in one example, the story of how a memorial to commemorate the wartime transport of Jews from Lodz was proposed, agreed and built within eighteen months, shows the contingency of change and the accumulated importance of small acts by many individuals. Journalists sometimes take center stage; a chapter about the village of Jedwabne, where officials had tried to cover up a wartime massacre of Jews by Polish locals, was inspired by the work of reporter Anna Bikont and includes her account of how she discovered the story.

The result is a rich mix of analysis and felt detail that captures the unease that still exists, as well as a real sense of movement. It is the story of how a new generation discovered its past and acted to integrate it into the present; a Polish version of Germany's *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. No one can declare that anti-Semitism in Poland is gone, and Potel does not try. But after this account, no one can claim that a serious attempt has not now been made.

**B**ikont is just one of a whole new generation of literary journalists in Poland, and the second book reviewed here brings its work to a wider audience. In the foreword the critic, translator and editor Margot Carlier makes the case for a “Polish school of reportage” that has become a popular and significant branch of the country's literature, winning prestigious prizes and inspiring a regular following.

The aim of the collection is to show the range and diversity of the Polish school, in both subject matter and writing style. To demonstrate continuity, Carlier presents the 12 stories in reverse chronology and includes older pieces from the three “greats”—Marian Brandys, writing just after the war, Ryszard Kapuściński and Hanna Krall. The last two are described as the “father and mother of modern reportage” (10), responsible for inspiring a whole new generation of writers in the country. Besides Kapuściński, who died in 2007, Krall is the only writer in this book who is easily obtainable in English<sup>4</sup> and it is a comment by her that inspires the book's title: “I don't really know where journalism ends and literature begins. More precisely, where reportage ends. Because I am a reporter. Reportage is for me a way of describing the world.” Carlier adds: “Isn't that the aim of all writers; the principal challenge of literature in general” (11)?

If there is a Polish school the questions arise: “Why this genre?” and “Why this country?” Carlier is not the first to point to the effect of communist censorship, which provided writers with years of practice in the literary game of disguising universal meanings in the detail of the text. In Poland, she says, “Since it was forbidden to criticize the system overall, it was necessary to turn towards the

destinies of individuals.” In addition, one could add, repression creates outsiders, and being an outsider on some level is a prime qualification for literature.

However, while other countries experienced the same conditions, their writers responded with different strategies, favoring fiction and drama. Carlier does not address this issue specifically, but notes another development in Poland that appears to have made all the difference. After the fall of one-party rule in 1990, the independent newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* invited Krall to launch a special new section on reportage. Then Malgorza Szejnert, “who has been able to gather around her young writers of talent” (12), further developed the section. Literary journalism, like any form, needs recognition and rewards to thrive, and in Poland it received that.

Carlier’s descriptions of the qualities present in the selection will strike an echo for anyone familiar with literary journalism in other countries and contexts, although the editor herself does not make the broader connection. “In Poland, the reporter is often considered as a real writer [and occupies] a particular place, between eyewitness and creator” (10), she says, adding later, “Here, creation is an integral part of documentation” (13). Creation is defined as the skilled use of narrative prose, built around a character, place, or event, often structured with plot-like precision, with the writer sometimes in the center of events. Whatever the subject, the writers “always elevate the human aspect of the situation, insisting on the particular, individual motivations of each person” (13). Another quality that she sees as characteristic of the Polish school is “a certain predilection for places and events that appear banal, but which reveal shadows ... that only an attentive observer knows how to perceive.”

For this reviewer, four stories remained the most haunting. In Mariusz Szczygiel’s “Reality” (2001), a daughter discovers nearly 800 notebooks when her mother dies. Every day since 1943, Janina Turek had recorded every act in a compressed, captain’s-log style. By the time of her death she had played bridge 1,500 times; received 10,868 presents; made 6,257 telephone calls; and on 23,397 occasions she had bumped into someone by accident and had said “Hello.” There are no confidences, no expressions of like and dislike. On the return of her husband from Auschwitz, Janina had simply written: “Unexpected visit by Czeslaw Turek” (39). The daughter, Eva, was shocked by the apparent coldness, and even more so by the evidence of trauma that the notebooks’s mere existence appeared to provide. In a search for explanations, the author discovers that this trauma was partly personal and partly public—when the notes start, Cracow is under Nazi occupation and Janina’s husband has just been arrested. There are also more general reasons why people keep diaries; the therapeutic effect of writing things down; a bid to capture fleeting time, and the impulse to make one’s life part of humanity. But in the end, we will never know the reasons why this woman kept a diary in this manner; the minds of other people always remain unknowable.

In “The Crossing of the Oder-Neisse” (1998), Włodzimierz Nowak provides a classic narrative, told from multiple points of view and full of telling detail, characterization, sense of place, and action. His subject is the large-scale human trafficking across Poland’s eastern border that started as soon as Poland became part of the promised land of Europe. At the time of writing, about three million people had tried to make the crossing there; by now, the number must be many times higher. The public is forbidden to walk along the river that marks the frontier,

but the landscape is hard to police and a local smuggler has a well-rehearsed excuse, saying with a wink: “Our cow is attracted by the water in the river; we have to keep an eye on her” (91). Even when the would-be immigrants are caught, the legal system cannot keep ahead; in one courtroom scene, we witness the struggle to find a suitable translator for an Afghan family.

Another story, “How I Rescued Emilia de Calabre from Her Evil Mistress” by Irena Morawska (1997), is rich with suspense. The author gets a telephone call at the newspaper from a woman who has not heard from her sister in months. As she follows the evidence, we learn that the girl is being held in a form of domestic slavery, in Italy, by a woman from her hometown. And she is not the first victim of this monstrous character, drawn with such detail and psychological astuteness that the reader begins to experience the abuse directly. As always, the past is interwoven with the present. The woman was the product of a forbidden dalliance between a local girl and an occupying German soldier, and from birth her compatriots have visited on her the sins of the father, making the world a very cruel place. One understands, even if one does not excuse.

In “The Seventeenth Ball” (1988), Krall—once described as having such a spare style, she makes even Hemingway seem garrulous—writes from the first-person point of view of a magician pressed into standing for election for the Young Communists. His party meetings are a big success; as soon as the political agenda is finished, he takes out his tricks and entertains the crowd. When anti-party revolt comes in 1980, he is not a target. Instead he performs for the strikers in the Gdansk docks. The quest that brings real meaning to his life is a bid to break a magician’s record by using not fifteen but sixteen balls for a particular trick. Looking back, he remembers: “At the moment when one realizes one’s dream, one is astonished; one even has difficulty believing that one has succeeded. Finally, one accepts it and starts again to dream . . . of the 17<sup>th</sup> ball” (236).

As William Faulkner famously wrote: “The past is not dead. In fact, it is not even past.” But it is one thing to be alive to the influence and meaning of the past, and another to be its prisoner. Both of these books show how literary journalism provides a means to discover this past, in a way that creates some freedom to shape the present and future for oneself.

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<sup>1</sup> Potel, Jean-Yves, *Scenes de Greves en Pologne* (Paris: Stock, 1981). An English translation, *The Summer Before the Frost: Solidarity in Poland* was published the following year by Pluto Press. A new edition of the French original by Noir sur Blanc appeared in 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Victimhood was real enough, of course. Vladimir Putin’s thoughtful response after the plane crash in April 2010 that killed Polish president Lech Kaczyński and other Polish notables, on their way to mark the seventieth anniversary of the Soviet massacre at Katyn, is thought to have gone some way to restoring relations between the two countries. Kaczynski had represented the arch-nationalist strand in Polish politics but obituaries noted the distance that even he had moved from that stance by the time of his death, shaped by a public discourse with a greater tolerance of complexity.

<sup>3</sup> For those wishing to pursue the subject in more depth, the author also provides a chronology, index and bibliography.

<sup>4</sup> For example, *The Woman from Hamburg, and Other True Stories* (New York: Other Press, 2006). Krall, recipient of many international awards, has been translated into fifteen languages.

## Pat Tillman, Truth and the War Machine

*Where Men Win Glory: The Odyssey of Pat Tillman*

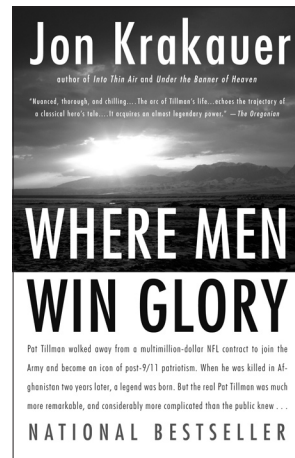
by Jon Krakauer, New York: Anchor, 2010, Paperback, 450 pages, \$15.95.

Reviewed by Robert Alexander, Brock University, Canada

Nothing comes easy in Jon Krakauer's books, at least nothing worth having. Whether trekking alone into the Alaskan wilderness with little more than a ten-pound bag of rice, a .22, and a stack of books, or standing in the mind-altering thin air of the final approach to the summit of Mount Everest, or even, of accepting the no less dizzying responsibility of living outside the strict authority of the patriarchs of the Mormon Fundamentalist Church, Krakauer's most remarkable subjects consistently shun ease with a passionate idealism that imbues them with a mythic wonder but also frequently kills them.

Difficulty in Krakauer's books, however, is never valued so much in itself as it is for the truths it may reveal. That principle is basic to narrative art, and Krakauer has always been a fine storyteller. But it's also true of journalism and, throughout his career, Krakauer has proven himself a first-rate reporter, adept at chipping away the errors and lies which tend to accrete around the extreme sorts of events, characters, and phenomena to which he is attracted. He noted the debilitating effects of such misconceptions in his first book, *Eiger Dreams*, where, in his account of his attempt at one of the world's most challenging ascents, he remarked, "The problem with climbing the North Face of the Eiger is that in addition to getting up 6,000 vertical feet of crumbling limestone and black ice, one must climb over some formidable mythology" (*Eiger Dreams*, Guilford, Conn.: Lyons Press, 2009, 1).

In each of his subsequent books, Krakauer has sought to dispel such errors where he finds them: in *Into the Wild* (1996), for example, he provided not only a gripping account of the life of Chris McCandless, but also a painstakingly researched hypothesis concerning the precise cause of his death. For *Into Thin Air* (1997), and its later "Postscript," he reviews source accounts and other data to sort through the various levels of culpability in the disastrous 1996 ascent of Everest in which he was involved and in which eight climbers died, four from his own team. In *Under the Banner of Heaven* (2003), he confronts the doctrine of a strain of American fundamentalism, contextualizing the brutal 1984 slaying of a young Utah mother and her baby by offering a sweeping historical account suggesting not the deviancy of the crime but rather its consistency with the patterns of violence that have shadowed the Mormon Church since its inception. With his most recent book, *Where Men Win Glory*, Krakauer tackles another hallowed figure as he tells the story of the life and death of Pat Tillman. In this case, though, Krakauer takes it as his task to separate the actual hero from the myth.



Tillman was the star strong safety of the National Football League's Arizona Cardinals until, in the wake of the September 11 attacks, he gave up his \$3.6 million contract to serve as an infantryman in the U.S. Army. Two years after enlisting, and one year after a brief tour of duty in Iran, he was killed in action in eastern Afghanistan. What made this sad event ignominious, however, were the concerted efforts of the U.S. military and the White House to exploit Tillman's death as a public relations blessing while simultaneously concealing the fact that he had been killed by friendly fire.

The contrast in this book between the cynical actions of deceitful government and military officials and the idealistic but clear-sighted conduct of Tillman himself is striking. Immediately recognizable as a classic Krakauer subject, Tillman is represented as a bold, intellectually curious, highly principled non-conformist who consistently pushed beyond the limits not only of convention but also of his own considerable accomplishments. Difficulty is often a teacher in Krakauer, and Tillman valued every challenge—even those at which he might fail—for the possibility it offered him to learn something about himself and, in so doing, to improve himself. As with many of Krakauer's characters, one senses that the particular activity on which Tillman chose to focus—football—was only one of any number of ways in which his passion for restless self-testing might have expressed itself. In his journal (like McCandless, he was a journal keeper and an eloquent one at that), Tillman wrote, "Passion is what makes life interesting, what ignites our soul, drives our curiosity, fuels our love and carries our friendships, stimulates our intellect, and pushes our limits" (177–78). It's also, in Krakauer's world, an emotional force that stares down fear and is recognizable in his most memorable subjects: *Into the Wild's* McCandless comes to mind, as do the various climbers from *Into Thin Air* and *Eiger Dreams*, and perhaps even *Under The Banner of Heaven's* Joseph Smith who in 1830 founded the Mormon Church. Susan Orlean has remarked that passion is a crucial quality in any subject worthy of the literary journalist's attention ("A Passion for Writing," Mark Kramer and Wendy Call, eds., *Telling True Stories*, New York: Plume, 2007, 284–87). But she also notes that it's vital to the writer as well, and Krakauer is an author in whose achievements, both as a mountaineer and most certainly as a literary journalist, passion abounds.

Although Tillman is clearly recognizable as the sort of passionate subject we expect to find in Krakauer's books, *Where Men Win Glory* also continues a trajectory that has become increasingly evident in his work. Krakauer has always provided a clear sense of the landscapes in which his stories unfold and against which his characters frequently pit their energies. With *Under the Banner of Heaven*, however (and probably at least as far back as *Into the Wild*), he began to add to those topographies the no less real environment of social relations which both produces his characters and with which they often find themselves in conflict. As that human environment has gained prominence in his work, a new category of character has crept into view: individuals whose preference for received (or revealed) truths over difficult, uncertain ones, and whose predilection for deceiving not only themselves but also others, marks them as the antithesis of Krakauer's sometimes flawed but ultimately honorable protagonists.

This social orientation is evident in Krakauer's attempt to explain McCandless's puzzling character by offering him to us in the context of his family. It is apparent as well in the attention he pays to the personalities of Everest guides Rob Hall and

Scott Fischer—in the context of the economics of chartered climbing expeditions that promote expertise in steering relatively inexperienced climbers to the summits of some of the world’s most dangerous mountains—and the role they play in the disastrous Everest climb. This greater depth of field emerges most obviously, however, in *Under the Banner of Heaven*, where Krakauer finds the motivation for an unthinkable double murder in the history of the Mormon Church and the mythic narratives by which its members are encouraged to uncritically abide.

With *Where Men Win Glory*, such malicious bad faith and allegiance to duplicity are located not in the extreme margins of North American religious faith but rather in the corridors of power in Washington, where it manifests itself in a host of government and military officials who opportunistically conjured a false but mythic vision of Tillman and his death in support of a presidency and a war in the midst of some of its darkest days. As Krakauer points out, Tillman’s death came during a disastrous month for American forces in Iraq and at a time when the Bush administration, six months from the 2004 presidential election, was in desperate need of an image boost. When Tillman was shot by a member of his own platoon on April 22, 2004, certain figures within the government seized the moment, concealing the basic facts of his death from his family and the nation, while crafting a message that trumpeted the familiar national values of military honor and valor.

Although Krakauer makes it clear there is plenty of incompetence, malfeasance, and blame to go around in this story, he reserves his harshest judgments for now-retired Major General Stanley McChrystal, a man for whom 2010 was not a good year. McChrystal was forced to step down as the top commander in Afghanistan after Michael Hastings’s unflattering portrait of him appeared in a July issue of *Rolling Stone* magazine. The expanded paperback edition of Krakauer’s book was published the same month, and it does little to improve impressions of the general. With 60 pages of new material, much of it gleaned through Freedom of Information Act requests as well as from McChrystal’s own testimony before the Senate Armed Service Committee in June 2009, McChrystal is shown in Krakauer’s book to have played a key role in preparing the “fraudulent” documents which, by ignoring the fratricidal circumstances of Tillman’s death, allowed him to be posthumously awarded a Silver Star for valor. Krakauer minces no words in his condemnation of McChrystal: “The available evidence indicates that McChrystal and his subordinates in the Seventy-fifth Ranger Regiment engaged in a coordinated effort to deliberately mislead the family, and high-ranking officials at the White House and Pentagon abetted the deception” (358). (The words “McChrystal and his subordinates” were added for the new edition.)

In its juxtaposition of character and social-political environment, Krakauer’s book reminds us of literary journalism’s roots in literary naturalism. In his *New York Times* review of *Where Men Win Glory*, Dexter Filkins questioned Krakauer’s decision to provide the level of detail he does in his description of Tillman’s life prior to enlistment. He has a point, but the lengthy back-story does serve to familiarize the reader with Tillman’s character and the forces that shaped it. In so doing, it also compels the dramatic question which underlies the text: What happens when an individual such as Tillman, possessed, as he seemed to be, of those fabled attributes of the American character (e.g., courage, independence, intelligence, honor), submits himself to the governmental and military machinery presumably entrusted



as the steward of those qualities? That machinery, it turns out, is under the control of some individuals far less noble than many of those they command, and the result is predictably tragic and absurd.

At the end of the book, however, Tillman is still standing, with a magnitude and integrity McChrystal, the Bush administration, and the perception managers who sought to spin an official myth out of the distorted facts of his death, have lost. What these men did not see, but what Krakauer shows us, is that Tillman's "heroism," such as it was, was of a depth and complexity more impressive than any fraudulent award citation could hope to approach.

No one in the book sums this theme up better than Jessica Lynch, a former soldier whose own capture by the Iraqis in 2003 was embellished by the Pentagon into an awe-inspiring but utterly fabricated story of combat heroism. Called before a House or Representatives committee investigating Tillman's death and its aftermath, Lynch told them, "The truth is always more heroic than the hype" (375). So too, Krakauer's books remind us, is the quest for truth, and, difficult as it might be, that quest remains the formidable but ever-present North Face of literary journalism.

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## In Slovenia, Literary Journalism Goes Local

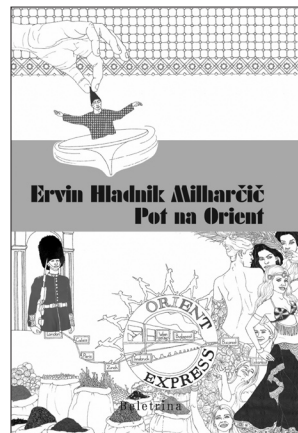
*Pot na Orient* (Road to the Orient)

by Ervin Hladnik Milharčič. Ljubljana: Študentska založba, 2009, Hardcover, 298 pages, €25.

Reviewed by Sonja Merljak Zdovc, University of Primorska, Slovenia

There are a few examples of literary journalism in Slovene language, although most of them have been translations of classic nonfiction texts. Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, for instance, was translated into Slovene in 1967. More recently, in 2009, George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* and Svetlana Aleksiyevich's *Voices of Chernobyl* were translated. Ryszard Kapuściński has become a household name in Slovenia, and Egon Erwin Kisch a legend.

These writers have inspired more ambitious local journalists to experiment with the form. However, many Slovene readers and journalists have never heard of literary journalism, and those who have are still often confused about the form. Yes, it is interesting to read a good story! But if it is well written, is it still journalism?



To complicate things further, the ‘literary’ modifier in the phrase literary journalism is seen by some as an excuse to fabricate. Isn’t that what fiction does—make up things to reveal the larger Truth?

The confusion is such that in the blurb for *Pot na Orient* the publisher writes, “We get a book which could be placed on the same shelf as those written by the masters of the intersection of literature and journalism; among those masters who only wanted to report what they saw and heard, but en route they inevitably ended up also in fictitious worlds.”

Luckily, the author knows a little more about literary journalism than his publisher. A former correspondent from the United States and Middle East, Ervin Hladnik Milharčič knows the difference between fact and fiction, is well aware that great journalism cannot be fabricated, and is familiar with narrative writing in contemporary newspapers and magazines. In fact, he holds narrative in such high esteem that when late in his career he briefly became the editor of the Saturday supplement of *Delo*, the largest Slovene broadsheet—a position similar to the editor of the Sunday papers in America—he cultivated a generation of young writers to file profiles, encouraging them to aim for the level of depth routinely achieved at the *New Yorker*.

One of his first pieces of literary journalism, “Where Fish Approach Swimming from the Sky” (1999)—certainly in the running for best example of Slovene literary journalism to date—pays homage to Joseph Mitchell. It is perhaps no coincidence that he chose Mitchell’s Fulton Street Fish Market as the topic for his masterpiece. As a writer, Hladnik Milharčič is not an outside observer like Gay Talese. Nor does he clue in the reader to his rambling internal dialogue like Hunter S. Thompson. Rather, he uses Mitchell’s conversational style as well as his favorite subject—local people.

However, Hladnik Milharčič’s local is another person’s global. As a Middle East correspondent, 1994–2000, he became quite familiar with the Orient, or, to be more precise, the Westerner’s idea of “Orient.” (Milharčič’s idea of Orient is actually the near Orient, extending to present-day Iran, not India, China, and Southeast Asia.) Yet the whole book tells about the author’s search for the “true” Orient. What is it? Where is it?

*Pot na Orient*, Hladnik Milharčič’s third book and first collection of narrative, consists of stories previously published in various Slovene newspapers and magazines. He has rewritten some of them, either to add new information or improve style and clarity. The book is divided into four parts and an epilogue. The first, “They All Went to Egypt,” is a long narrative about Middle Eastern cuisine in general, and the author’s search for the origins of “čevapčiči” (or “kebab” and “luleh” as they are called in Iran), in particular. While searching, he shares historical, cultural, sociological, and geopolitical information, and the narrative runs on many levels. For example, the profile of Claudia Roden, a famous cookbook writer, is also the story of life in Egypt in the 1940s and 1950s.

The second and the third parts, “Nilobus” and “Rock el Kasbah,” are collections of short features written mainly when Hladnik Milharčič filed stories from Cairo.

Some are based on his travels to neighboring countries, especially Israel and Palestine. He writes conversationally and matter-of-factly, as well as with wit and humor. Here is a representative example:

I asked if this warfare wasn't meant to be used in the war against Israel and how he will justify its usage against fellow Palestinians. He became serious.

"With everything it does, Hamas follows the religious principles. In our religion it is not acceptable, haram, to kill thy brother."

The phrase to kill thy brother was not a figure of speech. In many families there are some who belong to Hamas and others who belong to Fatah. The ex-chief of Arafat police in West Bank Džibril Radžub is a Fatah veteran; his brother is the leader of Hamas in their native village Dura near Hebron. "If we wanted to kill blindly, we could have done it a thousand times. There is still a red line that we do not wish to cross. We don't want to go on streets and kill everybody who belongs to Fatah."

He took his breath in.

"But."

There had to be a "but."

"If you find yourself in a position in which somebody attacks you, you have to defend yourself. You can't ask first who is on the other side of the gun" (203).

In part four, "Instanbul Ekspres," the author travels farther east—still looking for the origins of "čevapčiči"—which takes the reader back to the book's beginning. In this section, the landscape of journalism in Slovenia is changing and he is no longer a correspondent. His latest stories are based on occasional, post-correspondent travels to the Orient, Turkey, and Iran. Eventually, he realizes that "those European dreams of Orient, the same dreams about which Edward Said writes so ironically in *Orientalism*" (273), are nothing more than a fantasy.

Interestingly, the opposite is true. When he asks Barbara Skubic, a translator who lived in the Middle East for many years, how "her Arabs imagine Europe," he gets the following answer: "They (Easterners) see us (Westerners) as lost and lonely; every man is an island. We both have very unfortunate images of each other . . . For some parts of our and some parts of their society this is all true, but this is not all of the society. In fact, we barely know each other" (249). The stories collected in *Pot na Orient* complement the daily reports of on-going conflicts in the region, but also build a bridge between readers and subject (Hartsock, 2000, 141), helping readers to understand why, for instance, locals can bring themselves to support people or groups considered to be terrorists (176–78).

Will Durant once said: "Civilization is a stream with banks . . . the story of civilization is the story of what happened on the banks" (qtd. in Walt Harrington's *Intimate Journalism*, 1997, ix). Hladnik Milharčič's stories are not about the stream filled with blood from people being slaughtered; they're about life on the banks where people build homes, make love, and raise children.

In the epilogue, which acknowledges the people who opened their doors to him, Hladnik Milharčič reveals his credo: "Is all this true? Of course it is. If you go around and look for stories they find you. You walk through private mythologies and continue to wonder. Nothing that comes your way belongs to you in any other

form than in the form of a story that needs to be told. . . . We are storytellers and there is a story to tell. That's it. The story is a piece of journalistic writing as understood by Anglo-Saxon journalism. Either you have seen it for yourself, or it was told to you by someone who was there. There is no other way" (296).

With this closing remark, Hladnik Milharčič provides a brief, yet important theoretical framework to the practical examples collected in the book. *Pot na Orient* thus becomes a tool for those of us trying to affirm the position of literary journalism in Slovenia. It has been difficult at times to explain what literary journalism is about, especially to young journalists who may harbor aspirations to become literary journalists. For them, the writings of the masters from abroad are simply too far away, and their lofty heights seem so unobtainable. Now they can identify with and follow in the footsteps of a local reporter, despite the fact that in Slovenia he, too, is already a legend.

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## Literary Journalism, the Shorter Version

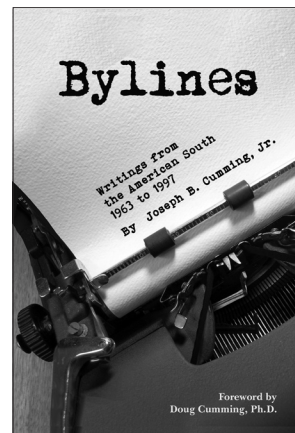
*Bylines: Writings from the American South 1963 to 1997.*

by Joseph B. Cumming, Jr., Bloomington, Indiana: Author House, 2010, 247 pages, \$24.99.

Reviewed by Sam G. Riley, Virginia Tech, U.S.A.

Joseph Bryan Cumming, Jr. is a prime example of the gentleman journalist. He was born in 1926 into the genteel part of Augusta, Georgia, a small city having an aristocratic element that extends beyond golf. His father was a well-connected lawyer there, and young Joseph grew up having the personal acquaintance of the movers and shakers of the New (and not-so-New) South. His higher education was of the old-fashioned liberal arts variety, in which history and literature assume greater value than mere training to do a job, at Sewanee, The University of the South in Tennessee.

The picture of Mr. Cumming that emerges from reading this delightful book is that of a highly evolved gent, kind and compassionate, a player of old standards on his grand piano, a lover of good writing—especially verse—who might well have followed his father into the law, but who instead gravitated toward a life of journalism. His usual subject



matter was the American South. The people with whom he socialized and others he interviewed for stories or worked alongside during the thirty-four years featured in this collection of his work come very close to being a who's who of the South in that era.

The book owes its dual charm first to the fact that Cumming was an active journalist and writer during the Civil Rights era that so changed the South and dragged it out of its rustic feudalism. Race, he wrote, was an issue that “went far deeper than reason,” one that “made men grow pale with outrage, their lips drawn to the color of clay” (35). It was a time when a gulf wider than the Pacific separated opportunities available to the young men of Cumming's social set and similarly youthful black men, whom white Southern boys never met. Second is the undeniably literary style that enlivened his freelance feature writing, his commentary pieces and his column. Like most of us interested in literary journalism, Cumming was drawn strongly to the New Journalism, but his own work was not cut from the same cloth as that of Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese, and their fellow writers of long-form narrative articles based on saturation reporting about a single person or topic.

Instead, Cumming's writing was done in short-form and was contributed mainly to a variety of Southern magazines and newspapers, but also surfaced in *Esquire* in that magazine's more literary period. Though short in form, Cumming's work was long in use of literary devices: metaphor, simile, allusion, irony, humorous understatement, involvement of the reader's emotions, and the like. His fondness for verse shows up in the way he so often inserted snippets of it to add an artistic touch and a deeper layer of meaning to accompany his already stylish prose. A selection of three of his poems makes up a small section of this book. There, one will see his deft touch in commenting about the process of aging when he writes that “all these summer years so great in heedless grace, so romping banjo clever, shall be safely lost and free to sneak alive and live forever” (136). What a fine way to describe the odd way the bird of youth flies away, yet in our autumn years, lives on fondly in the form of memories.

Cumming's type of immersion reporting differed from that of the primary demigods of the New Journalism in that he did not devote enormous amounts of time to producing one extremely long article or book, but the twenty-two years he spent reporting on the South for *Newsweek*—serving for eighteen of those years as that magazine's southern bureau chief in Atlanta—provided him with what arguably might be considered an even more profound immersion in the monumental changes-for-the-better taking place in the South during that dramatic and wrenching era. His reporting, however, does not appear in this book, which instead showcases his freelancing and his commentary. In all his writings, his remarks are made with great charm as he reflects on what life had been like for a privileged, though not enormously wealthy young man such as himself, born in a time when everything came easier than it does now for fellows in his situation. He wrote of the time's sense of revelry that felt like an echo of the Roaring Twenties, describing the time of his youth as resembling “a cloud kingdom, unrelated to toiling earth” (13).

Readers of *Bylines* are certain to come away from the book wishing they could

have known Cumming, to have been part of his “enclave of billowing conviviality” (31) filled as it was with visits from fascinating and accomplished people of all sorts and, in Cumming’s elegant words, “good talk and the slinksound of ice in gin and tonic” (31). The reader will be treated to Cumming’s fond take on his *Newsweek* mentor, Big Bill Emerson; such writers as James Dickey, Pat Conroy, and Anne Rivers Siddons—each of whom he actually knew, not merely knew about; and a whole panoply of the era’s heroes, rouges, political luminaries, lettered worthies, and odd characters. This reviewer’s favorite piece fondly describes two venerable newspaper columnists who shared an office at the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*: Celestine Sibley and Harold Martin (who also wrote features for the *Saturday Evening Post*). Both wrote about people who don’t ordinarily make the hard news but who reflect the color and interest of real life, which is something that literary journalists should strive to do. An example Cumming uses is a convicted murderer, rapist, and robber Sibley once wrote about, who shrugged off his heinous crimes saying, “Ain’t nobody perfect” (22).

From 1979 to 1985, Cumming wrote his own column for the Sunday book page of the *Journal-Constitution*. The topics his columns addressed ranged widely, from writer Marshall Frady, who had published a book about Southern evangelist Billy Graham and who defied the advice of Strunk and White with his lavish but deft use of adjectives, to cocktail parties as a minor art form, to the two winter months Cumming and his wife spent slogging through every page of Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy*, to the riches of the Atlanta History Center, to the “secret life” of books found in vacation houses.

One of the few examples of Cumming’s writing in which he commented negatively about his subject was headlined “Atlanta Magazine Gets the Blahs.” This former chamber of commerce periodical turned glossy city magazine, in which Cumming himself had published stories from 1967 to 1969, in his view had become blah by 1980 and was busy becoming even more so. He characterized the magazine’s history as having been “by turns, spunky, dull, outrageous, lively, sleek, slick and blah” (155). Its editorial content, he commented, had become driven by the needs of its advertising department. He ended his comments about the magazine by wishing that “some foolish old Warbucks will take a fancy to her, take her off the street and, as they say, make an honest woman of her” (158).

It was during this period, beginning when he was in his early fifties, that he put his long years of professional experience to work teaching media and journalism courses at West Georgia College in Carrollton, Georgia. Earlier he had spent a year as a visiting instructor at the University of Georgia, and he had earned a liberal arts master’s at Emory University. The final part of his book deals with the joys and frustrations of college teaching—joy taken from the intellectual riches all around any college teacher and frustration from struggling against undergraduates’s complacency in a time when sports seem to be a college’s most important component. Those of us who also teach—quite possibly including Cumming’s son Doug, a professor of journalism at Washington and Lee University, who provided the foreword for this book—can relate to the elder Cumming’s wry remark that,

while he liked teaching and was fond of his students, as to those students's grasp of real-world knowledge, they had "two small blank spots—the past and the present" (223)—and many of them seemed determined to keep it that way.

One of Cumming's saltiest pieces of advice was aimed at his male journalism students. Those of us who also teach this subject at a college or university have met ever so many young fellows whose journalistic interest extends not a single inch beyond sports. Not that anything is wrong with sports, to be sure, but Cumming's message is that sports alone is simply not enough. Young fellows who limit their interest to this one topic, he predicts, will become bored, then boring, and probably will be divorced by age thirty-five.

What a delightful man. What a talented writer. How fortunate anyone who has been part of his charmed circle.

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## After the Horror, the Story

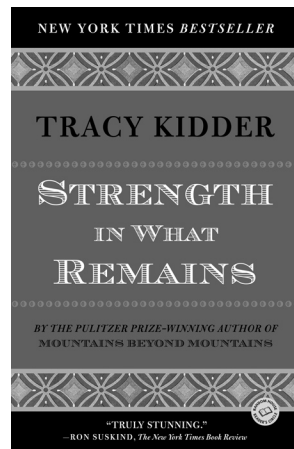
*Strength in What Remains: A Journey of Remembrance and Forgiveness*

by Tracy Kidder, New York: Random House, 2010, Paperback, 284 pages, \$16.

Reviewed by Leonora Flis, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

When you find yourself in a place beyond horror, you are faced with two options: run or succumb to the horrifying reality. In *Strength in What Remains: A Journey of Remembrance and Forgiveness*, Deogratias Niyizonkiza chooses to run from Burundi, East Africa, where he is a medical student. Just one of many trying to survive civil war and genocide, he flees first to Rwanda. Eventually he arrives in New York City with \$200 in his pocket, knowing no one and having no command of English. Central Park and the streets become his new home. Later, after graduating from Columbia University and attending the Harvard School of Public Health, "Deo," as he is known, returns to Burundi. With a network of friends and supporters, he builds, staffs, and establishes the country's first public health clinic.

Deo is the protagonist of Tracy Kidder's latest nonfiction narrative. His journey reads like a novel—or perhaps a work of literary journalism—with a woven narrative



that uses retrospection as its main structural principle. And while the narrative is somewhat fragmented, shifting back and forth across time and place, the design and structure echo the often disjointed nature of memory.

Kidder and his wife are introduced to Deo in 2003 by Paul Farmer, the infectious disease expert and crusader who is the central figure in Kidder's 2003 book, *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, A Man Who Would Cure the World*. Deo initially tells some of his story to Kidder's wife, who shares it with the author. As Kidder says later in *Strength*, Deo's story lingered like "the secondhand memory of someone else's memories, as strange and unresolved as the memory of a dream" (150).

Three years later, Kidder sits down with Deo for the first time, about 10 years after Deo fled Burundi and landed in New York. Relying on Deo's memory and the memory of others, Kidder retraces Deo's journey, returning to Burundi with him and then searching out the New York locales where he slept, ate, worked, and studied. He also talks to the people Deo met and knew along the way.

Kidder wants the reader to bear in mind the subjectivity of remembrance, but also the truth of the story. "I didn't embellish anything," Kidder claims in an Amazon.com podcast, "but no one's memory is perfect and I wanted to acknowledge that to the reader." In the first chapter of the book's second section, "Gusimbura," Kidder explains that Deo told him "details of his story gradually, over the next two years," and therefore "the account of the escape suffered here and there from memory's usual additions and subtractions, and there was no direct way to verify a lot of it. . . . But the story was consistent—and sometimes slightly, reassuringly inconsistent—with the facts that I could find."

**K**idder is one of our most accomplished literary journalists. He has been writing for more than thirty years, and tends to prefer relative detachment in narration, not in a sense of not immersing himself fully into investigating and experiencing the reality he writes about, but in a sense of minimizing his presence in the narrative. He prefers to give full power of narration to his protagonists. His previous books were mostly written in the third person, but in *Strength in What Remains*, as with the beginning of *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, Kidder opens in the first person with a short introduction that gives us Deo and Kidder traveling to Burundi together in June 2006, thereby naturally acknowledging Kidder's presence in the story as well as the authenticity of the story's telling.

In the first part of the book, titled "Flights," Kidder writes in the third person. He utilizes flashbacks and takes us to the Burundi of Deo's 1970s childhood, as well as to his student years in the early 1990s, when the succession of dreadful massacres involving Hutus and Tutsis starts. The "state-sponsored slaughter" (270) cuts Deo off from his family, turns his world upside down, and sends him fleeing. Then, with an anthropologist's keen eye and a novelist's skilled hand, Kidder portrays Deo's new life in New York City in 1994.

To tell Deo's tale in both Africa and the United States, Kidder couples dialogue with meticulous descriptions of Deo's inner landscapes, at times entering his lead character's mind to describe his innermost fears, and the external reality he knew



and experienced. The depictions of massacres are direct and sharp; the reader is not spared the bloodshed, and we suffer with Deo, as does Kidder: “The rain was heavy. He couldn’t stop shivering. He was stumbling along, hugging himself. He saw swarms of flies and smelled putrefaction before he saw the bodies. The thick grass among the banana trees was full of them” (125).

While Kidder’s own reactions to the disasters in Deo’s homeland are shown in “Gusimbura,” where the narrative again switches to first person, the author diminishes his presence and lets Deo feel and think his way through the memories and the actuality he revisits. Similarly, with Kidder’s careful telling, we are able to see Deo the delivery boy try to deal with his boss, a malevolent store manager, and watch him make his deliveries on New York’s Upper East Side, where he feels too ashamed to accept tips from customers because it seems like begging. He would rather go hungry. For a while, he sleeps in an abandoned tenement in Harlem. Later he finds a better, safer spot and second home in Central Park—both of which we’re able to visit, courtesy of Kidder’s precise descriptions.

Throughout, Kidder never fails to remind us that Deo is haunted by recollections of bleeding Burundi and his family: “But always memories troubled him . . . especially on nights when there was a moon. It was automatic: every time he saw the moon, he thought of a moonlit night when he was a little boy, feeling utterly safe because he was with his grandfather Lonjino” (30–31).

**T**he book offers remarkable depth of vision and emotion. Kidder is interested in singular moments and details, which he connects with sheer artistry. Deogratias, whose full first name is a Latin phrase meaning “Thanks be to God,” has, as we can see from the very beginning of the story, a special kind of luck; it is as if someone watches over him. On his dramatic journey, he meets a number of incredible people who help him turn his life around. Kidder sketches these “benefactors” and their stories, showing how their lives merged with Deo’s. Sharon McKenna, a former nun, stands out because she finds Deo a safe place to stay in New York. Nancy and Charlie Wolf, a kind, educated, idealistic couple from Soho, basically adopt Deo and make it possible for him to enter Columbia and graduate with a degree in biochemistry.

Kidder does not fail to stress the unlikelihood of such a turn of events. He writes: “Improbable as it would have seemed to almost anyone else, the fall of 1995 found Deo entering his freshman year at Columbia University” (99). Yet such opportunity leaves Deo conflicted. He is grateful for his new life, but at the same time torn with guilt, we learn as Kidder takes us into Deo’s mind and heart: “But then he thought of his parents trying to rebuild their burned house in Kigutu, of his widowed grandmother in Butanza, of his siblings hiding in the forest. And here he was living off Nancy and Charlie and going to an Ivy League school where he had been mistaken for the son of a king, studying organic chemistry and philosophy. The words that came into his mind were ‘useless,’ ‘selfish,’ ‘parasite’” (104).

The final chapters reveal the realization of Deo’s long-lasting hopes and dreams—the building of a clinic in Burundi. Village Health Works opened in the town of Kigutu in November 2007, the same year Deo became an American citizen. He

keeps going back to Africa, Kidder tells us, not only to greet the patients but also to visit the memorial sites, to remember “that place beyond horror;” to take these images with him, and recount the story to the world. Because “stories are for eternity,” as Tim O’Brien says in *The Things They Carried*, they are for the time “when there’s nothing to remember except the story.” And Deo’s actually happened.

## Appropriation as the New Truth Value

### *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*

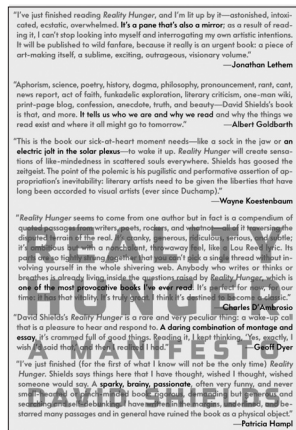
by David Shields, New York: Knopf, 2010, Hardcover, 240 pages, \$24.95.

Reviewed by Doug Underwood, University of Washington, U.S.A.

There is much in David Shields’s *Hunger Reality: A Manifesto* that is likely to annoy the traditional journalist, the more conservative of today’s literary journalists, and probably many scholars of literary journalism. In places, Shields—who confesses to once being kicked off the Brown University campus newspaper because “I’d made stuff up” (169–70)—has penned a manifesto that reads more like it might have been produced by Stephen Glass or others of the disgraced recent generation of journalists than it does a serious treatise about the place between fiction and nonfiction, where Shields contends the most important truths of life reside.

However, if one can get past the places where he cavalierly dismisses the truth-telling distinctions deeply felt by many journalists, one will encounter a book with a good deal to say about the authenticity of imaginative literature, the limitations in describing “reality” in much nonfictional writing, and the deeper truths that can be found in books that, as Shields puts it, are about “the real world, with all its hard edges, but the real world fully imagined and fully written, not merely reported” (69).

In order to comprehend Shields’s resistance to “generic boundaries” (168) one must unravel the elements of the postmodern funhouse that he has constructed to make his points. The first element is structure. The book amounts to a numbered series of aphorisms, assertions, and personal comments that advocate for the blending of traditional genre categories in many forms of expression—journalism, literature, cinema, photography, music, memoir, reality TV, social media. The second element is the issue of citation. Most of the passages are borrowed, with no attributions or footnotes to distinguish them from Shields’s contributions. Only



because he says he was required to do so by his editors does Shields list in truncated form a cited appendix of the many eminent figures that he quotes. Finally, there is the tone of the work. In places, it is celebratory of an insular writer's worldview, name-dropping throughout in giving plaudits to a host of contemporary writers, and superior in its rejection of traditional writing categories. Often Shields, who got his M.F.A. from the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop program, judges the value of writing by what "bores" him or what he finds difficult to proceed through—plots and invented characters (175), the reading of a novel that "presents itself unself-consciously as a novel" (71), the "banality" of much nonfiction (40), John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* (169, 171), etc. "When I'm constrained within a form, my mind shuts down," Shields writes. "...*This is boring, so I refuse to try very hard*" (70–71).

A key element of the book is his celebration of the value of "collage," which he indicates serves as his justification for appropriating the comments of others. This leads to some of his most problematic statements about the relationship of fact to fiction, such as, "I recognize no difference along the truth continuum between my very autobiographical novels and my frequently fib-filled books of nonfiction" (177). In fact, in sorting through the book's aphorisms, I found myself grateful that his editors made him add some minimal formal attribution. It often turns out that the most eloquent come from his quoted notables; his own often have a glib, flip flavor. For example, here is Picasso: "Art is not truth; art is a lie that enables us to recognize truth" (32). Here is Shields: "You mix and scratch the shit up to the level your own head is at" (103). Or here is Geoff Dyer: "I like to write stuff that's only an inch from life, from what really happened, but all the art is of course in that inch" (64). Here is Shields: "These categories are plastic. But they aren't. Ah, but they are" (64).

It goes without saying (since that is the design of his project) that much of what Shields has to offer has been said before—including by others important to the field of literary journalism and journalistic literature that he doesn't quote. Mark Twain, for example, captured the tension between "artistic" truth and "factual" truth in his famous quote by Huckleberry Finn about the tactics of the author of *Tom Sawyer* ("he told the truth, mainly"). Ernest Hemingway talked about the "kinetographic fallacy" and opined that fiction allowed him to penetrate to deeper truths of life than conventional journalism ("That is what we are supposed to do when we are at our best—make it all up—but make it up so truly that later it will happen that way"). And Tom Wolfe served as a lightning rod for his comments about the best nonfictional writing having become literarily superior to most contemporary fiction two decades before Shields wrote that "the novel isn't dead," it's just not as "central" to the culture as it once was (22).

Shields's version of this conversation, in fact, seems to be too much a product of the inbred American writing industry and the preoccupations of those who have spent too much time in a campus creative writing culture. Narcissism and solipsism are two terms he describes in positive ways (153–54)—and there is a "the present-is-where-it-is-at" and damn-tradition-and-morality feeling when he writes, "I can

hardly treat the topic (of plagiarism and appropriation) deeply without engaging in it. That would be like writing a book about lying and not being permitted to lie in it" (209), or, "Who owns the words? . . . We do—all of us—though not all of us know it yet. Reality cannot be copyrighted" (209).

So what is one to think about a work that is so proudly derivative and purposively provocative? My advice would be to read the book and to ruminate upon its challenges to the writing and scholarly orthodoxies that can bind journalists, narrative non-fictional writers, and scholars of literary journalism. For me, *Reality Hunger* was a fascinating read because I agree with many of its underlying sentiments. I have made a similar case for fiction built upon a foundation of journalistic fact-gathering, and I have advocated for writing that sits on the boundaries between fact and fiction as being worthy of greater consideration in any discussion of the literary canon.

And yet, as a journalist by background, I am loath to call for doing away with genre distinctions or our expectations that writers be transparent in their writing strategies simply because I can see the value in writing that blends literary categories. I would agree with Shields's point that the line between fiction and nonfiction is "easy to voice but hard to sustain in logic" (65). But I also would suggest that we tread carefully before calling for its elimination simply because we recognize philosophically and intellectually that no human being can ever fully comprehend "reality."

Shields's own writing career has followed an arc that helps to put into context his contentions in *Reality Hunger*—from conventional novels and short stories, to non-narrative short fiction, to book-length social commentary, to free association autobiographical vignettes. In his most recent works, Shields mixes genre forms, such as in *The Thing About Life Is That One Day You'll Be Dead*, which is a pastiche of autobiographical musings, reminiscences about his yarn-spinning father and his experiences of mortality, and discourses about biology's role in the aging process. (He also puts into practice his belief in "collage" in an odd way— for *The Thing About Life*, he cribs passages virtually verbatim from his 1984 novel, *Heroes*, but with autobiographical references substituted for fictional ones.) A writing professor at my own institution, the University of Washington (we have never met), Shields has accumulated a mass of writing grants, literary awards, and favorable reviews.

The trouble with a manifesto is that it depends a great deal upon who is writing it. When entering into any discussion about the intriguing but dangerous zone between fact and fiction, one looks for guideposts that signal that we can trust a writer's insights—the integrity of a George Orwell, the irony of a Twain, the social conscience of a James Agee, the demonstration of the principle in the works of all three that truth in the deepest sense mattered to them more than anything else. When new voices jump in to celebrate the sacking of tradition and the setting aside of professional writing standards, one worries sometimes about the foundation upon which the call for a new creative order rests.

In the end, *Reality Hunger* may best serve as an illustration of the gap that exists between an edgy, postmodern, experimental writing culture and the world of professional journalism, which continues to draw upon the modernism of Enlightenment thought with its faith in the search for real and tangible truths that all can believe in.

Still, *Reality Hunger* is worth a look-see by scholars of literary journalism, if for no other reason than that it may help some among us find additional reasons why we aren't ready to abandon all distinctions between fact and imagination, even as we advocate for writing that straddles the boundaries.

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## The Art of Feature Writing Explained

### *The Bigger Picture: Elements of Feature Writing*

edited by Ivor Shapiro, Toronto: Emond Montgomery, 2009, Paperback, 325 pages, \$42.

Reviewed by Jane Johnston, Bond University, Australia

Like a great feature, this book is a compelling and seamless combination of many parts. Editor Ivor Shapiro, an associate professor of journalism at Ryerson University in Toronto, has brought together the work of twenty feature writing and creative nonfiction luminaries in this tightly constructed but comprehensive feature writing text. The book comprises ten chapters, each concluding with a previously published feature story that illustrates the chapter but is also a stand-alone piece of excellent journalism. Shapiro points out in the preface: "Each of the ten feature articles reprinted in these pages represents a Canadian author's journey and invites us, the readers, along for the ride." Indeed, the



features took this Australian reader along for the ride as well. The stories transport you to the farthest points of Canada—from fishing for lobsters in the Magdalen Islands, to outsmarting beavers in Alberta, and to British Columbia and the tragic story of the culled 'Golden Bough'—and stay with you long after reading them. They are well chosen for their impact, poignancy, clarity, and illumination of what Shapiro calls the "bigger picture."

Shapiro's book deals with feature writing, creative nonfiction, literary, and narrative journalism synonymously. While there is some reference to journalism throughout the book, its overwhelming approach is to position feature writing as a broader form of nonfiction, inclusive of literary techniques, with the theme of good storytelling at its core. If we see journalism as existing along a continuum, with news reporting at one end and literary journalism at the other, this book positions feature writing firmly at the literary journalism end. Chapter authors are keen to

differentiate feature writing from straight reporting. For example, David Hayes explains why longer-form journalism is different from straight news reporting, comparing the two to travellers (long-form features) and tourists (straight news). “The tourist experience is superficial and glancing . . . the traveller develops a deep conversation with her surroundings,” he writes, citing *The New New Journalism*. The selected feature articles include strong literary qualities, are longer form, include characterization, scene setting, use of time and sequence, point of view and so on, plus the chapters are inclusive of literary and creative techniques and readings. It also draws on the ideas and suggestions of key literary journalism and creative nonfiction writers throughout the book and includes a list of “essential reading” inclusive of the likes of Robert S. Boynton, Roy Peter Clark, Norman Sims and Mark Kramer, Gay Talese, and Tom Wolfe.

**I**t is, nevertheless, an extremely accessible undergraduate journalism textbook for both feature writing and literary journalism students. The book chapters traverse the usual feature writing textbook topics: Part One, story ideas and how to bounce back from editor’s rejections; Part Two, chapters on research, reporting and reconstructing scenes, and interviewing; Part Three, predominantly structure; and Part Four, written by Shapiro, is a single chapter, “Truth and Storytelling: Ethics in Nonfiction,” that wraps up the text and, in good feature-writing style, draws the rest of the copy together, focusing on one of the book’s key themes, truth. Here, Shapiro confesses: he told a (white) lie in an early feature story and he has never forgiven himself. “Tweaking” the truth, he was told, was common and he succumbed (though it must be noted that his editor requested the “tweak”). “I always—always!—feel a twinge of shame,” he now says of the indiscretion. This type of firsthand experience, and insights into the traps along the path of reporting and writing, help to make this book a great read, with personal experiences such as this separating it from the more formularized style of textbook. Shapiro drives home this key theme—“truth trumps narrativity.” Other themes he draws out include the “show don’t tell” rule, how technique is important but takes second place to accuracy, and the importance of keeping promises to sources.

Like Shapiro, chapter authors bring their own experiences to this book, plus they also draw on the insights of others. This makes each chapter rich with examples and illustrations. Paul Benedetti uses the work of Jon Franklin to explain structure in dramatic nonfiction, and then uses an article by Gay Talese to illustrate how to bring the reader into the story. Sue Ferguson spends two pages outlining how to garner information from sources, explaining the benefits of persuasion, the need for trust and spending time with your sources. She also outlines the importance of online research, but with the caveat, “while the web *is* an amazing tool, it has limited function for journalists.” Ferguson cites John Vaillant to reinforce her point: “The good stuff is out in the world . . . There’s no substitute for the power of being there.” The result is a book that is brimming with great illustrations and wonderful anecdotes plus good advice from many of the best known in the fields of feature writing, literary journalism, and creative nonfiction.

Ironically, *The Bigger Picture* is almost devoid of pictures—diagrams, tables, or

images, that is. But it doesn't need them. It is so cleverly written that it doesn't require the elaboration or simplification that comes with images: with two exceptions. Susan McClelland's visual structure of the feature story, consisting of a wavy line cut through the centre by a straight line, is the most basic of diagrams, but clever in its simplicity. McClelland explains: "The part of the wave that touches the straight line is known as *grounding*, when you reiterate to your readers, in different words, your topic and theme." The second image is the wonderfully evocative front cover. Here, a small photograph of an urban street scene is intriguing, presenting any number of narrative options: a youth with a Labrador pup are investigating something on the ground, a bike sits against a curb, a television is abandoned on the sidewalk, and red graffiti breaks up the blue exterior wall behind the curb. Set against a glossy black cover, the image of the youth and pup are mirrored elsewhere on the page. This is definitely a pick-me-up cover. (The only other image in the book is a communication triangle in Chapter 1, which warrants no comment or elaboration.)

What is abundant are sidebars, used like sidebars in feature stories, dealing with specific detail and issues that are dealt with in brief. This allows additional topics to be covered without weighing down the overall size of the book. These are presented under the heading, "Glad you asked!" with topics covering everything from essential reading for feature writers and cures for writer's block to working under Canadian media law. Of course, there's also a sidebar on sidebars.

As a book editor and a teacher of feature writing for twenty years, I find this book impressive in many ways. If done well, edited books can bring together the best of all their contributors. In this particular edition, the ten chapter authors represent a massive pool of knowledge about this genre. Each author has an impressive resume of published journalistic works and journalism scholarship. That each feature story included at the end of each chapter is so different, yet each chapter conforms to a uniform style while still maintaining authorial voice, is testimony to the adaptability and versatility of these writers and the clever editing of Shapiro. On the second point—of teaching feature writing—this book is one I would readily adopt. While clearly Canadian in focus its ideas, approaches and knowledge base give it global appeal and usability. Good feature writing is good feature writing and a good book is a good book wherever you are. The structures, writing devices, reporting approaches, ethical framework, and outstanding illustrations of long-form feature writing, inclusive of literary style and techniques, have broad application for teachers of both feature writing and literary journalism. *The Bigger Picture* is likely to do something far more important than teach great feature writing—it will inspire it.

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